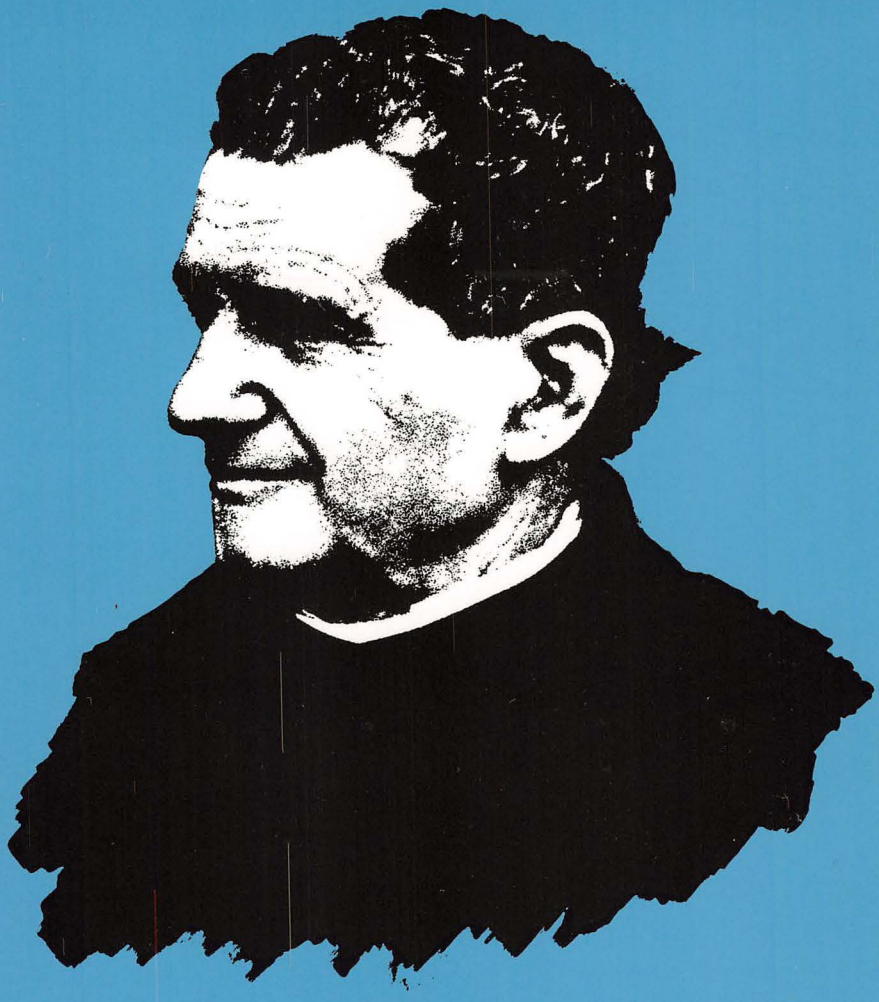


VOLUME IV - 1850-1853

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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Archbishops	24
Cardinals	6

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

2004

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THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

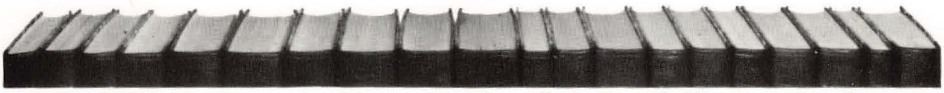
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THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO



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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

FATHER FRANCIS BINELLI, S.D.B.

(1863-1931)

***

Appointed Master Of Novices By Saint John Bosco,

He Trained Generations Of Young Salesians

In Europe And In The United States.

Himself A Perfect Model Of The Salesian Spirit,

He Accordingly Formed His Charges

With Rare Discernment, Simplicity And Kindness.

Editor's Preface to the First Nine Volumes

SAINT 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, ab-

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

sorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious 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

[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.

Bosco. This 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 whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his spiritual

[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 Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Etude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco,* Lyon, 1962, pp. 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.

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 Reverend August Bosio, S.D.B., Provincial emeritus of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsor of this project, and to the Very Reverend John J. Malloy, S.D.B., his successor in office.

In the preparation of this volume we are indebted to Salvator Attanasio, Joseph Isola, Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Rev. Gustave Sigwart, S.D.B., and Rev. Roger Luna, S.D.B., for editorial assistance; to Rev. Arnold Buja, S.D.B., Rev. Guido Favini, S.D.B., and Emilio Chiolero for research assistance; and to Rev. Henry A. Sarnowski, S.D.B., for compiling the index. Last, but not least, we wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the research facilities of the Ufficio Stampa, Biblioteca Centrale, and Archivio Centrale of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, the Salesian motherhouse, in Turin, Italy.

Rev. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
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SALESIAN TERMINOLOGY

(For the General Reading Public)

ARTISANS: trade school students.

ASSISTANCE: Salesian method of supervision of boys and students, friendly and informal in manner, stressing the prevention of disorders rather than the punishment of offenders.

ASSISTANT: A Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

CLERIC: a member of the Salesian Society training for the priesthood.

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

COMPANION OF YOUTH, THE: a prayer book composed by St. John Bosco for the use of boys, originally entitled *Il Giovane Provveduto.*

COOPERATOR: one who contributes in any manner to the development of Salesian work.

EXERCISE FOR A HAPPY DEATH: a monthly practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's eventual death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion as if for the last time.

FESTIVE ORATORY: A Salesian work which offers boys and young men organized recreational, educational, and religious activities mostly on Sundays and festive days.

The Festive Oratory was St. John Bosco's first work and, for a good many years, his only one. He called it "oratory" that is, a place of prayer, because its primary purpose was to teach boys to go to church and pray. "Its objectives were the practice of religion and virtue, the boys' moral education and, consequently, the salvation of their souls; recreation, entertainment, singing and schooling, which followed in due time, were only the means." (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. II, p. 71. *See also* Vol. III, pp. 67f)

GOOD NIGHT: a short talk, immediately after night prayers, given by the Director or someone in his stead. It consists of advice, exhortations, or occasional remarks.

ORATORY *see* Festive Oratory, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales

ORATORY, THE: abbreviated form of "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." (*See below*)

ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, THE: the *first* festive oratory and the *first* boarding school for boys founded by St. John Bosco in a district of Turin known as Valdocco; the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from head to foot, knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco's mother fed him and prepared a place for him to sleep. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. III, pp. 141ff) Thus, side by side with the festive oratory there began a hospice that eventually grew into a large boarding school and became the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: the Salesian method of education and discipline, based on reason and religion. It stresses vigilance, guidance, and sympathetic understanding in the training of the young.

VALDOCCO: a district of Turin.

The name is probably a contraction of the Latin *vallis occisorum,* the valley of the slain, i.e. some soldiers of the Theban Legion who were martyred under Emperor Maximian. The Salesian motherhouse stands on the site of their martyrdom. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. II, pp. 233ff, 268)

THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

CHAPTER 1

Loyalty to God and Church

IN the middle of the 19th century, the leaders of [Piedmontese] secret societies were planning to establish a godless State which, instead of ruling according to God's laws, would abide by the changeable will of a people they would skillfully manipulate. Their plan was to overthrow what until then they had hypocritically held up to public admiration;[1] however, they intended to do this gradually, unobtrusively, and only after the people had been psychologically prepared for the transition by moral decay and intellectual poisoning inflicted through the agencies of the press, entertainment, education, and politics. To this end, under the guise of fostering national independence, they advocated freedom of thought, of conscience, of religion, and of the press. Their brand of freedom had already been described by St. Peter when he wrote, "Live as free men, yet not using your freedom as a cover for malice." [1 Pet. 2, 16] The freedom they advocated was nothing less than a declaration of war against anything and everything that clashed with man's pride, ignoring the fact that there is a God to whom one owes absolute obedience. Under this guise, godless legislators have proclaimed in the past and continue to proclaim, "We are the law, and there is no one above us—neither God nor Church." They regarded the Catholic Church as a purely private society, utterly without relevance and without legal right, divorced from society, separated from the State, and, worse still, an enemy to be incessantly fought. "I am a king," Jesus Christ proclaimed [John 18, 37], but they retorted, "We do not wish this man to be king over us." [Luke 19, 14]

But "woe to those who enact unjust statutes," Isaia threatened.

[1] The monarchy. *See* Vol. III, pp. 1ff. [Editor]

[10, 1] "Governments," commented Bonald,[2] "strengthen themselves when they make concessions to religion and undermine themselves when they refuse to do so." Where respect toward the Pope wanes, respect toward the sovereign disappears. After evil councilors had influenced Louis XIV against the Church, [Jean Baptiste] Colbert, his famous minister, thus addressed him in his will, "No son who rebels against his father goes unpunished. The actions you take against the Supreme Pontiff will redound against Your Majesty."

Unfortunately, monarchs despised the Church and were themselves enslaved by the revolution which subjected them to parliaments and parliaments to the masses. The revolution's ultimate cry is still heard, "Away with God, with kings, with rulers! Away with private property! We want socialism and communism!" The efforts and prayers of the Church and the almighty hand of God will foil these movements, but not before the apostate nations have paid dearly for their rebellion.

In every country, city, or even small town, there were saintly people in every walk of life who were like the salt of the earth and the light of the world. There were religious, priests, and bishops who, while invoking Divine Mercy on mankind, relieved the poor with heroic acts of charity and gave to God and to the Church the obedience that misguided men were refusing. Don Bosco was one of these. The commandments of God, the precepts of the Church, and the duties of his state in life were his code of action. He took great care to abide by this code faithfully, and he was so thoroughly dedicated to its adherence that he seemed unable to deviate from it in any degree throughout his whole life. No one ever noticed in him any fault or negligence in the fulfillment of his duties as a Christian, as a priest, or as the superior of a congregation whose rules he himself, their author, obeyed to perfection.

However, Don Bosco grieved at the general disregard of the Divine Law and at the blasphemies uttered against God, Jesus Christ, and the Blessed Virgin. He felt profoundly saddened by the snares laid for the innocence of so many boys; his heart bled at the outrages committed against the Pope and at the disregard of the Church's rights. His obedience to the precepts of the Church in-

[2] Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald (1754-1840), French philosopher and writer. [Editor]

cluded the most minute regulations, the sacred ceremonies, the rubrics, and the various replies of the Sacred Roman Congregations, and he exacted the same observance from his subjects. Even in those things in which there was more than one possible interpretation and practice, he always followed the opinion most in keeping with the Church's spirit.

Father Ascanio Savio [3] affirmed, "From what I know, he was absolutely irreproachable. I never had the least doubt about his having preserved his baptismal innocence."

Father [Felix] Reviglio [4] corroborates this testimony, "He had such a profound horror of sin that in the eleven years I lived with him I never saw him deliberately commit a venial sin."

Father Michael Rua [5] did not hesitate to say, "I lived at Don Bosco's side for thirty-seven years. The more I think of the tenor of his life, of the example he gave us, of the teachings he left us, the greater grows my esteem and veneration for him and my conviction of his holiness. I may safely say that his entire life was dedicated to God. I was more impressed by watching Don Bosco in all his actions, even the minutest, than by reading and meditating on a spiritual book."

This same conviction was expressed by the several hundreds of people who lived with our beloved Don Bosco from 1846 to 1888.

[3] Don Bosco's first seminarian. [Editor]

[4] One of Don Bosco's first pupils and later a pastor in Turin. [Editor]

[5] Don Bosco's vicar and successor. He first met Don Bosco in 1845. *See* Vol. II, p. 248. [Editor]

CHAPTER 2

A Father's Care

WE shall now proceed with our story. Don Bosco directly looked after the religious and moral welfare of the seven hundred and more boys attending the Festive Oratory of St. Francis de Sales; in addition, he supervised the management of the St. Aloysius Oratory and that of the Guardian Angel (the latter two oratories frequented by a total of about one thousand boys). But while doing this, he did not lose sight of the poor boys in the hospice that was gradually talking shape at Valdocco.[1] Indeed, he looked on them as the apple of his eye. The most solicitous and affectionate father could not have exerted himself more conscientiously on their behalf. During this year [1850] there were about forty of them. Pastors, parents, and other people sent a steady flow of recommendations for some boy or other. In the face of such need Don Bosco was deeply moved, and, fearing that a refusal on his part might jeopardize a boy's future, he often would take him in. If the boy himself pleaded to be admitted, Don Bosco simply did not have the heart to refuse.

In 1884 the school superintendent of La Spezia, Mr. Alvaro Bonino, told us the following moving incident which he himself witnessed in 1850. He was at that time an elementary public school teacher and a catechist at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

In Turin the father of a family from Savoy had become a Protestant, exchanging his faith for money. This pitiable man wanted his wife and son to do likewise, but his hopes were in vain, for the good woman remained steadfast in her Faith and kept their young son equally firm. The distressed mother wept and prayed. One night the

[1] A section of Turin where Don Bosco began his work and established the motherhouse of his religious congregation. [Editor]

boy dreamed that he was being forcibly dragged to the Protestant church. While he struggled, a priest appeared, set him free, and led him away. The next morning he told the dream to his mother who had been seeking for a way to shelter him in some institution in order to protect him from his father's evil design. During that week someone suggested that she visit Don Bosco at Valdocco and inquire about placing her son there. She took the boy there on Sunday morning, and since it was time for Mass, they went into the chapel. At that moment Don Bosco entered the sanctuary to celebrate Mass. Mr. Alvaro Bonino happened to be kneeling beside the young boy. The moment the young lad saw Don Bosco, he cried out, almost beside himself, "C'est lui maman! C'est lui même! C'est lui même!" ["Mom, it's him, it's him. It's really him!"] Don Bosco was the priest he had seen in his dream. The young boy was very excited and the mother was in tears. Mr. Bonino, who had at first admonished the youngster to keep quiet, realized that he could not hush him and led the mother and her son into the sacristy. There they told him about the dream and how the boy had recognized Don Bosco as the priest who had freed him. When Mass was over, Don Bosco returned to the sacristy. Before he could finish taking off his sacred vestments, the boy ran to him and, hugging his knees, cried, "Please, Father, save me!" Don Bosco accepted him into his hospice and the little Savoyard remained at the Oratory for several years.

How many other boys, through a chance meeting with Don Bosco, were given shelter by him and saved from moral danger! One day in a café in Turin he was served by a handsome young waiter. While the youth poured the coffee, Don Bosco struck up a conversation with him, kindly inquiring about his life. With each question he probed more deeply to his innermost heart. Won over by Don Bosco's fatherly manner, the youth kept no secrets from him and disclosed the sorry state of his soul. Their conversation was interrupted whenever the youth had to wait on other customers; however, he always managed to return to Don Bosco, who spoke in a low tone so that their tête-à-tête could not be overheard.

Don Bosco ended by saying, "Ask your employer for permission to come to the Oratory, and then we'll come to some decision."

"He'll never give me permission."

"But you can't stay here."

"I know; I understand that, but what can I do?"

"Run away."

"But where?"

"To your parents."

"They're dead. I'm all alone."

"Then come with me."

"Where?"

"To Valdocco."

He gave him the address.

"And then what?"

"Don't worry. Get your things and come to me as quickly as possible. Don't let anyone know about it. Just come and you'll have food, shelter, and an education. That will help you toward a happy future. I'll be your father."

Don Bosco then left the café. The following day the youth ran to the Oratory with his few belongings under his arm. His conduct was excellent and for several years he was a model to the other pupils.

The responsibility for feeding, housing, and clothing the boys fell entirely upon Don Bosco. It was out of the question to expect a monthly contribution from the boys themselves or even from those who had recommended them. The majority of the boys earned nothing or very little, and their sponsors generally were poor. On the other hand, Don Bosco himself had no steady income and lacked other financial resources. His debts continued to increase alarmingly, and he was also burdened by the cost of running the festive oratories. Quite often, unable to pay the amount due on time, Don Bosco was faced with the hard choice of either letting his boys suffer privations or of sending them back to those who had entrusted them to his care.

His charitable heart could not be reconciled to either alternative. Therefore, putting all his trust in God and in Our Lady's promises and sure of his mission, he would go out during the week to solicit donations for his boys with the greatest humility and amiability. To anyone who met him on the street and inquired where he was going, he would reply, "I'm foraging for my fledglings," and continue on his way.

This was a heroic sacrifice, the full import of which only God knew. Bishop [John] Cagliero had this to say:

By his own admission Don Bosco had a fiery and haughty temperament intolerant of rebuff. He suffered intensely whenever he had to call on someone for charity. Yet, by incessantly battling this natural tendency of his, he learned to approach graciously not only those whom he knew to be favorably disposed toward him, but also those who were more or less disinclined or adverse to him. If he did not succeed at first, he would return again and again with such amiability that he finally would win the person over. I can attest to this not only because I accompanied him many times in later years on such visits, but also because he took me into his confidence in order to instruct me.

For his boys he spared neither efforts nor humiliations. Sometimes his quest brought him only kind words, often nothing but rebuffs, insults, and harsh refusals; however, he gladly accepted everything without taking offense. His ardent charity never waned. Ever more numerous were his appeals to wealthy persons.

Once he received an insulting note. He dictated the answer to one of his aides. "Tell him," he said, "that if he cannot or will not help my orphans that's his privilege. But he should not abuse me for taking care of them. Such conduct is displeasing to God. Nevertheless, send him my respects, and assure him that I bear him no ill will." Upon receipt of this letter the gentleman took a more favorable view of the matter and from then on became a friend and admirer of Don Bosco.

Never importunate or indiscreet, Don Bosco limited himself to explaining his boys' needs without asking for any particular amount of money. He left it to his listeners to draw their own logical and charitable conclusions. He was often asked to name a specific sum, but he would simply restate his need without directly replying to the question. Thus he often received larger donations than he could have hoped for even from the most generous.

In an extraordinary case he would call upon some wealthy person, but not as a petitioner; kindly, but as one having the authority to do so, he would tell the person to donate a considerable sum of money, and he was obeyed. His ability to impress people as God's spokesman was one of Don Bosco's wonderful gifts. We will bring this out in due course.

Don Bosco never kept a penny for himself. Often he had to deprive himself of the bare necessities of life for the sake of his young boarders. A conscientious administrator, he gladly used all donations for their benefit and welfare. If it was necessary to make an expenditure, he knew how and when to make it. This was the consensus of all who knew him. Joseph Brosio [2] narrates, "One day, in later years, I found myself for business reasons with a group of bankers, journalists, and important businessmen, among whom I thought I recognized two reporters of *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* Mr. Govean and Mr. Bottero. Although they were anticlericals and therefore logical enemies of Don Bosco and his institutions, I heard them admit that if Don Bosco were the Minister of Finance, Piedmont would have no debts. Such esteem shows how greatly people trusted Don Bosco when giving him their donations."

Nevertheless, many times it seemed as though such help would not be forthcoming. In 1850, in the aftermath of war and other disastrous events, the little hospice at Valdocco was often in sorry straits. On those occasions when there was neither food nor money in the house for the next day's needs, Don Bosco never doubted Divine Providence; always cheerful and serene, he would tell the boys, "Eat and don't worry. God will provide for tomorrow." Divine Providence never abandoned him. Though the number of boys at the hospice increased daily and general conditions became critical, he was never obliged to send a boy away for lack of means. This was a well-deserved reward for a life spent entirely in performing heroic acts of charity toward his fellowman.

His most zealous solicitude, however, was directed toward the boys' spiritual welfare. Evil influences were becoming daily more powerful and baneful. Freedom of the press resulted in large numbers of harmful books and newspapers that had great influence on the working class. Anyone and everyone, the educated and the uneducated, felt qualified to discuss religion and morals and make pronouncements as if they were all Sorbonne theologians. Faith and morals were in great peril.

[2] A young man who began helping Don Bosco in 1841 and became one of his most valuable assistants until Don Bosco's death. *See* Vol. III, pp. 76f, 90, 309ff, 336, 348f, 395, 421, 423f. [Editor]

Don Bosco had to send his boys into town to learn some craft or trade. To shield them from spiritual harm he made careful inquiries beforehand about the integrity of the people to whom he was to entrust his boys; when necessary, he looked for more reliable employers. In addition, he often checked with the employers about the boys' deportment. Thus he showed both his interest in their diligence at work, and his concern lest the faith and morals of his young protégés be endangered. He spent as much time as he could with them. He tactfully kept himself informed of their day's events and, like an expert and loving physician, promptly counteracted the poisonous notions they had absorbed.

From the very beginning of his hospice he had started the custom of giving the boys a little talk after night prayers. At the very start he did it rarely, mostly on the vigil of feast days or some special occasion; in 1850 he did it very frequently, almost nightly. In his short talk, lasting only two or three minutes, he would stress some doctrinal point or moral truth embodied in a story to which the boys would listen attentively. Above all, he endeavored to guard them against the unwholesome ideas of the times and against Protestant errors which were fast spreading in Turin. Sometimes, the better to hold their attention and the deeper to impress some good maxim on their minds, he would tell them about some edifying incident which had occurred that day, or which he had culled from history or the life of a saint. At other times, as he had done and continued to do with the festive oratory boys, he would present them with a problem to solve or a question to answer, as, for example, the meaning of such words as "God," "Jesus Christ," "Catholic Church," "council," or why the Lord punished unrepentant sinners with eternal damnation, and so on. He generally gave them several days to prepare their written and signed answers. There would be some small prize for the best response. Thus Don Bosco made them think and could develop important truths which they never forgot. His brief talk was always preceded by a "Lost and Found" announcement, for the boys would bring him whatever personal objects they had found on the premises.

In addition to the various practices of piety and solemn liturgical services that fostered frequent confession and Communion, Don

Bosco introduced the annual celebration of the Forty Hours' devotion. It was held in the little chapel [formerly the Pinardi shed],[3] beautifully decorated for the occasion. Services were held for three days with high Mass, sermon, Vespers, and *Tantum Ergo* in polyphony, just as in the local parishes. This afforded the choirboys an opportunity to sing. Don Bosco had formed them into three groups, and had assigned to each group one of the more experienced singers as a leader. James Bellìa [4] was one of these leaders.

Charles Tomatis [5] wrote:

Don Bosco played on a miserable piano so that we could learn the tunes, and sometimes he would also teach some volunteer to play the violin to accompany a solo singer. One day in 1850, inspired by a musical motif he had heard soldiers in the neighborhood practicing on their trumpets, he wrote a single-voice *Tantum Ergo*. I still have it, and I sang it many times when he took the choir boys to sacred services in Turin, most of the time at the Crocetta parish church, or elsewhere. Felix Reviglio [6] also helped Don Bosco with the choir from 1850 to 1856.

Shortly afterward Don Bosco provided his choristers with a small wooden pipe organ, a real antique. It was worn-out and screechy, but it had the virtue of being able to withstand the pounding of a beginner. Everyone recalls how one of its valves was cracked and emitted shrill sounds that plunged us into fits of laughter. It was placed in the room next to Don Bosco's, and some of those who practiced on it later became well-known organists.

Since music and dramatics go hand in hand, Don Bosco continued to entertain the boys with delightful stage plays. However, he excluded those that required costumes, since he could not afford to rent them.

This gave rise to some amusing and memorable incidents. One play, *Three Wise Men,* required some costumes. The actors secretly got together and figured out a way to obtain them. They went to the Rifugio [7] and to a parish church and asked for the loan of some copes, alleging

[3] *See* Vol. II, pp. 334f. [Editor]

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

[5] Don Bosco first met him in 1847 in an artist's studio. From then on he attended the festive oratory in Valdocco every Sunday. *See* Vol. III, pp. 118f. [Editor]

[6] As a boy of sixteen he first met Don Bosco at the Oratory in 1847. Later he became a priest and pastor in Turin. *See* Vol. III, pp. 239ff. [Editor]

[7] An institution for wayward girls where Don Bosco had been a chaplain. *See* Vol. II, pp. 184ff. [Editor]

that the Oratory needed them for solemn Vespers. They requested four, one of them for King Herod. Since they used Don Bosco's name, they had no trouble obtaining them. Concealing them carefully until the performance, they donned them just before walking on stage, thus making a triumphal entry. There was, however, an anticlimax. Uproarious laughter greeted their ridiculous appearance and Don Bosco immediately made them take the copes off.

Most of my companions were of a happy, carefree nature, though they studied and worked hard. There were regular evening classes during which Don Bosco taught us arithmetic and penmanship. His presence alone filled us with an indescribable joy.

What we all admired in him, in these and in many other circumstances, was the blend of firmness and gentleness of manner, of patience and of inexhaustible forbearance with which he overcame or forestalled difficulties, and his ability to pursue all things to a successful conclusion. Above all, his humility appealed to us.

One evening, while he was teaching us the metric system, he made a mistake while making some calculations on the blackboard, and thus he could not solve the problem correctly. Though the large class was paying attention, they did not see the difficulty. Detecting the error, I arose and, as best I could, corrected it. Other teachers might not have welcomed such a public correction, but Don Bosco not only graciously accepted it, but thereafter held me in such high regard that I was overwhelmed.

Finally, his vigilance over us was unceasing, for he would not suffer the devil to rob him of our souls.

Thus wrote Charles Tomatis. During 1849 and 1850 Don Bosco was assisted by Father [John] Grassino [8] who was in charge of discipline and administration. He used to move to the Oratory whenever Don Bosco was away preaching in various parts of Piedmont.

[8] A diocesan priest. [Editor]

CHAPTER 3

A Fact-Finding Committee

THERE was much talk in Turin about Don Bosco's oratories. His untiring efforts made people forget their earlier misgivings; they now appreciated his work and frequently voiced their favorable opinions. They realized that Don Bosco's festive oratory prevented juvenile delinquency by turning underprivileged youths into good Catholics and upright citizens. The facts spoke for themselves and could not be denied. Public opinion, private reports, and a deliberation in the Senate finally led the government to take an interest in Don Bosco's oratory.

At this time a relative of the Gastaldi family,[1] a kindhearted gentleman named Volpotto who held a high governmental post, advised Don Bosco to place his festive oratory informally under government auspices. When Don Bosco declined, Mr. Volpotto of his own accord had the Senate pass a resolution requesting the government to grant a subsidy to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Before passing the resolution, the Senate appointed a three-man fact-finding committee. The committee members were Count Frederick Sclopis,[2] Marquis Ignatius Pallavicini, and Count Louis Collegno.

[1] One of its members, Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, became bishop of Saluzzo in 1867 and archbishop of Turin in 1871. Serious controversies developed between him and Don Bosco soon after the former's appointment to the archdiocese of Turin. [Editor]

[2] Count Frederick Sclopis, one of the most illustrious Piedmontese patricians and a high-minded magistrate, was the Crown's trusted counselor and president of the Senate. A man of international repute and a devout Catholic, he became mediator between England and the United States in the intricate question concerning the ship *Alabama*. He earned worldwide applause and congratulations for the just settlement of this issue. It is gratifying to note that this distinguished diplomat attributed the outstanding results of his mediation to Divine Wisdom. On September 17, 1872, he wrote in his *Memoirs*, "I am returning from Geneva after having experienced your blessing, O Lord.... Profound and deep gratitude binds me to

On the afternoon of a holy day in January, 1850, the three senators went to Valdocco to visit the Oratory. It was about two o'clock. The more than five hundred boys engaged in various games provided a most pleasant spectacle. Watching them running around, jumping, and walking on stilts under the supervision of various priests and laymen, the senators were greatly impressed. After a few moments Count Sclopis exclaimed, "Isn't this something!"

"Indeed!" answered Marquis Pallavicini.

"Turin would be truly fortunate if many more such institutions would be established," added Count Louis Collegno.

Count Sclopis mused, "That would take so many youngsters off our streets and squares on Sundays and holy days: youngsters who are growing up ignorant and lawless."

Don Bosco, surrounded by a group of boys, noticed these visitors and approached them. After the usual amenities, a conversation ensued which we have been able to reconstruct from what the visitors and especially Don Bosco related to us.

Count Sclopis: We have been watching with astonishment so many boys enjoying themselves. It's quite a sight! We have heard that a priest named Don Bosco is the prime mover behind all this. Would you introduce us to him?

Don Bosco: Gentlemen, I'm Don Bosco. Would you be so good as to come with me?

(*He then led them to his small room.*)

Count Sclopis: I am delighted to meet you in person. Your fame has long preceded you.

Don Bosco: Perhaps that's due more to the boys' chatter than to my merits.

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you, my God." *See: Carattere e Religiosità del Conte Frederico Sclopis,* a golden booklet written by another Turin patrician, Baron Anthony Manno, Turin, 1880.

Editor's Note: During the American Civil War, a Confederate raiding-ship, "The Alabama," was built by a private company in England. It destroyed many millions of dollars worth of Union shipping in the period 1862-1864. After the war, the Union government demanded reparation from the British government for allowing this Confederate raider, which had caused such havoc, to be built within, and sail from, its dominion. After much discussion, the dispute was turned over to arbitration. The members of the commission included one American, one Briton, one Italian (Count Sclopis), one Swiss, and one Brazilian. After many months of discussion, on September 14, 1872, the United States (Union) government was awarded $15,000,000 by the committee of arbitration, and this amount was paid by Great Britain.

Marquis Pallavicini: Your boys are the best judges in this matter and have been quite truthful. Didn't David say, "Upon the lips of infants and babies, you have composed a hymn of praise"? [Ps. 8, 2]

Count Sclopis: The Senate is cognizant of your work and we have been commissioned to acquaint ourselves with what you are doing and make a report. I am Count Sclopis, this is Marquis Pallavicini, and this is Count Louis Collegno.

Don Bosco: To date, my little oratory has received many welcome visits, but this one will certainly be remembered as one of the most cherished. Gentlemen, ask me any questions you like. I shall be happy to answer them as best I can.

Count Sclopis: What is the purpose of this oratory?

Don Bosco: Its purpose is to gather on Sundays and holy days the greatest possible number of boys who, either because of parental neglect or because they are strangers in the city, would roam the streets instead of attending church services and catechism classes. Here, instead, attracted by the many games available, as well as by small gifts and a warm reception, they have an opportunity to enjoy themselves under supervision. In the morning they hear Mass, receive the sacraments, and listen to a sermon especially suited to them; in the afternoon, after several hours of play, they receive catechism instruction and attend Vespers and Benediction. Briefly, the purpose of this oratory is to gather boys and turn them into upright citizens and good Catholics.

Marquis Pallavicini: A fine program indeed. There should be more such oratories in town.

Don Bosco: With God's help, in 1847 a similar one [3] was started near Valentino Park, not far from the Royal Palace at Porta Nuova, and a third one [4] was opened a short time ago in Borgo Vanchiglia.

Count Collegno: Excellent!

Count Sclopis: How many boys come here?

Don Bosco: Usually five hundred; often we have even more. About the same number attend each of the other two oratories.

Count Collegno: So that's about fifteen hundred boys who are providentially brought up in the right manner. Our city is indeed fortunate. This is a great help for our government.

Marquis Pallavicini: When did you begin this work?

Don Bosco: It all started in 1841 when I began to care for several poor young boys who needed personal attention. I soon realized that many

[3] The St. Aloysius Oratory. *See* Vol. III, pp. 197ff. [Editor]
[4] The Guardian Angel Oratory. *See* Vol. III, pp. 392ff. [Editor]

boys who were a little unruly but not really bad could easily become serious problems if left to themselves.

Count Sclopis: Yours is truly a philanthropic work and one of great social importance. Our government should encourage and support such undertakings. I am sure you will be pleased to know that the government and the Royal Family appreciate your work and will support it.

Count Collegno: How do you go about keeping order and discipline among so many boys?

Don Bosco: Reason and charity. One must be kind, patient, and forbearing. Here kindness prevails over punishment; in fact, kindness reigns supreme.

Marquis Pallavicini: This method should be adopted in other institutes, especially in our reformatories. Then we wouldn't need so many wardens and guards. Not only that, but these inmates would be rehabilitated instead of being released after many years far worse in character than when they entered.

Count Sclopis: Are all these boys from town?

Don Bosco: No, sir. Some come from Biella, Vercelli, Novara, and other provinces; others are from Milan, Como, and even from Switzerland. They come to Turin to look for jobs. Being far away from their families, they are exposed to many dangers and could easily turn bad.

Count Sclopis: And soon give serious trouble to the police and even to the government.

(*At that moment a twelve-year-old boy came knocking at the door with a message for Don Bosco, who told him to stay. The boy's confidence and candor delighted Count Sclopis.*)

"What is your name?" he asked the boy.

"Joseph Vanzino."

"Where are you from?"

"Varese."

"What's your job?"

"I'm a stonecutter."

"Are your parents living?"

"My father is dead."

"And your mother?"

The boy lowered his eyes, hung his head, blushed and did not answer.

"Tell me," Count Sclopis pressed him. "What about her? Is she dead too?"

In a muffled voice the boy replied, "My mother is in jail." And he broke into tears. The senators and Don Bosco were moved. After a moment's silence Count Sclopis continued:

"Poor lad, I am deeply concerned about you. When night comes where do you go?"

"Up till now my employer let me sleep in his house," the boy replied, wiping his eyes, "but today Don Bosco promised to take me in with the other boys who live here."

"What?" asked Count Sclopis turning to Don Bosco. "You also shelter boys?"

Don Bosco: Yes. Circumstances made it necessary. Right now about forty boys live here; most of them are either orphans or forsaken by their parents. They board here and go to work in town.

Marquis Pallavicini: This is truly a work inspired by charity.

Count Collegno: But where do you obtain the means to feed and shelter so many boys?

Don Bosco: It's quite a problem, and at times I am in financial difficulty. Most of the boys do not earn any money, and as for the few who do, they earn so little that it could never suffice to provide for their needs. However, to tell the truth, Divine Providence has never failed me yet. In fact, I am so confident that God will continue to aid me that I am planning to expand in order to accommodate a larger number of boys.

Count Sclopis: Will you show us around?

Don Bosco: Most willingly. Our dwelling is so poor, however, that it is hardly worth seeing.

So saying, Don Bosco took them on a tour. They first visited the dormitory located on the first floor. The entrance was so low that Count Sclopis accidentally hit the lintel with his hat; it fell off and hit the nose of Marquis Pallavicini who was following close behind and who managed to catch it.

"This never happened to me in the royal palace," remarked the count. To which the marquis added, "Nor did I ever have a hat land on my nose before!"

From the dormitory the three senators passed on to the kitchen, where Margaret was putting away pots and dishes. "This is my mother," Don Bosco said. "She is also the mother of my orphans."

(*Another conversation then ensued.*)

Count Sclopis: It seems you are also the cook. Isn't that so, mother?

Mamma Margaret: To gain heaven we do a little bit of everything.

Count Sclopis: What do you feed the boys?

Mamma Margaret: Bread and soup, soup and bread.

Count Sclopis: How many courses do you serve Don Bosco?

Mamma Margaret: Only one!

Count Sclopis: That's rather little. Is it a good one at least?

Mamma Margaret: You be the judge. It's the same dish twice a day, Sunday through Thursday.

(*The senators chuckled at these words.*)

Count Sclopis: Why not from Sunday to Sunday?

Mamma Margaret: Because Fridays and Saturdays are meatless days, and so I prepare a dish without meat.

Count Sclopis: I understand. I see that you are a very thrifty cook. I fear your menus will not be a great success nowadays.

Marquis Pallavicini: Is anyone helping you?

Mamma Margaret: I have a very good helper, but today he is very busy and I have to manage all by myself.

Marquis Pallavicini: Who is your kitchen boy?

Mamma Margaret: "Here he is," she said laughingly as she pointed to Don Bosco.

Count Sclopis: Congratulations, Don Bosco. I knew you to be an excellent educator and also a gifted writer, but I didn't know that you also had experience in cooking.

Don Bosco: You should see me in action, especially when I make *polenta.*[5]

They all laughed and said good-bye to the good woman.

The time for recreation was now over. Don Bosco gave the signal and the visitors were in for another surprise. All games promptly stopped, and hundreds of boys fell into an orderly line and went into the chapel.

The senators then visited the catechism classes and attended Vespers, the sermon and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, to the great edification of the boys. Afterward, they exchanged a few words with the youngsters in the playground.

"What's your job?" Count Sclopis asked one of the boys.

"I'm a shoemaker," the boy replied.

"What's the difference between a shoemaker and a cobbler?" continued the count.

"Well," the boy answered, "a cobbler mends shoes while a shoemaker makes them."

[5] A tasty cornmeal dish quite common in northern Italy. [Editor]

"Excellent!" said the count. "You have given me a very good answer."

Don Bosco: He attends our evening classes very faithfully.

Marquis Pallavicini: Do you have evening classes too?

Don Bosco: Yes, marquis. We have had them since 1844 for those boys who because of their jobs or age cannot attend regular day classes. During the next hour classes will begin in those rooms over there.

Marquis Pallavicini: What subjects are taught?

Don Bosco: Reading, writing, bible history, Italian history, geography, arithmetic, and the metric system. There are also classes in drawing, French, and music, both vocal and instrumental.

Marquis Pallavicini: And who helps you?

Don Bosco: Some priests and laymen. I call them "cooperators." These generous men help me not only in teaching, but also in other ways, such as finding jobs for the boys with reputable people, and providing shoes and clothing.

Marquis Pallavicini: Good! These men are truly civic-minded and well-deserving of our country's gratitude.

Count Sclopis: Don Bosco, I don't indulge in flattery, but in all honesty I must say, also on behalf of my colleagues, that we are highly pleased with what we have seen, and that as Catholics, citizens, and senators of the realm we heartily endorse your work and hope that it will prosper and expand.

Before leaving, Count Sclopis gave Don Bosco a donation for the boys most in need. From that time on the three senators became Don Bosco's benefactors.

The praise bestowed on the oratories greatly pleased Don Bosco. Another source of comfort to him was the interest shown by these and other high government officials.

A few days after the committee's visit, Don Bosco received the following reply to a petition he had made.

Royal Secretariat for Internal Affairs, Department 5, No. 563
Turin, February 12, 1850

Reverend and dear Father:

I cannot take your petition into consideration until this department's budget has been definitely approved by the Parliament, notwithstanding the fact that I would very much like to assist in promoting a work which is such a credit to you. Truly inspired by sentiments of Christian charity, you have undertaken to reduce as much as possible the number of under-

privileged youths who, orphaned and without a guiding hand in their early years, could become by their lawlessness a serious problem to society and a threat to themselves. I am very pleased, however, to express my sincerest admiration for your untiring zeal on behalf of these youths. I hope that my appreciation will at least gratify you and encourage you to continue this arduous humanitarian undertaking.

I shall give your petition every consideration as soon as our budget is approved. I am honored to remain,

Your most devoted servant,

For the Minister of the Interior
S. Martino, *Executive Secretary*

Don Bosco was more interested in the government's official approval than in a subsidy. With the help of Divine Providence this would in due time ease the unjust animosity and suspicion that political reactionaries had against the clergy and would protect him against the new wave of anticlerical moves that were in the offing.

The secret societies and the government were both pressing for the abolition of the ecclesiastical court. But the government, wishing to keep a semblance of respect for the authority of the Church, decided to resume negotiations for a new concordat. Negotiations had broken down in 1848, partly because of the bad faith of the Piedmontese delegation and partly because of Pope Pius IX's departure from Rome. For this purpose, and also to seek the resignations of Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni [of Turin] and Bishop [Philip] Artico [of Asti], Count Joseph Siccardi was sent to Gaeta in November of 1849.

Pius IX was ready to make some concessions, but not all those demanded, and he was totally opposed to the unjustified request regarding the two bishops. Vexed by this turn of events, Count Siccardi broke off negotiations and returned to Turin. In order that Victor Emmanuel II would not receive a distorted report, the Pope instructed Bishop Andrew Charvaz [of Pinerolo] to assure the king of his goodwill and explain the grave obligations that the Pope's apostolic ministry placed on him. The king then wrote the Pope a letter stating that he would uphold the rights of the Church and protect the two bishops.

For some time anticlerical newspapers and publications had been

mounting a campaign against the ecclesiastical court, demanding its abolition. As a follow-up, on February 25, 1850, Count [Joseph] Siccardi, Minister of Justice, introduced a bill for its total abolition.

The ecclesiastical court was the most ancient tribunal in Piedmont, or for that matter in any other Catholic State; it was based on law and justice, on Holy Scripture, and on the decrees of popes and councils. It had precedents in civil society: magistrates were judged by magistrates, senators and ministers of state by their peers, soldiers by the military, importers and exporters by courts of commerce, and members of the House of Representatives could not be imprisoned while the House was in session without the House's authorization. Obviously, the aim of all these moves was to subject the clergy to the civil authority.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of this year [1850], Archbishop Fransoni had decided not to postpone his return to his diocese any longer. The situation was growing more uncertain and difficult. The clergy, accustomed to a long period of peace and harmony between Church and State and to the laity's docile submission to the Church's authority, was unprepared for the approaching storm and would not have been able to steer a safe course in the turbulent waters ahead.

On January 22 [1850], the archbishop had issued a pastoral letter informing the faithful of the Lenten indult, reiterating his ban on licentious and heretical newspapers, and announcing the restoration of papal government in the Papal States. Leaving Chambéry on February 25, he arrived at Pianezza the following day. From there he apprised King Victor Emmanuel II of his arrival by letter, adding that he was obeying a call of duty that he could not ignore without grave guilt.

The king sent prominent people, including some ecclesiastics, to persuade him to return abroad, but he frankly told them he intended to stay.

Don Bosco, alone and on foot, hastened to Pianezza, about six miles away. When Don Bosco was ushered in, the archbishop remarked affectionately, "Woe to the solitary man!" [Eccles. 4, 10] Without acknowledging the prelate's reference to his having come unaccompanied, Don Bosco said to him, "To His angels He has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways." [Ps. 90, 11]

Don Bosco visited the archbishop frequently; he had many things to report, and the archbishop had confidential errands to entrust to him. Without doubt great affection linked Don Bosco to his first benefactor! Despite the grave problems which beset him, Archbishop Fransoni always enjoyed talking with Don Bosco about the festive oratories. This was a work in which he had taken a personal interest and to which he had given his support from the very start.[6] He was greatly concerned with its future. In fact, before going into exile [7] he had frequently urged Don Bosco to work toward insuring the future of his oratories. He had expressed to Don Bosco his earnest desire that a society be established and developed to look after the education of poor boys and to preserve the spirit and those traditions that are formed only through experience. He often asked, "How will you make sure that your work will continue? You are mortal like all other men; if you don't take the necessary steps, the oratories will die with you. Figure out a way to make them survive. Look for someone to take your place." Finally, he said that it was necessary for Don Bosco to found a religious congregation.

[6] *See* Vol. II, pp. 61, 194, 236, 281, 316, 325, 344; Vol. III, pp. 134f, 154-9. [Editor]

[7] *See* Vol. III, p. 224. [Editor]

CHAPTER 4

Distinguished Catechists

LENTEN catechism classes began at the three oratories of Valdocco, Porta Nuova, and Borgo Vanchiglia on February 18 [1850]. It was the Tuesday after the first Sunday in Lent. Earlier in the month the boys had made the usual Exercise for a Happy Death [1] amid hopes and fears prompted by the unrest of the times. The only change introduced in the boys' practices of piety was that the Sunday rosary was no longer recited in the evening but rather before or after Mass.

In Piedmont at this time there was great interest in Don Bosco's oratories. Of course, opinions varied. There was no lack of critics who, unable to do any good themselves, scoffed at Don Bosco and his youngsters. "They're just riffraff," they told him. "You won't be able to do anything with them." Later they had to reverse their opinion when they saw how he had turned them into skilled workers, honest shopkeepers, teachers, lawyers, brave soldiers, and saintly priests. As regards workers, we must add that Don Bosco, in a brief history of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales published in 1862, wrote that every year he was able to find jobs for several hundred boys.

Many people came to Valdocco on Sundays to see how he conducted catechism classes. It was an extremely rewarding experience. Classes were held in the chapel, in the sacristy and adjoining rooms, on the playground, in the little vegetable garden fronting the house, and even in an open field nearby where the church of Mary Help of Christians now stands. In a little clearing flanked by potatoes and

[1] A practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist as if for the last time. [Editor]

beans Don Bosco taught catechism to the more difficult boys. After welcoming them as his very dear friends, he would begin his instruction.

One Sunday several Englishmen came to the Oratory to ascertain personally the truth of what they had heard about the priest of Valdocco. They were led by Bishop Cucchi who had told them, "Now you'll see what Don Bosco is like!" Since this was to be a surprise visit, the prelate said nothing to the many boys they passed, but looked for Don Bosco all over the grounds. The search was unsuccessful until, finally, as they came out the gate, he spotted a group of boys sitting in the shade of a tree on a patch of grass and exclaimed, "He must be over there!" Don Bosco indeed was there. Seated on the grass, he was teaching about twenty of the older boys who, despite their cocky appearance, were listening with rapt attention. After watching the unusual sight in amazement for several minutes, the Englishmen exclaimed, "If all priests acted like that and taught catechism even in the fields, the whole world would be converted in no time at all!"

Of course, this success had not come about by itself; it had cost Don Bosco much hard work. Since crowds of boys also flocked to catechism classes at the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories, Don Bosco had to send most of his young clerics and the more experienced catechists there. But he did not fail to supervise them, and often he would drop in on them unexpectedly. He would walk out of the Oratory with his biretta on lest his absence be noticed, but a short distance away someone would be waiting to hand him his hat.

As a result of his solicitude for these two other oratories, Don Bosco was often short of personnel in Valdocco. He had entrusted all the discipline to Father [John] Grassino [a diocesan priest], but this did not remedy the shortage of catechists. To ease the situation, he made use of anyone who happened to be around, provided that the individual was qualified for this work. Thus, for example, he enlisted Father [Francis] Marengo [another diocesan priest], who ended up by teaching catechism there for about eight years until other duties finally forced him to give it up. However, he still continued to help with the hearing of confessions.

One day Marquis Gustavo Cavour arrived with a friend after the

catechism classes had already begun. Knowing Don Bosco's ways, he immediately set out for the field where Don Bosco was sitting surrounded by boys. He went up to him, introduced his companion, and asked Don Bosco to take him for a tour of the Oratory, since his friend was eager to know everything about it. "I'd be happy to oblige, marquis, but right now I'm tied up with these boys. If you would kindly take over this class for a little while, I'll be very glad to show your friend around." The marquis agreed, sat down among those young apprentices, and took over where Don Bosco had left off.

On another Sunday afternoon Don Bosco was visited by two distinguished priests from out-of-town. Passing through Turin, they had decided to call upon Don Bosco. It was about two o'clock when they arrived at the Oratory. The boys were moving to their locations for catechism class, while Don Bosco, short of teachers, was thinking of how he could switch the classes around. The two priests showed up at that very moment. "My companion and I would like to visit your Oratory and observe your method of teaching," one of them said.

"I'll be delighted to show you everything after the church services. As you can see, right now I'm terribly busy with these hundreds of boys. Your arrival at this very moment is providential. Would you be so good as to help me with the catechism classes? Afterward, we'll be able to talk at our own leisure." Then he turned to the one who seemed to be the more important of the two and said, "Would you please take care of the older boys? They are in the chapel, back of the main altar."

"Gladly!" replied the priest.

"And you," Don Bosco said addressing the other, "would you mind teaching another group in the sanctuary? The boys in that group are the most restless."

The second priest also generously consented. Don Bosco gave them a copy of the diocesan catechism and, without asking their names, led them to their respective locations. Thus he was free for general supervision. Young Michael Rua, who had attended the festive oratory regularly since 1849, was present at this scene. He had a good view of the two priests from where he sat among the other boys and he was greatly impressed.

Don Bosco somehow sensed that his two visitors were not just ordinary priests, and he also noticed that they were expert catechists. He could hear the one who was teaching back of the main altar. The priest was speaking about the virtue of faith and was bringing in examples and comparisons. "Faith," he was saying, "concerns things which we do not see. Since they are not visible, we make an act of faith and believe in their existence. We would not need to do so if they were visible. Thus while we are on earth we believe in eternal life, but when we shall have the good fortune to be in heaven, we shall no longer need to make this act of faith; we shall be actually enjoying eternal life."

After listening for some time to the priest's accurate presentation of doctrinal truths in a manner adapted to the understanding of his youthful audience, Don Bosco asked him to give them a brief sermon after the singing of Vespers. The priest tried to decline since he was a stranger, adducing that it might be more fitting to have a preacher with whom the boys were familiar, but Don Bosco insisted. He also asked the other priest to give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Both accepted without further ado. During the sermon the other visiting priest helped to supervise the boys. As soon as the services were over, Don Bosco eagerly looked for them to make their acquaintance. "This is Father Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity," one of them said, gesturing to the other.

"Oh, the great philosopher!" exclaimed Don Bosco, highly surprised.

"Oh, indeed?" Father Rosmini remarked with a smile.

"Quite so," continued Don Bosco. "Your many books warrant my calling you a great philosopher."

"Yes, I've written a few," Father Rosmini said humbly in a matter-of-fact fashion.

"I'm not surprised now that you taught catechism so well," Don Bosco added. Then turning to the other priest, he said, "And might I ask your name, Father?"

"I'm Father Joseph De Gaudenzi."

"The canon archpriest of Vercelli?"

"Yes."

"I'm delighted to finally meet you in person, since I already know

you so well by our correspondence. I have heard about your charity and pastoral zeal."

Both then had a long conversation with Don Bosco, and from that time on they became great admirers, friends, and benefactors of the Oratory.

After they left, the boys in the canon's class asked Don Bosco about him, and he told them, "He comes from Vercelli and is one of the outstanding priests of that archdiocese. He is the timber of which bishops are made." Indeed, Canon De Gaudenzi was later appointed bishop of Vigevano and proved to be a great credit to the episcopate.

Father [Antonio] Rosmini came to visit Don Bosco on other occasions, together with Marquis Gustavo Cavour.

Professor Charles Tomatis of Fossano described these visits as follows:

Father Rosmini often dropped in on our evening classes, graciously taught us catechism, and occasionally took part in the church services of the Oratory, to our great delight. He considered them no less important in spreading the Faith than those held in the forests of primitive countries or in the churches of mission lands such as China and India. Once he chanced upon Don Bosco teaching a large number of boys under a mulberry tree. It was a charming scene and Father Rosmini remarked, "The loving serenity of that good priest is a reflection of his yearning for the eternal repose of heaven, where he will go with the thousands of souls he has saved. They will throng around him in the glory of the blessed, just as they now surround him affectionately on earth." Once Father Rosmini also put in an appearance at the Oratory on a weekday just as the young apprentices were returning from their jobs. Don Bosco summoned them around the priest, who asked them a few questions and spoke a word of encouragement to all, including myself. Afterward he visited our little home and was moved by its extreme poverty.

On another occasion, Father Rosmini and Marquis [Gustavo] Cavour, whose guest the former always was whenever he came to Turin, attended a playlet written by Don Bosco and staged by the Oratory boys. John Turchi [2] played the leading part.

[2] A pupil and later a teacher at the Oratory where he said his first Mass on May 26, 1861. [Editor]

During his visits to Valdocco, Father Rosmini used to have long, friendly talks with Don Bosco in his room. On one of his first visits he asked Don Bosco's advice about putting money belonging to his institute into a savings bank. But he added that he would prefer to lend it to some private individuals provided that he could be sure of their integrity.

At that time Don Bosco was planning to put up another building at the Oratory. Therefore, he replied, "I can help you in that. I know a person in need of a loan. He is quite trustworthy. I'll write you about it soon, and I hope you will agree with me."

A few days later he wrote the following letter to Father Rosmini at Stresa.

Turin, March 11, 1850

Very Rev. Father Antonio Rosmini
Superior of the Institute of Charity
Stresa

Very Reverend and dear Father:

Your interest and active participation in all that concerns public welfare, especially the spiritual welfare of souls, encourages me to reveal a plan which I have already discussed with Father [Joseph] Fradelizio [3] and about which I have recently informed Father Pauli.[4]

I plan to expand the facilities of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, an institution for the civic, moral, and religious education of underprivileged youths, by adding another building. Other similar oratories, of which I am the head, have already been opened in Turin. The harvest is not without thorns but is nevertheless plentiful and promising. Priests are needed, priests full of love for their fellowmen.

Would it be possible for your Institute of Charity to establish itself quietly here in Turin? One way to do so would be by contributing to the construction of the new building I am planning, with the proviso that some members of your institute could live here and gradually participate in the many works of charity as the need arises. Please give this matter some thought. Should you decide to try something along these lines, you can count on my cooperation in any undertaking for the welfare of souls and the greater glory of God. Father Pauli is fully acquainted with my

[3] A Rosminian. *See* Vol. III, pp. 371ff. [Editor]
[4] Another Rosminian. [Editor]

plans and so he will be in a better position to explain matters than I could in a letter.

Please forgive me if I have taken too great a liberty in making this suggestion. I assure you of my highest esteem and am honored to remain,

Your most humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Father Rosmini had the following reply sent to Don Bosco:

Stresa, April 4, 1850

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

The charitable undertaking you mentioned in your kind letter of March 11 sounds very interesting to my revered superior, Father Antonio Rosmini. He would like to participate in it effectively, but, before committing himself, he needs more detailed information on the matter. Neither your letter nor the report made to him by Father Pauli upon his return from Turin sufficiently illustrates your plans. My superior therefore suggests a meeting at which it will be easier to clarify the matter and reach some agreement. We would be very pleased if you could honor us a second time [5] by visiting us at your convenience in Stresa.[6] You would then have every opportunity of discussing the matter at length with my superior. If you can do so, please let us know when we might expect you.

Father Rosmini and all the members of our community who know you send their most cordial regards. With the deepest respect, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

Father Charles Gilardi

Don Bosco lost no time in supplying the desired information.

Turin, April 15, 1850

Very Reverend and dear Father Charles:

I was very glad to learn that the plan I mentioned to Father Rosmini met with his approval in principle. I too believe that we should have a meeting, but presently I cannot say when I will be able to come to Stresa, much as I am looking forward to it.

For the moment, therefore, I shall outline a few specific points which

[5] Don Bosco had paid them a visit in the fall of 1847. *See* Vol. III, pp. 173f. [Editor]

[6] Headquarters of the Rosminians. [Editor]

I shall be glad to clarify further if need be. My plan has two objectives: the first is to obtain material and spiritual support for the oratories which by design of Divine Providence have been opened in three different parts of the city; the second is to ascertain whether the Lord has chosen this as the time to establish your congregation in Turin, as a remedy against the many grievous wounds already inflicted or about to be inflicted on the Church. As you see, we must combine the simplicity of the dove with the prudence of the serpent. *Everything must be done quietly lest the enemy rush in to sow the seeds of discord.*

Since undertakings of this sort require compliance with legal formalities lest any of the parties concerned suffer damages, I submit the following agreement to your reverend superior. I believe that these provisions will satisfy legal requirements without attracting too much public attention.

1. My plan is to erect a three-story building with a church annex. The land covers an area of approximately 34,200 square feet and will be encircled by a wall. It is located at Porta Susina [7] in the Valdocco district.

2. The Rev. John Bosco will reserve six or more rooms for the use of students of the Institute of Charity or for others as determined by the superior of the institute. This arrangement will offer an opportunity for works of charity in the oratories, hospitals, prisons, schools, etc.

3. The Rev. John Bosco is prepared to lend his assistance in whatever may redound to the prestige and benefit of the institute.

4. The Institute of Charity would contribute to the construction the sum of, say, twelve thousand lire, payable in three installments: at the start of the construction, at the mid-point, and upon its completion.

5. This sum would be guaranteed by a mortgage on the land and building.

6. In the event of the Rev. John Bosco's death, the Institute of Charity would acquire title to a portion of the building on terms to be established, or be entitled to a refund of the money, but only in the event that no other testamentary arrangements have been made in favor of the said institute.

These are my suggestions. I would like to point out, though, that the government and the municipal authorities, both of whom take great interest in public education, are favorably disposed toward the oratories, and have several times expressed the wish that day classes be established in all three of them. A shortage of teachers has prevented me from carrying this out.

[7] Also called Porta Paesana. Since 1860 its name has been Porta Savoia. [Editor]

In conclusion, I am interested in furthering the expansion of the Institute of Charity by aiding its establishment in Turin. If this is in accordance with God's will, we could attempt it.

Please give my regards to the revered Father Rosmini. I shall pray that God will preserve you both in the interest of the Church, so sorely tried in our day. I remain,

Your most humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 5

A Senate Debate on the Oratory

HARDLY a month had passed since the visit of the three senators to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales when, at the beginning of March, it became known that the Oratory had been discussed at a Senate session. On March 1 [1850], under the chairmanship of Marquis [Caesar] Alfieri, the Senate examined two petitions, quite similar in nature, which had been on the agenda since January 11 of the same year. Petition No. 47 read as follows, "Joseph Charles Bruno, physician, proposes the adoption of legislation to provide shelter and education for unemployed, vagrant boys." Petition No. 48 was couched in these terms, "The Rev. John Bosco states that, through his personal initiative, three oratories have been opened on the outskirts of Turin for the intellectual and moral education of vagrant boys, and requests the Senate to provide funds for the operation of said institutes."

Marquis Ignatius Pallavicini, reporter of these petitions, spoke for the committee which had been appointed for that purpose, delivering the following address in the March 1, 1850, session as recorded in the *Atti Ufficiali* [similar to our Congressional Record].

Senator Pallavicini: Joseph Charles Bruno, house doctor and surgeon of the state reformatory for juveniles, in his petition No. 47 expresses a justified concern over the alarming number of orphaned or abandoned boys roaming the city streets. Many are runaway boys. Jobless, they go around selling matches or candles or other odds and ends. Since they are homeless, they sleep in doorways and hallways. Briefly, they grow up lazy, idle, and prone to delinquency. Even though very young, they are fast becoming skillful pickpockets and are well on the road to far greater crimes. To remedy this lamentable situation, Dr. Bruno suggests that these urchins be removed from their dangerous surroundings and housed

in some institution where they can learn some trade and receive some moral education. The institution he has in mind is the agricultural school called "La Generala" which was recently remodeled according to modern penal principles and has been properly equipped with everything necessary to give its inmates a moral, intellectual, and vocational education. In support of his suggestion, he cites what is now being done along such lines at Lausanne, Belgium, and in France. He finally asks for the realization of this project. Our committee cannot but applaud the humanitarian intentions of Dr. Joseph Charles Bruno and is convinced (indeed I believe the entire Senate shares this conviction) that it would be highly advisable not to postpone further whatever steps are required to curb and prevent this disorder. Let us fill our educational institutes and we shall empty our prisons. Our committee therefore proposes that this petition be forwarded with our recommendation to the Minister of the Interior in order that he may expeditiously and effectively remove the causes of juvenile delinquency.

(*At this point Senator Giulio requested permission to speak.*)

President: Senator Giulio has the floor.

Senator Giulio: We certainly sympathize with the humane sentiments expressed by the petitioner and shared by the committee whose report we have just heard. I am sure that we are all eager to take steps to put an end to the evils rightly deplored by both the petitioner and the committee. Yet one may well believe, indeed one may be convinced, that the means suggested in the petition (which would bear the Senate's stamp of approval if the Senate forwarded it to the Minister of the Interior), far from eradicating the evils deplored, would merely aggravate them.

Before recommending the petition to the Minister of the Interior for action, as proposed, the Senate should first consider whether the government can possibly take upon itself the education of so many boys; and even if it can, whether such a step would be advisable. By so doing, the government would unavoidably encourage parental irresponsibility and give rise to greater evils than those it tries to remedy.

I will not further elaborate on these points as I am sure that what I have already said will suffice to alert the Senate regarding an all-too-facile humanitarianism which might easily produce results worse than those it intends to cure.

(*Here Senator Giulio made a motion to reject the Bruno petition without further consideration.*)

President: Senator Giulio has made the motion to reject this petition. If someone will second it, we shall put it to a vote.

(*Senator Giulio's motion was seconded and Professor Bruno's petition*

was rejected by a standing vote. The unsuccessful outcome of this first petition did not augur well for Don Bosco, but things turned out quite differently despite Senator Giulio's opposition, as the record shows.)

Senator Pallavicini: Petition No. 48 is similar in content and purpose to the one I have already had the honor of submitting to you. The means it proposes, though, are somewhat different.

The petitioner is a distinguished and zealous priest of this city, the Reverend John Bosco. He too is solicitous for the welfare of abandoned boys and society in general. With the approval of both ecclesiastical and civil authorities, he has for some years dedicated his efforts to gathering boys between the ages of twelve and twenty on Sundays and holy days. For example, more than five hundred boys attend his oratory in Valdocco. Their numbers increased to such an extent that three years ago he had to open another oratory at Porta Nuova, and recently a third one in Borgo Vanchiglia. At all these places, whether in the playground or in the classroom, the boys learn moral principles and respect for authority and law in accordance with our Faith. Moreover, they are also taught reading and writing, arithmetic, and the metric system.[1] I may also add that he has even opened a hospice sheltering between twenty and thirty of the most needy.

This holy undertaking is supported by donations from zealous and charitable priests and laymen, for the city of Turin is second to none in generosity toward charitable institutions.

Expenses, however, have increased yearly. The petitioner is burdened not only with the rental of the buildings, amounting to 2,400 lire, but he must also provide for the upkeep of the hospice and adjacent chapel as well as meet the daily expenses necessitated by the extreme poverty of some of the boys. He finds himself compelled to discontinue this work since all too frequently he is obliged to appeal to those who have already come to his assistance on other occasions. Therefore he would like the Senate to take a benevolent interest in his institute and support it by adopting relevant resolutions.

The members of my committee did not rely exclusively on the petitioner's report. Even though they already knew of this well-deserving institute, they sought more information. They were able to verify on the spot that in addition to practicing their religious duties on Sundays and

[1] As of January 1, 1850, the metric system had become the exclusive legal system in Piedmont. In preparation for this development, Don Bosco in 1846 wrote and published a pertinent booklet. *See* Vol. II, pp. 374-9. He also began teaching the metric system in his evening classes. In 1849, to familiarize his pupils with it, he also wrote and staged a three-act comedy. *See* Vol. III, pp. 420ff. [Editor]

holy days, the boys learned drawing, bible history, Italian history, civics, and physical education.

The founder of these oratories also planned to foster a healthy spirit of competition by having the boys prepare exhibits on art and industry and present musical and literary entertainments with prizes awarded to the best performers. All this could not be carried out for lack of means.

From what I have already said, it is obvious that this institution is eminently religious, social, and useful. I need not say more. Our city would suffer very much if such an institute, rather than prospering and developing as planned by these sincere friends of the people, were to languish or close down altogether for lack of a helping hand to enable it to maintain at least the good already accomplished. Our committee would be at fault and negligent in its duty toward the Senate, which honored it by entrusting this important task to it, as well as to society, if it did not propose most unreservedly that this petition be recommended to the Ministry of the Interior, so that due assistance may be accorded to so beneficial and deserving an enterprise.

Senator Giulio: To my deep regret I must for the second time perform an unpleasant duty and dissuade you from pursuing a path to which we are all sentimentally drawn—the path of legal charity—which I hope the Senate will not wish to pursue in connection with a petition.

I move once more that this petition be rejected and that my motion be seconded and voted upon.

Count Sclopis: The considerations advanced for the second time by my honorable colleague, Senator Giulio, surely touch upon one of the major issues debated throughout Europe today. This is neither the place nor the time for such a debate. Were we to reject this petition, our decision would, at the very least, discourage institutes of this sort which (depending on private charity) strive to fill a tragic gap in contemporary society.

Moreover, it seems to me that it is not proper to raise the question of legal charity here, insofar as only subsidiary assistance is being requested. When great questions about public charity arose in other countries, I believe that even those who very rightly opposed it as a matter of principle, nevertheless admitted that in such instances where private assistance was inadequate or impossible, the government, without undertaking to establish institutions of its own, could very well, indeed even ought to give temporary supplementary aid.

I consider it an urgent necessity that something be done on behalf of these boys who, when they will have to leave these oratories (founded by our fellow citizens), will be almost totally on their own at a difficult and dangerous age. I am convinced that it is very important that the gov-

ernment meet its pressing charitable needs, without however committing itself permanently to any such institutions.

In this present instance, therefore, I invite the government to take the necessary steps to cope with this grave need. Speaking also on behalf of my committee (whose members, I am sure, share my opinion), I wish to declare that it has not been our intention to debate the pros and cons of public charity. We merely wish to request a subsidy such as those which the government grants to so many other institutions of public charity. I shall therefore insist that this petition be forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior.

This I say with the utmost conviction, because (as I already had the honor to state in this assembly on another occasion) the municipal council, after making a survey of conditions among workers, was obliged to admit great deficiencies in this field. Without compromising the government into adopting a rigid policy, it is possible to cooperate in keeping such institutions alive; through other means they may then perhaps become more permanently established. The government must come to their assistance; it will thus remedy a sad situation and lay the foundation for a better future.

Senator Giulio: I shall reply briefly to Senator Sclopis' remarks. Governments are bound to dispense justice, not alms, to citizens. Public funds belong to the citizens and therefore may not be disposed of except for reasons of justice. Such considerations, which I consider incontestable, are sufficient to demonstrate how governments are under no obligation to come to the assistance of charitable institutions with public funds, no matter how deserving they are for humanitarian or moral reasons. Governments have nothing to give except justice for all.

Count Sclopis: The government indeed must be just before all else; but the government must also be farsighted. The government should not commit itself to run charitable institutions, although it should help in emergencies. In such cases a hard and fast line of conduct is not the best. Such rigidity, especially in our present circumstances, might lead people to despair concerning the future welfare of many institutions which not only the voice of charity recommends to us but also that of political foresight as well.

Senator Sauli: I might add that such institutions do not merely dispense alms, but provide moral and religious training, which, I believe, is of great concern to the government.

Senator Pallavicini: May I point out that not long ago the Senate agreed that compulsory education should be provided to vagrant boys and demonstrated this conviction in a vote to that effect on a bill sub-

mitted to the Chamber of Deputies. Now what is the petition about which we have just heard a report? Its purpose is to give an education practically identical to the one that I have already mentioned. If the government [a short time ago] was willing to institute such a program of education, it can now very well contribute to a necessary outlay without getting involved in a debate on the pros and cons of public charity.

Count Sclopis: The government recently did so in a similar case and earned the gratitude of the entire populace.

President: Two motions have been made: one by the committee which recommends the petition to the government for a subsidy; the other by Senator Giulio, who moves that the Senate take a vote on his motion. This latter motion has precedence.

(*Senator Giulio's motion was rejected.*)

President: I now make a motion that we vote on the recommendation of the committee.

(*This motion was adopted, and Don Bosco's petition was referred by the Senate to the Minister of the Interior with recommendations for a subsidy for the upkeep of his institute.*)

The approval of this petition by the Senate was of great importance. Thereafter both the hospice and the festive oratory at Valdocco were extended official consideration by the government. Now and then the government manifested its approval by praising the work, granting subsidies, or recommending poor boys to Don Bosco's care as to a sure haven where they could become upright citizens, to their personal advantage as well as that of their families and the nation.

Even the local antireligious newspapers, echoing the Senate's sentiments, wrote articles in praise of Don Bosco. In fact for a while no one dared to speak disparagingly about him.

While on the one hand Don Bosco had good reason to rejoice over the outcome of this debate in the Senate, on the other hand he was saddened by news concerning his archbishop. King Victor Emmanuel had personally written to the latter telling him that he should not have returned to his diocese without having been summoned, and that since it was known that the archbishop was not in favor of constitutional government, he was expected to declare in a pastoral letter his intention of not opposing it in any way. Under these circumstances, in a letter dated March 4, the archbishop an-

nounced his imminent return to Turin. Expressing his thanks to the clergy and the faithful for their expressions of affection, he praised their constancy in their Catholic Faith and also had some laudatory words for the House of Savoy. He also declared that all citizens should obey the Constitution granted by King Charles Albert. Its first article solemnly declared: "The Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church is the sole Church of the State."

CHAPTER 6

Harassment of the Church

THE month of March [1850], a month which should have been spent in devout preparation for Easter,[1] was darkened by some highly disturbing incidents. March 4 was the [second] anniversary of the proclamation of the Constitution. To solemnize this event a solemn high Mass and *Te Deum* were scheduled in the church of La Gran Madre di Dio [the Great Mother of God] [2] in the presence of the military and civil authorities. In the huge and magnificent Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, battalions of the National Guard were lined up as a guard of honor. All the boys' schools of the city had reserved places, but the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales did not make an appearance. Don Bosco was determined to keep his boys away from any ceremony that had political overtones, for he realized the potential disastrous consequences involved. The course of action chosen by Don Bosco was not easy (as Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi relates), especially between 1850 and 1855, but Don Bosco always held fast to his policy and managed to steer a safe course.

On this particular day, the anticlerical fury of the mobs roaming the streets and squares reached fever pitch. Priests were insulted and jeers were shouted under the windows of the papal nuncio, Archbishop [Anthony B.] Antonucci. Landlords and tenants were forced to display flags; a "spontaneous" general illumination was achieved by hurling stones at any darkened windows.

Meanwhile, in Parliament, debate over proposed legislation to

[1] Easter fell on March 31 that year. [Editor]

[2] This church was built in the style of the Roman Pantheon between 1818 and 1831 to commemorate the return of King Victor Emmanuel I from his exile. [Editor]

abolish the ecclesiastical court was drawing to a close. The best Catholic spokesmen of the Chamber of Deputies had fought against this bill, but the vast majority of the deputies were men without any faith or religion. When the Catholic position was stated, they responded with outbursts of laughter, boos, and hisses, applauding instead the vicious diatribes of Angelo Brofferio [3] and those of his ilk. On March 9 the bill passed with one hundred and thirty votes in favor and twenty-six against. The eloquent protests of James Cardinal Antonelli, of the nuncio, and of the bishops were of no avail. Catholic newspapers did not fare any better when they protested against the violation of the public rights of the Church and demanded observance of the first article of the Constitution. *L'Armonia* was confiscated and declared guilty of breaking the law, Lenten preachers were threatened and physically attacked, and the preacher at St. Dalmazzo [4] was forced to leave the city. The clergy was forbidden to present petitions against the passing of this law, while those in favor of it were openly encouraged. *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* the unofficial mouthpiece of Parliament, unchallenged and in fact imitated by other liberal newspapers, had conducted a savage campaign of abuse against the senators and deputies who had fought for the rights of the Church.

This was the atmosphere in Turin when Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni arrived on March 15 to take up residence again. He paid a courtesy visit to Victor Emmanuel II, who received him coldly and somewhat resentfully.

March 28 was Holy Thursday. On that morning Don Bosco said to Father [John] Giacomelli, "Let's go to the cathedral and see what's happening over there." They went and were present at the blessing of the holy oils. The manager of *La Campana,* a Catholic newspaper, with a group of husky young men from the Valdocco Oratory, stood in the square near the archbishop's coach ready for action should anyone dare to insult the prelate. Nothing happened, but on his way home the archbishop was greeted with catcalls and hisses. He was similarly insulted on Good Friday. But on Holy Saturday there were no insults as he made his way to and from the

[3] A Piedmontese politician and an opponent of Camillo Benso Cavour. [Editor]
[4] A parish church in Turin. [Editor]

royal chapel, where he distributed Easter Communion to the king and his family.

While this was going on in the heart of the city, in the three oratories on the outskirts (Porta Nuova, Borgo Vanchiglia, and Valdocco) about two thousand youngsters, well-versed in their catechism and carefully prepared by a triduum of sermons and a good confession, were receiving their Easter Communion. For many it was also their First Holy Communion.

Don Bosco had ordered six thousand cards from the Paravia Press printed as follows:

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE FRUITS OF YOUR EASTER COMMUNION

Dear boys, if you want long-lasting results from your Easter Holy Communion, practice these three suggestions. They will fill your heart with joy and your soul with true happiness.

1. Always keep holy the day of the Lord by attending Mass and listening to the Word of God in sermons and catechetical instructions.

2. Avoid bad companions as you would the plague. Keep away from boys who blaspheme or take the holy name of God in vain, and who indulge in unseemly acts or conversation. Avoid also those who speak disparagingly of our holy Faith, or who criticize its ministers and above all the Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Just as only a degenerate son would criticize his father's conduct, so only a degenerate Catholic would criticize the Pope, who is the father of all Christians throughout the world.

3. Go to confession often. Never let a month go by without making your confession and also receiving Communion, in accordance with your confessor's advice.

After Communion remain in church as long as you can to thank Our Lord and ask of Him the grace of not dying in mortal sin.

There is only one God; if He is against me, who will save me?

I have only one soul; if I lose it, what will become of me?

One single mortal sin makes me deserve hell; what would become of me if I should die in such a state?

To my words, dear sons, pay heed.
False is the world;
God is your one true friend in need!

But the boys were not the only ones to benefit from Don Bosco's priestly charity; many of their fathers also came to the Oratory to settle longstanding accounts with God. As Lent progressed, they noticed how catechism instructions had made their children more respectful and obedient. On questioning them they had come to know what Don Bosco was teaching them: obedience and love toward their parents, and the boys' duty to pray for them in gratitude for all they had done and were doing on their behalf. This discovery kindled feelings of goodwill and respect for the priest in the parents' hearts. On the evenings their sons went to confession, they saw them return so radiant with joy that their prejudices against confession vanished, and they began to realize that there was joy in a tranquil conscience. When their sons, following Don Bosco's promptings, asked their forgiveness for all the grief they might have caused them in the past, and promised to obey them in all things in the future, these parents were gripped by deep remorse, remembering how they themselves had often failed to give good example to their children. At Don Bosco's invitation many fathers accompanied their sons to the Oratory on the day of their First Holy Communion. Observing their devout behavior in church and their angelic faces after receiving Holy Communion, they were deeply moved. They envied the happiness of their sons, and their eyes filled with tears remembering the time when they too were innocent. That day they kept away from the tavern; they stayed at home to experience once again the joys of family life and to share the spiritual happiness of one they loved. Then they would begin to feel aversion for the kind of life that had brought unhappiness to their home. A salutary sorrow forced them to think, a struggle between good and evil arose in their hearts, and finally the grace of God triumphed in answer to their sons' prayers. Then they went to the Oratory chapel to wait for Don Bosco; others made their way to the sacristy after he had said Mass or knocked on the door of his room late in the evening for greater privacy. Don Bosco understood their need at a glance and received them cheerfully, encouraging them to confide all their troubles. He assured them that they were talking to a friend who would not be shocked by anything since he had already heard everything. He urged them to overcome their understandable reticence

and simply kneel down and make their confession. Afterward, full of joy, they returned home. From then on happiness reigned in their families; with their wives and children they would pray, attend church services, and go to confession and Communion. Often these fathers would also spend an evening in pleasant relaxation at the Oratory. The oratories had indeed bestowed great benefits on the people of Turin.

While Don Bosco's efforts were rewarded with abundant fruit, Easter Sunday brought new tribulations to the archbishop. As he emerged from the main portals of the cathedral and walked between two lines of carabinieri to his carriage where a whole cavalry squadron and a battalion of the National Guard were in attendance, he was greeted by a storm of catcalls, boos, and threats that drowned out the acclamations, applause, and other tokens of respect from the faithful.

Among his courageous supporters, according to Father Felix Reviglio, was a group of the older and more dependable boys from the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Several hours previously Don Bosco had sent them to applaud the archbishop since that was all they could do at that time.

Don Bosco had been apprised that the mob would attempt some outrage. It was all too true. The rioters surged toward the archbishop's carriage, pounded on the windows with their clenched fists, and tried to cut the reins of the horses, while the guards looked on passively. Fortunately, the archbishop was saved by his coachman's presence of mind. He simply lashed at the would-be assailants with his whip and boldly urged his horses forward.

Again pressure was exerted to force Archbishop Fransoni into further exile. The Senate was debating the question of ecclesiastical immunity. When a vote was taken on April 8, fifty-one were in favor of rescinding it, with only twenty-nine opposed. That same evening and for several succeeding evenings, a mob of political extremists, subsidized by the government, and groups of young hooligans paid and rehearsed by agitators roamed wildly through the streets hurling imprecations at the clergy and shouting "Long live Siccardi!" [5] They had made a similar demonstration against the

[5] As Minister of Justice, Siccardi had sponsored the bill abolishing all ecclesiastical privileges and the ecclesiastical court. [Editor]

bishop of Chambéry on his way to the Senate. The most violent demonstration was held outside the episcopal palace. Here the mob shouted, "Down with the archbishop! Down with the episcopal court! Down with the nuncio!" Hurling stones through the windows, they then attempted to force their way through the main entrance. Infantry and cavalry troops finally quelled the savage rioting.

On April 9 the king ratified the law which, among other odious articles, subjected bishops and priests to the civil courts. In protest the apostolic nuncio asked for an exit visa, took leave of the king, and left for Rome on April 12.

The real aim of the anticlericals was to destroy episcopal authority and foment rebellion among the clergy. They hoped that priests and rural pastors would throw off Church discipline and start forming a civil clergy salaried by and subject to the State. Instead the Church was to shine in new splendor; new examples of sacrifice, generosity, and steadfastness flourished among priests and laymen.

But there was some joyful news to temper the grief of Catholics: Pius IX had returned to Rome.[6] After the French recaptured the city from the revolutionaries and order was restored out of the chaos fomented by the rebels, the exiled Pope at last decided to return to his beloved people who were anxiously awaiting him. From Gaeta he first went to Portici and then to Naples, whence he set out for Rome on April 4. The triumphant journey lasted eight days. He set foot in the capital of Christendom on April 12 amid immense heartfelt rejoicing and enthusiastic acclaim such as no sovereign or pontiff had ever experienced before. Not only Rome but the whole world rejoiced. At the Oratory the boys shed tears of joy when Don Bosco announced this wonderful news to them.

Upon receiving from Rome a detailed account of Pius IX's triumphal journey, Don Bosco immediately arranged for its publication. *L'Armonia* meanwhile was printing the article that had appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano.* Moreover, at Archbishop Fransoni's order, thanksgiving services were held in all the churches of the archdiocese and also at the Oratory with sincere joy and deep gratitude.

Not all the favors granted by Divine Providence to save the Pope

[6] Pius IX had fled from Rome on the night of November 23, 1848. *See* Vol. III, pp. 324ff. [Editor]

for the Church were known at that time. During Pius IX's stay in Gaeta, a group of Mazzini-inspired anarchists and revolutionaries in Geneva had plotted the Pope's assassination by hired killers disguised as priests. The Paris police disclosed this plot to the Piedmontese government. An official attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a certain John Baptist Gal, received the dispatches and passed the information in strictest confidence to Father Joseph Cafasso.[7] Perhaps Don Bosco was also privy to this secret, for in 1890 Gal himself told us of the great trust he had had in Don Bosco ever since 1841.

Father Cafasso had immediately dispatched the information to Gaeta and the plot was thwarted.[8] Nothing ever came to light about this case until 1898 when John Baptist Gal died, but it is an authentic fact documented in the correspondence and diplomatic notes of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

For all these reasons Don Bosco wanted to give a solemn demonstration of his love for the Pope. A magnificent ode had been published in Rome hailing his return. Don Bosco liked it so much that, after explaining its meaning to his boys, he had them declaim it on several occasions.[9]

[7] At this time Father Cafasso was rector of the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin. For further information *see* indexes of Vols. II and III. [Editor]

[8] *See Corriere Nazionale,* issues of May 18 and 19, 1898.

[9] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 7

The Imprisonment of Archbishop Fransoni

NEW sorrows were in store for the archbishop of Turin. On April 15 this intrepid successor of St. Maximus,[1] prudently and courageously carrying out his apostolic ministry, wrote a secret pastoral letter to the pastors of his diocese. Without mentioning those who had voted for the Siccardi bill, he asked that the contents of the letter be brought to the attention of all the priests of their parishes. The letter set forth rules regarding how priests should act under the new law (which could not release them from their obligations) and how they could go about their duties with a clear conscience. At the same time, he ordered them not to appear before any civil court, should they be summoned, without his permission.

The police, suspecting that he would make just such a move, had instructed the mayors of the towns to be on the lookout. They soon learned about Archbishop Fransoni's letter. On April 21, the police raided the Botta printshop [in Turin], seized all available copies, and then confiscated all the copies still in the post offices. They even conducted a meticulous search of the archbishop's residence. Shortly afterward Archbishop Fransoni was summoned into court. He refused to appear, stating that he would do so only with the Pope's permission. The judge did not find this acceptable and sentenced him *in absentia* to a fine of five hundred lire and thirty days in jail. On the feast day of the Holy Shroud, May 4 [1850], at 1 P.M., the archbishop was taken to the Citadel [2] to serve his prison term. This

[1] Maximus was the first known bishop of Turin, then a suffragan see of Milan. He attended a synod in Milan in 451 and a council at Rome in 465. Many of his sermons, homilies, and treatises survive. Turin honors him as its patron saint. His feast is celebrated on June 25. [Editor]

[2] The Citadel, built by Duke Emmanuel Philibert between 1565 and 1568 according to the plans of the renowned military engineer Francesco Paciotto of

caused deep sorrow among the faithful. Many wept bitterly, and among these were Don Bosco's boys, who looked lovingly upon the archbishop as their benefactor and father. Major [Cajetan] Viallardi could not restrain his tears when he received the prelate as a prisoner of the Citadel, and the commandant, General Imperor, gave up his own quarters to him. That same evening, by courtesy of the commandant, Archbishop Fransoni was allowed to receive a delegation of the cathedral chapter expressing its solidarity with him. In the ensuing days many members of the Turin nobility and clergy were also allowed to visit him.

Not only was Don Bosco among the first visitors, but he also arranged for several of his boys to call on the imprisoned archbishop. Among these were Felix Reviglio and a companion. When they returned to the Oratory, they described how, after being led through two or three courtyards enclosed by high walls which were policed by sentries and carabinieri, they were finally ushered into the archbishop's presence. He graciously accepted their greetings in Don Bosco's name, and then presented each of the boys with a rosary.

A few days later, five more young men from the Oratory visited him, but [Bartholomew] Bellisio [3] and three others were detained in the last courtyard, and only one, [Victor] Ritner, a goldsmith, was allowed to see the archbishop. When he came out, deeply moved, he distributed blue-beaded rosaries to his companions as gifts from the archbishop. [Bartholomew] Bellisio, who had come to the Oratory that same year, guarded this as a most precious possession. He was still using it in 1902.

Meanwhile the vicar general had prescribed public prayers in all the churches of the archdiocese, and demonstrations of affection and esteem for the archbishop continued.

On May 27, 1850, *L'Armonia* began a drive to donate a crozier to Archbishop Fransoni. Eminent members of the clergy and laity

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Urbino, became the first true fortress of Europe. It successfully withstood the sieges of 1640 and 1706 by the French. It was also used as a maximum security prison. At present it houses the national museum of artillery. [Editor]

[3] A young artist very much attached to the Oratory, which he began frequenting from its very beginning. In 1855 he painted a portrait of Mamma Margaret and made a gift of it to Don Bosco on his name day. He also photographed Don Bosco in the act of hearing confessions. [Editor]

enthusiastically welcomed this initiative to the great annoyance of the anticlericals. When *L'Armonia* from time to time published the names of donors, the liberal papers reprinted them in handbills and had street urchins give them out shouting, "Extra! Extra! Read the list of the idiots!" *La Gazzetta del Popolo* also launched a vulgar attack on the promoters of the drive, among whom was Canon [Lawrence] Gastaldi, but it backfired. More than eight thousand lire poured in within a very short time. Not only was the crozier purchased, but it was a very artistic one. Don Bosco's name appeared in the first list of subscribers on June 10 with a donation of five lire.

On Sunday, June 2, after serving his thirty days, Archbishop Fransoni was released in the early morning hours. He remarked, "Next time it will be the fortress of Fenestrelle!" After remaining a few days in Turin, he retired to Pianezza to recover from the upsetting events of the last month.

Don Bosco visited him there to ascertain what he thought of his method of running the Oratory, and in particular if it could serve as a basis for drafting the rules of a religious congregation. He also hoped to receive encouragement and support. Archbishop Fransoni approved Don Bosco's ideas, but then added: "I would like to give you my support, but as you see, I myself am uncertain about the future. Do whatever you can; persevere bravely in what you have begun. I give you all faculties, my blessing, and whatever else I have. There is only one thing I can't do, however, and that is free you from the trials which may come your way."

During the archbishop's imprisonment two events had taken place that had greatly comforted Don Bosco and were to be of incalculable advantage to souls.

At the beginning of the year, several of the more zealous priests who attended the weekly spiritual conferences at the Cottolengo Hospital had formed a society, naming it after St. Vincent de Paul. Its members were men of great learning and piety: Canon Vogliotti, Father [John] Borel, Father Louis Anglesio, rector of the Cottolengo Hospital, Father Joseph Cafasso, Father [John] Vola, Father Maria Anthony Durando, superior of the Vincentians, Canon Eugene Galletti, Father Francis Barone, professor of church history, Canon [John Baptist] Bottino, Father [Vincent] Ponzati, Father Destefanis, Father [John] Cocchis and our own Don Bosco. Father

Robert Murialdo served as secretary; the meetings were held in the archdiocesan seminary. These zealous priests discussed ways and means to more effectively perform their duties and sought to promote vigorous religious activity among the laity. They devoted special attention to the teaching of catechism in the parish churches (a practice which at that time was somewhat neglected), especially in the outskirts of Turin at Borgo San Salvario and Borgo San Donato. They also provided priests for missions and sent catechists to the oratories, which they recognized as the great need of the times. They planted the first seeds of various associations that later were to mature, combat blasphemy and the desecration of Sundays, and promote good literature to counter the Waldensian propaganda. They also started catechism classes in the city prisons and at La Generala, a boys' reformatory.

Don Bosco attended these meetings as regularly as he could. As our narrative unfolds we shall see how he was among the most zealous promoters of all the good works that were proposed and set in motion.

At the same time Catholic laymen were organizing into societies which were to support and complement clerical action. One of these was the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in Turin on May 13, 1850, and modeled on those already organized by [Antoine Frédéric] Ozanam in France in 1833. Count Rocco Bianchi, president of the first Vincentian society established in Genoa in 1846, came to Turin on this occasion. He had been very active in promoting the Turin branch. He must also be given credit for the establishment of other St. Vincent de Paul societies in many parts of Italy at Don Bosco's advice and urging.

The inauguration ceremony took place in the sacristy of Holy Martyrs Church, where the seven founding members assembled. They were Father [John] Baptist Bruno, pastor of Holy Martyrs Church, Father Andrew Barrera of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Marquis Dominic del Carretto of Balestrino, Francis Louis Rossi, a lawyer, Chevalier Louis Ripa of Meana, a retired colonel, Guido Goano, an engineer, and Count Rocco Bianchi. Don Bosco, who had been invited, was seated in the place of honor. The meeting opened with a prayer and was placed under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin and the holy martyrs Solutor, Adventor and

Octavius.[4] [Francis] Rossi was elected chairman. Archbishop Louis Fransoni, Silvio Pellico [5] and Don Bosco were the first honorary members. Don Bosco attended the first meetings and always remained an honorary member, friend, and supporter of this society. It developed slowly but steadily. Its members visited the wretched, often appalling, hovels of the poor like angels bearing material help and peace. They also looked after the spiritual welfare of the poor, giving them religious instruction and helping correct bad marriages. The members launched their program of charitable works after their third meeting on May 26, 1850, with a capital of only twenty-four lire and fifteen centesimi. Their first benefactresses were the devout and charitable queens Maria Teresa and Maria Adelaide, and Marchioness Barolo.[6]

On September 1, 1850, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Holy Martyrs Church was affiliated with the Society's General Council in Paris. By 1853, there were sixty-three active members and thirty-one honorary members in Turin; consequently, it became necessary to split the group and form four different chapters. Count Charles Cays,[7] a very active member, was elected the first chairman of the local chapter on September 15. In 1856, since there were already eleven such chapters in Turin and nineteen outside the city, the General Council in Paris instituted a Superior Council for the

[4] Soldiers of the Theban legion. Under Emperor Maximian they suffered martyrdom in Turin. [Editor]

[5] Silvio Pellico (1789-1854): Born in Piedmont; spent most of his young manhood in Milan where, in 1820, he joined the carbonari, a secret society formed in the early 19th century to promote the independence of Italy. 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. He died in 1854. [Editor]

[6] Marchioness Juliette Colbert Barolo (1785-1864): Born in Vendée, France, she 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]

[7] Count Cays made his religious profession in the Salesian Congregation on December 8, 1877, and was ordained a priest on September 20, 1878. He died at the Oratory on October 4, 1882. [Editor]

whole of Piedmont. Count Cays became its first president and remained in office until 1868.

Don Bosco had played a very active part in the foundation of the first Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Turin; he had also helped to establish others, and he supported them in many ways, especially when they encountered strong opposition. He was on very friendly terms with the members of this charitable association, and he placed under their guidance youths who had just been released from prison and whom he had set on the right path. Some members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul also joined a legally constituted society for the supervision and education of youths released from reformatories.

Don Bosco always recommended that the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society deal in a fatherly manner with the children of destitute families. The members, in turn, actively supported the foundation of other oratories and promoted catechism courses and the general education of the young to the great advantage of both Church and country. In their fifty years of social and religious work, about one hundred thousand boys benefited from their paternal guidance and protection.

Don Bosco continued to attend the annual general assembly of the society for many years. It was always held with great solemnity in December, either in Holy Martyrs Church or in the so-called "Church of the Merchants." [8] On those occasions he always spoke to the assembly. Thoroughly acquainted with the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, he cited examples and teachings of the saint. At times he spoke about the obligation to give alms, the proper manner of doing so, and the reward promised by Our Lord. On other occasions he would dwell on the inefficacy of faith if not joined to good works, stressing that we should do good while we can. Some of his exhortations dealt with the necessity of becoming genuine Christians so that one's words and actions would always be in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel. He also spoke on the importance of being affable and kind when giving spiritual advice. Other exhortations concerned the poor they visited and the assistance ren-

[8] Located in the same block of Holy Martyrs Church its official name was "Oratory of the Merchants' Guild." Its spiritual activities included the performance of works of charity and attendance at church services. [Editor]

dered to them. He recommended that the members instill in the minds of the poor the thought that Divine Providence, when invoked, will respond at times in a miraculous way; he suggested that they remind the poor of the infallible promise of the Lord, that he who suffers patiently with Jesus Christ shall also share His glory with Him forever. His words had a marvelous effect on his listeners, whether laymen or ecclesiastics; all looked upon him as a true man of God, and many of them vied with one another to assist him in his undertakings.

But a day came when his voice was no longer heard in these assemblies. During the last few years of his life Don Bosco retired from this work and was seen there no more. He had accomplished his mission. The various chapters of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were doing very well and he was not needed anymore. In 1900, for example, there were seventeen chapters in Turin and thirty-one in the rest of Piedmont. In half a century of activity they had visited more than forty thousand families and distributed a million and a half lire in alms. One day Father [John Baptist] Francesia [9] asked Don Bosco why he no longer attended the general assembly, where he had so many friends. He replied, "I am no longer needed there. If I were to go, it would only be to show my face." He definitely shunned applause.

His friends and benefactors, however, never forgot him. On May 6, 1900, four hundred members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, mostly city workers and farmers, gathered at Don Bosco's tomb in the Salesian school at Valsalice [10] to commemorate the golden jubilee of their society in Turin and in Piedmont. Augustine Cardinal Richelmy celebrated Mass and distributed Holy Communion. After the assembly the members sat down to a festive banquet at which toasts were raised to the memory of Don Bosco. He must have rejoiced in heaven at being honored by an organization that was a triumph of Christian charity.

[9] An outstanding Salesian of the early years. He died a nonagenarian in 1930. [Editor]

[10] Just across the Po river on a picturesque hill overlooking Turin. [Editor]

CHAPTER 8

Don Bosco's Mutual Aid Society

THE feasts of St. Aloysius and St. John the Baptist were kept at the Oratory with great solemnity. On the latter occasion [1] the playground echoed with songs to Don Bosco which we were privileged to hear even many years later. Amateurish as the verses were, we loved them as though they were composed by gifted poets. Lest they sink into oblivion, we reproduce them here to recall the quality and warmth of the feelings our former companions had for their beloved teacher.[2]

Don Bosco responded to his boys' gratitude with a fresh proof of his own love. To gauge its importance properly, we must go back several years.

In 1847, Turin still had some remnants of the ancient universities or guilds of arts, trades, and commerce, each with its confraternities and a priest moderator. The confraternities spiritually assisted their members by helping them fulfill their religious duties. In temporal matters they provided adequate apprentice-training, ran employment offices and savings banks, provided help for the sick, aged, widows, and orphans, loaned money to young married men, warned the public against swindling artisans and merchants, and supplied necessary funds for the sacred services in their magnificent chapels.

But the gales of liberalism had penetrated most of these associations early in their history, destroying their religious character and cutting them off from the jurisdiction of the Church. In many instances, members of the same confraternity were apparently split into two categories: the liberal-minded handled the funds and ad-

[1] Don Bosco's name day was kept on the feast of St. John the Baptist. *See* Vol. II, p. 381. [Editor]

[2] In this edition we have placed these verses in Appendix 1. [Editor]

ministered the welfare programs, while only the spiritual-minded still wore the confraternity garb and attended the religious ceremonies.

While these confraternities were deteriorating, other associations were springing up. Inspired by masonic principles and under cover of philanthropy, they actually sought to pervert their members' minds in both political and religious matters.

Ridiculous tales were told against the Catholic Church. Scurrilous stories about bishops, priests, and monks were made up and spread far and wide; indeed, no effort was spared to make priests and religious as unpopular as possible. The smears were so successful and they misled and duped so many people that very shortly no ecclesiastic was any longer safe in the streets of Turin.

One of these associations called itself the "Workers' Society." Several members, on registering, realized that they had stepped into a trap and managed to free themselves in time, but many were ensnared and soon lost their Faith. Regrettably, social-minded Catholics had not yet directed their efforts to win over the workers by protecting their interests, for up to now the guilds had looked after them.

After organizing a new confraternity within the St. Aloysius Sodality, Don Bosco realized that this would not suffice to keep his young apprentices together. Some material attraction was needed. Lest his young workers join some liberal, irreligious society, he resolved to found one that would promote both their material and spiritual welfare. To this end, he decided to make it mandatory for prospective applicants to be members of the St. Aloysius Sodality, which encouraged the reception of the sacraments every two weeks. He began to discuss his idea with the older boys, explaining the purpose, advantages, and conditions of the society he planned to form. With their unanimous approval he proposed that they choose a committee to launch this project. They agreed.

The society, formally known as the "Mutual Aid Society," was officially established at a ceremony held in the Oratory chapel on July 1, 1850. From the start, it was a success, the first seed of countless other societies or unions of Catholic workers that later appeared in Italy. We think it worthwhile to reproduce here its regulations both by way of acknowledgment and to offer a model to anyone

wishing to do something similar, with, of course, the modifications and additions required by the times.[3]

Organized along these lines, the society splendidly served its purpose, but it aroused the anger of those who were striving to poison the minds of the workers and use them for their own ends.

One such instance is described by Joseph Brosio to Father John Bonetti: [4]

Opposite the main entrance of our little church in Valdocco, separated from our playground by a wall, stood a tavern known as "La Giardiniera." It was a hangout for thieves and vagabonds. Here wastrels, drunkards, gamblers, wandering musicians, bear tamers and rogues of all kinds rubbed shoulders with members of the liberal workers' associations which had just been founded and whose headquarters were in a basement in Vicolo Santa Maria. The secret leaders of these associations were a few Waldensians and certain individuals of highly reprehensible conduct. Although in previous years the drinking bouts at La Giardiniera had given us plenty of trouble, they had never been deliberately engaged in for that purpose. This year, instead, the wild uproar breaking out during church services made it clear that they were meant to annoy Don Bosco. Agitators paid the rabble to make the Oratory aware of their hostility.

Don Bosco realized that he had to drive that devil's outpost from Valdocco, a task that would be as difficult as it would be expensive and risky. It would have been foolhardy to antagonize a rabble ready for violence if he tried to evict them from the house they considered their own domain. More than once Don Bosco was given violent evidence of this fact. On one occasion he was called to the sacristy where several men were waiting for him. He went at once, thinking they had come for confession, but as soon as he entered, the door was slammed shut. Several of the older boys, among them [Joseph] Buzzetti and [Hyacinth] Arnaud, became suspicious and went into the sanctuary, where they could listen and peek into the sacristy through a keyhole. The men were talking loudly and heatedly; it sounded as though they had come to pick a quarrel with Don Bosco. However, his answers apparently threw them off balance and made them resort to abusive language. Don Bosco tried to calm them, but that caused them to become even more excited. Suddenly they

[3] In this edition we have placed these regulations in Appendix 2. [Editor]

[4] Having come to the Oratory as a student in 1855, he became a valuable assistant to Don Bosco and a member of the Superior Council of the Salesian Society. He wrote a history of the first twenty-five years of the Oratory, which has been a primary source for these Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco. [Editor]

whipped out knives. At that point, the eavesdroppers raised a rumpus and broke down the door, putting the ruffians to flight.

In the meantime, for unknown reasons some of the older boys who were members of our Mutual Aid Society had stopped frequenting the Oratory. Then one day, two well-dressed men stopped me on the street. They spoke French, which I knew quite well. After a cordial conversation, they offered me a large sum of money, about six hundred lire and a high paying job, if I would quit the Oratory and take my friends along with me, for they had been told that I had a great influence over them. I became very indignant at their offer and curtly replied, "Don Bosco is like a father to me, and I wouldn't quit or betray him for all the gold in the world!" These men, who, as I later discovered, were secret ringleaders of the workers' society, did not take offense. They asked me to think it over; several other times they renewed their offer which I always turned down. I understood then how bribe money had lured several of my wretched companions away from the Oratory.

I reported this to Don Bosco and we both decided that it would be the wiser course to keep it a secret, so as not to arouse the greed of some who might not be strong enough to resist. At the same time we prayed, doubled our vigilance, and increased the attractions of the Oratory.

Despite these obstacles, Don Bosco's Mutual Aid Society continued to grow for years. Some of Turin's best artists, practicing Catholics, were admitted by special dispensation so that their example might inspire the younger members. John Villa,[5] invited by his friend [John] Gravano, joined in 1856. In 1857, the Mutual Aid Society, while retaining its headquarters at the Oratory, was affiliated with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for several years.

Two other very serious reasons induced Don Bosco to promote this type of society for the workers. First of all, he was one of the few who had understood immediately—and he said so a thousand times—that the revolutionary movement was not just a passing storm. Not all its promises to the people were unjust; many of them filled real needs. The workers demanded equality of rights without class distinction, more justice, and improvement of living conditions.

Secondly, Don Bosco saw how wealth was becoming the monopoly of ruthless capitalists. Employers imposed unjust labor contracts

[5] A pupil of Don Bosco who began frequenting the Oratory in 1855. [Editor]

on individual, defenseless workers, and crudely violated provisions for the Sunday rest. These abuses were bound to produce disastrous results; workers lived in misery, lost their faith, and fell prey to subversive principles.

Hence Don Bosco deemed it necessary for the clergy to draw closer to the working class to guide it. He could not give his own Mutual Aid Society the expansion demanded by the needs of the times, although he planned to build many hospices for young workers. He could see that in the long run it would become impossible for him to manage a mutual aid society, keep track of its deposits, administer its funds, and distribute sick-benefit payments. He kept up this project and even made some headway, but eventually he had to call a halt, particularly since he not only lacked the support of those who might have helped, but even became a target for their criticism. Nevertheless, Don Bosco must be given credit for having blazed a new trail and set a pattern for similar associations of Catholic workers which aimed at bettering their working conditions, granting their just demands, and shielding them from the tyranny of revolutionaries. The first Union of Catholic Workers in Italy was founded in Turin in 1871, thanks to the efforts of a handful of idealistic young workers. Unfortunately, however, the secret societies had already made headway among workers and established mutual aid societies which they exploited for their own ends. Still, better late than never! These Christian associations multiplied throughout Piedmont and other parts of Italy. They had priest moderators and furthered the Catholic cause to Don Bosco's great satisfaction. Many of them chose him to be their honorary president. The spirit of the Lord was making itself felt throughout the world by setting up new institutions to meet new needs. In Germany Father [Adolph] Kolping founded the Catholic Young Workmen's Society, which now has houses and thousands of members in many cities. France also provided a noble example. Rich industrialists were generous in accepting the new concepts of dealing with their employees to assure them a just wage for their work and free them from worry for their present and future welfare. Outstanding among them was Léon Harmel, known as the "workers' father," who was an intimate friend of Don Bosco and shared his feelings on the social problems of the day.

CHAPTER 9

A Gift from the Pope

RESPECT and love for the priesthood characterized the conduct at the Oratory, in contrast to the ever increasing hostility to the Church clearly evident elsewhere. Pope Benedict XIV had granted several church lands to Piedmont as perpetual vicariates for a simple fee of two thousand scudi [1] to be paid to Rome each June 28th. This pact had been formally approved on January 5, 1740, and had been observed since that time without incident. In 1850, however, the Piedmontese government refused to honor this commitment, claiming that the State had exclusive legal rights over those lands.

Despite the injustice of the claim, Pius IX did not lessen his love for the faithful of Piedmont. That same year he gave Don Bosco's boys another reason for rejoicing. It will be recalled that they had sent him a small offering of thirty-three lire when he was in exile and that he had set it aside for a particular purpose.[2] During his stay in Gaeta, Pius IX had mentioned this offering several times, and he would show it proudly to visitors who came to pay their respects. One day he sent for James Cardinal Antonelli, and, adding to the sum, he instructed him to purchase a good supply of rosaries. Sixty dozen were immediately acquired and brought to him. He blessed them and then personally handed the two large packages to Cardinal Antonelli with the words, "Please have them sent to Don Bosco's boys as a token of my fatherly love." The cardinal forwarded the parcels to the apostolic nuncio in Turin with this letter:

[1] The scudo was a silver coin used in Italy until the 19th century, approximately equivalent to a United States dollar. [Editor]

[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 358ff, 367. [Editor]

Portici, April 2, 1850

Your Excellency:

As a follow-up of my letter to you of May 14 of last year, I am sending you, through the papal consul general in Genoa, two parcels of rosaries blessed by His Holiness for Don Bosco's young apprentices.

I would have attended to this wish of the Holy Father sooner, but other pressing matters prevented me from doing so.

Please see that the gift is duly appreciated inasmuch as it comes from the Holy Father himself. Please accept my highest regards.

Yours devotedly,

James Cardinal Antonelli

Considering the Pope's eminent position of reverence and the countless weighty problems he had to cope with in those days, one can appreciate the significance of this gesture toward lowly youngsters. Their hearts swelled with joy when Don Bosco announced that the kindly Pope, before leaving exile, not only had remembered their little gift but was sending each a present in turn. They could hardly wait for its arrival.

After much thought, on returning from his spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine (where the pastor of St. Dalmatius' Church in Turin had preached the instructions and the vicar general of Fossano the meditations), Don Bosco decided that the presentation of the rosaries to the boys should be made in as solemn a manner as possible so that their minds would be indelibly impressed. The event was recorded in a booklet later published by Don Bosco.[3]

On the evening of Sunday, July 21, all the boys of the three oratories gathered at their headquarters in Valdocco. The chapel, adorned as on feast days, was quickly filled to capacity and many boys had to be content with following the ceremonies from outside. Joseph Brosio, the bersagliere,[4] and his lieutenants kept order. Father [Andrew] Barrera, of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, delivered a sermon befitting the occasion. His lucid, dignified style and

[3] *Breve ragguaglio della festa fattasi nel distribuire il regalo di Pio IX ai giovani degli Oratorii di Torino* [Brief Account of the Solemn Distribution of the Gift Sent by Pope Pius IX to the Boys of the Oratories of Turin], Torino, 1850, Tipografia Eredi Botta.

[4] As a soldier he had served in this special corps of the Piedmontese army. [Editor]

the warmth with which he spoke of Pius IX held the boys' attention and stirred them to the depths of their being. Among other things, he said: "Do you know, dear boys, why Pius IX sent you this gift? I will tell you. Pius IX is deeply interested in young people. Before becoming Pope, he was busily engaged in teaching, educating, and encouraging young people to lead virtuous, upright lives. He has given each of you a rosary because, even before becoming a priest, he was already deeply devoted to the Blessed Virgin. Several times I myself have seen his extraordinary devotion to the great Mother of God both in public and private."

After the sermon and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the boys filed singly to the altar and received a rosary from Canon Joseph Ortalda, assisted by Father Simonino and Father Barrera. The rosaries had red beads strung on steel wire. Even some priests and other staff members of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales lined up with the boys; Michael Rua [5] and Ascanio Savio [6] were among the latter. It was edifying to see the respect with which they all approached the altar and prided themselves on possessing a gift from the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Since there were more boys than rosaries, several hundred more were bought and distributed with those donated by the Pope so that no one would be disappointed.

After services, all gathered in front of the chapel, and one of the boys gave the following address on behalf of all his companions.

Reverend Fathers and Distinguished Guests:

Were a prince, a king, or an emperor to show a sign of benevolence by presenting a gift to one of his subjects, the subject would consider himself very fortunate indeed.

What can we say when the successor of the Prince of the Apostles, the head of the Catholic Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding his many responsibilities in governing the entire Catholic world, turns his thoughts to us poor young apprentices? His graciousness is so boundless that it overwhelms us. We can speak only in words of gratitude.

If in our nothingness we could convey our sentiments to so kind a father, we would gather enough courage to give vent to the feelings of

[5] Don Bosco's future vicar and successor. [Editor]
[6] Don Bosco's first seminarian. [Editor]

our heart and say to him: "Holy Father, we realize the importance and value of your gift, as well as the obligation of gratitude it imposes on us." But how could we ever meet this obligation? With money? Certainly not, nor would you desire it. Perhaps with an eloquent speech? It would be beyond our capacity. But we know, Holy Father, what you really want from us. Your fatherly love made you remember us. As affectionate sons, we shall reciprocate with all our love for you and for God, whose representative you are here on earth. Never shall our lips utter a word displeasing to you, nor shall our hearts ever harbor a thought unworthy of the goodness of such a loving father.

Your desire that we should keep to the path of virtue inspired you to remember us. Firmly attached to that divine Faith of which you are the supreme leader, we assure you that we shall ever uphold it, ready to forfeit everything, even our lives, rather than cut ourselves off from it for a single instant.

In your great wisdom you will also understand what we are unable to express, but now we wish to declare unanimously that we recognize you as the successor of the Prince of the Apostles, the head of the one true Church, from which those who break away shall be eternally lost. We beg Your Holiness to grant us a further favor by imparting your apostolic benediction upon us, your humble sons.

Mindful of this red-letter day, we shall ever treasure this beloved gift of yours. With our dying breath we shall find joy in saying: "The Vicar of Jesus Christ, the great Piux IX, in a gesture of boundless kindness gave me this rosary. I shall kiss its crucifix devotedly for the last time, and then I shall expire in peace.

Reverend Fathers and distinguished guests, we shall be always grateful to you before God and men, if you will see to it that these sentiments of ours are communicated to the Holy Father. Our most cordial and undying thanks to you.

Then several boys presented a bouquet of flowers, and others sang a hymn written especially for the occasion.[7] Prolonged cries of "Long live Pius IX! Long live the Vicar of Jesus Christ!" greeted the song's end. The applause ceased only when a blast from the bersagliere's bugle signaled a military drill. To add variety to the festive occasion, a mock battle was staged that simulated an attack upon a fortress surrounded by small mounds representing ramparts and defenses. The guests were delighted with the display of energy,

[7] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

resourcefulness, and prompt obedience to the commanders' orders shown by both defenders and besiegers. A four-star general who was present exclaimed, "Don Bosco's boys would make able defenders of their fatherland!"

This celebration did not go unnoticed in Turin. People spoke of it everywhere, highly praising the kindness of Pius IX. It also increased public esteem for the oratories which the Pope had singled out for his benevolence. The newspapers also commented on the occasion. On July 26, 1850, *L'Armonia* published a fine article which merits inclusion for the sake of history.

A new act of generosity has confirmed to the world the well-known and widely acclaimed goodness of heart which characterizes the Vicar of Jesus Christ. We refer to the gift he sent the youngsters cared for by Don Bosco's three oratories in our city. We trust that our readers will enjoy an account of this event.

Everyone is already aware of a few zealous priests in our midst who are emulating the example of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Jerome Emiliani.[8] Their efforts keep off the streets boys who, left to their own devices, would otherwise spend their Sundays in idleness or perhaps in evil pursuits. These priests gather them together in a safe place to teach them catechism, instruct them in the essential duties of a citizen, and give them the benefits of wholesome recreation. This charitable undertaking, which began on a truly modest basis, has been blessed by God and has flourished. It is not yet ten years old, and already over a thousand boys have benefited from it. Since one place was no longer large enough to accommodate all, two more have been opened in suitable locations of this city. Unanimously the Senate sent to Parliament a petition requesting official support for an institute that serves Church and country so well. The city authorities have established a special committee to study the good being done and give it assistance.

Lastly, Pius IX, our Supreme Pontiff, who from his exalted office notices the smaller works of Christian charity no less than the greater ones, was pleased to bestow his blessing upon this institute and to promote its progress in the following manner.

When he was in exile at Gaeta the faithful followed the example of the early Christians toward the Prince of the Apostles. They vied with one another not only in offering prayers to God to alleviate the Pope's

[8] The founder of the Clerks Regular of Somaschi and patron saint of orphans. [Editor]

sufferings, mitigate the anguish of his exile, and swiftly restore him to his see, but also in contributing funds, according to their means, in order to provide him with whatever was necessary to lessen his hardships. The boys of the three Turin oratories were second to none in this respect. They presented their offering to Don Bosco (the zealous priest in charge of these oratories) and asked him to forward it to the Pope through His Excellency, the papal nuncio.

In their modest but generous offering, Pius IX saw the widow's mite of the Gospel and declared that such a gift was too precious to be used in the same manner as the others; he marked the package and put it aside as a precious memento. When he came across it in less sorrowful times, he ordered the purchase of a sufficient quantity of rosaries. After blessing them personally, he sent them to Don Bosco to be given to the boys of his three oratories.

The presentation took place last Sunday, July 21, at the main oratory situated in the Valdocco district.

When all the boys were together in the chapel, Father [Andrew] Barrera spoke to them about the precious gift they were about to receive in his customarily fluent and lucid manner which moves the heart and enlightens the mind. He began by recalling the biblical story of young Daniel and his companions who, despite all subtle temptations besetting them in the court of Babylon, remained steadfast in the faith and law of their fathers and received from God an earthly reward as a token of their eternal one. "You have done the same," Father Barrera told them, "by your steadfast fidelity to Our Lord and His Vicar through thick and thin, rejecting the words of both the tempters and the traitors who sought to undermine your loyalty to God and Church. You have therefore merited this precious reward sent to you by our Redeemer through the hands of His Vicar." Elaborating on the significance of this gift, Father Barrera briefly touched on the ancient Roman usage of crowning with oak leaves those who had distinguished themselves by some heroic action in behalf of their fellow citizens, and he explained that, by this gift of a rosary, Pius IX intended to crown the fortitude they had displayed. He exhorted them to treasure the gift and to draw inspiration from it in the face of every struggle for God's cause. The tiny cross attached to it was to remind them that only by suffering with Christ would they find the road to the glory that He has promised.

A brief article such as this cannot do justice to the numerous topics he expounded on, and especially his favorite theme of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In exhorting them to ever greater love for Her, he re-

minded them of the example given by their beloved Pope who from his earliest years had nourished a most tender devotion to the Mother of God.

It was a moving sight to watch so many youngsters listen with rapt attention to this eloquent speaker. He stirred their pure hearts, especially when, pointing out to them how they should repay this special trait of benevolence of the Holy Father, he said, "Love is repaid by love. Think of the love Pius IX has shown you. He has singled you out among so many of his children scattered throughout the world. In the midst of so many pressing duties which constantly burden him, he has thought of you through this gracious gesture. Love him, therefore; love him with all your hearts! If you are with him, you are with Christ Himself. Therefore, vow fidelity and love to him, unto death!"

Although the boys listened to these words in impressive silence, their facial expressions and their eyes glistening with tears spoke eloquently and attested to their great love for the Pope. At the end of the sermon grateful prayers were offered aloud by all to the Blessed Sacrament for the Holy Father, as well as for the king and the royal family and their subjects. After Benediction, the boys walked to the altar to receive their rosaries. It was a stirring sight to see them kiss their gift repeatedly and press it to their hearts as they walked away.

When they came out of church, the Oratory guard of honor, which had maintained order during the ceremony, performed some military drills. There followed a hymn of thanksgiving to the Pope sung by the boys and then the air was filled with joyous shouts acclaiming the revered Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Thus closed a joyous family celebration inspired by the gracious gesture of the Father of all the faithful. The many guests who were present at the ceremony, both priests and laity, rejoiced at seeing the profound faith of those youngsters—a faith that augured well for the Church. We who were present seemed to see fulfilled the words of the Psalmist, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have fashioned praise because of your foes, to silence the hostile and the vengeful." [Ps. 8, 2]

Thus read the article in *L'Armonia*. Shortly afterward Don Bosco, through [James] Cardinal Antonelli, sent the boys' thanks and his own to the Holy Father with an account of the solemn distribution of the rosaries. The cardinal obliged and was in turn asked by the Pope to convey to Don Bosco his deep satisfaction. This he did in the following letter:

Rome, September 13, 1850

Very Rev. Father:

I told the Holy Father about your letter of August 28 last, in which you expressed your gratitude and that of your pupils for the Holy Father's gift of rosaries that he himself blessed. His Holiness was very gratified and expresses the wish that the young people under your care advance in the path of virtue.

He graciously has granted the petition you presented to him and action is now being taken.[9]

I received copies of the booklet commemorating the Holy Father's gift and I thank you. Let us hope that the Lord, in response to the prayers offered up continually in the oratories under your direction, will deign to grant happier days to the Church.

I assure you of my profound esteem and remain,

Affectionately yours,

James Cardinal Antonelli

These words clearly reveal the Pope's warm love for Don Bosco and his boys.

And so, even at that time the Church expressed her appreciation for an undertaking that promised to be eminently beneficial to both Church and civil society.

[9] This petition is particularly important because Don Bosco for the first time mentions the Salesian Congregation. *See* Appendix 3. [Editor]

CHAPTER 10

Anticlerical Demonstrations

ONE day the superior of the Servites and Father Charles Baima [one of his confreres] paid a visit to Archbishop Fransoni. "The hydra has been unleashed. Terrible events are in the offing," the prelate warned them. "Both the plan and the means are ready." Then, alluding to the expulsion of the Jesuits,[1] he continued: "Jesus (the Jesuits) was driven out first; soon it will be the turn of Mary (the Servites), then of all the other saints (religious orders). As for myself, I shall have to go into exile. You will see!"

His gloomy forebodings were indeed realized, adding to the sorrow that Don Bosco and his boys already felt because of earlier events.

Peter De Rossi of Santarosa, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, had been among those who had voted for the passage of the Siccardi Law and had thus incurred excommunication. He was a member of St. Charles' parish entrusted to the Servites. Father Buonfiglio Pittavino was the pastor, and he also held the office of local superior and provincial. He combined deep goodness with unswerving fidelity to his sacred duties. De Rossi fell seriously ill at the end of July and asked for the sacraments. He made his confession, but before giving him Holy Viaticum the pastor asked him to abjure the harm he had done to the Church. De Rossi at first refused, only yielding at the end when it was too late. He died on August 5 [1850] without Viaticum.

Relatives, friends, cabinet ministers, senators and representatives (among them Count Camillo Cavour), journalists, and even newsboys raised a howl of criticism against the alleged intolerance of

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 208f. [Editor]

the pastor and the archbishop, accusing them of having done violence to the conscience of the deceased. A mob of idlers and hired agitators (nearly all of them exiles from other Italian states) wildly demonstrated in the city squares and then marched on the Servite monastery, shouting threats to the pastor and coming very close to lynching him. Even at the funeral procession they kept up a steady chorus of threats, drowning the strains of the *Miserere* with their shouts and catcalls.

Two days later, on August 7, the government seized the monastery. Father Pittavino and all his religious were bundled into coaches and taken away under carabinieri escort, some to Alessandria,[2] others to Saluzzo.[3]

After the Servites it was Archbishop Fransoni's turn. On the day of De Rossi's death, Count Ponza of San Martino, together with Alfonso La Marmora, Minister of War, called on the archbishop at Pianezza [4] and in the name of the government demanded his resignation. The archbishop flatly refused, saying, "I would consider myself a coward if I were to relinquish my diocese in such a crisis." On the following day, August 7, the carabinieri again showed up and took him as a prisoner to the Fenestrelle fortress,[5] high in the Alpine region, where the winters are long and severe, accompanied by icy winds, snow, and fog. He was received courteously by the commandant, Alphonse de Sonnaz, who was nevertheless under orders to keep him confined to a few rooms under close surveillance. Suffice it to say that the archbishop was not even allowed to make his confession to the Capuchin chaplain. Shortly thereafter, Father William Audisio, renowned for his educational work among the clergy, was removed as president of the Superga Academy,[6] in reprisal for his articles in *L'Armonia*. Purposely no successor was named, and the event marked the end of this famous academy. At the same time, as the result of the Siccardi Law, Archbishop [Alex-

[2] A town some fifty-seven miles from Turin. Its population at that time was about forty thousand. [Editor]

[3] About fourteen miles from Turin, with a population of fifteen thousand. [Editor]

[4] About eight miles from Turin. [Editor]

[5] It dates back to the 17th century and is located at an altitude of about 3,500 feet. [Editor]

[6] Founded in 1833 at King Charles Albert's request for advanced theological studies. *See* Vol. I, p. 212. [Editor]

ander Dominic Varesini] of Sassari was sentenced to a month's imprisonment, which, on account of his poor health, he served in his own residence, and Archbishop [Emmanuel Marongiu-Nurra] of Cagliari was stripped of his revenue, driven from the realm, and forcibly conducted to Civitavecchia.

In Turin some of the people were beside themselves with fear while others reveled in the insults and slanders of the newspapers. An abusive ditty mocking Archbishop Fransoni was sung in the streets by a blind guitarist to the delight of the anticlericals.

On August 12, 1850, the chief of police with twelve carabinieri searched the premises of the Oblates of Mary in Turin in the vain hope of finding documents that would compromise the archbishop. It was assumed that the Oblates had aided and abetted him in his alleged activity against the State. The usual mob gathered upon hearing rumors of a conspiracy, and it eventually became so unmanageable that the police and carabinieri had to be increased. Later the bersaglieri and even National Guard contingents had to be summoned, but the crowds were not dispersed. By evening the tumult had assumed such proportions that the demonstrators had to be restrained by brute force. Finally the chief of police stood in front of the monastery gate and read a declaration stating that, despite a most meticulous search, nothing had been found that in any way incriminated the Oblates. Thereupon the mob dispersed, but the anticlerical newspapers still reported that there had indeed been a conspiracy but that the Oblates had managed to destroy all proofs.

It was on this occasion that, according to Father Reviglio, Don Bosco wrote a booklet—in reality, a few articles—in defense of religious congregations. Thanks to the influence he enjoyed among certain highly-placed government officials, he was able to prevent the expulsion of the Oblates, warding off, temporarily at least, such undeserved treatment. It is well known that he had a great affection for that congregation; several of his boys, inspired by his frequent praise of its religious, later joined that order.

While taking up the defense of the Oblates, Don Bosco also had to fend off serious personal attacks. Since he was known as a staunch supporter of Church rights, the anticlericals, before launching new attacks on the Church or the Pope, took action to undermine his in-

fluence. They painted him to the populace as an enemy of the new institutions, as a priest influenced by Jesuit thought, as a fanatical teacher of bigots, and as a foe of freedom. For good measure they also charged that he was an accomplice in the archbishop's reactionary activities. In an attempt to remove him from the scene, the anticlericals planned a hostile demonstration against the Oratory on August 14 in order to wreck it and drive Don Bosco out of the city. The plan had been kept secret, but on the scheduled day, Mr. Volpotto, the same individual who had been instrumental in the Senate's passage of a resolution in favor of Don Bosco,[7] came to the Oratory to warn him of the impending danger and advise him to flee. Don Bosco instead called his mother and told her not to forget to prepare him his supper. "Why tell me that?" Margaret exclaimed. "What makes you think I won't?"

"Because," replied Don Bosco, "I want you to know that no matter what happens, I'll be here."

According to Mr. Volpotto's warning, a mob was to march on the Oratory around four o'clock, but no one appeared either that day or the day after. What had happened? After a noisy demonstration against the Oblates of Mary, the rabble was about to march on the Oratory when one of them, who knew Don Bosco and had been befriended by him, stood on a wayside stone and shouted at the top of his voice, "Listen to me, friends! Some of you want to go down to Valdocco and heckle Don Bosco. Take my advice. Don't go! It's a weekday, and you won't find anybody there but Don Bosco and his old mother and a few poor boys he cares for. Rather than heckle him, we should shout 'Long live Don Bosco!' because he cares for and helps the sons of the people."

Another member of the mob rallied to Don Bosco's support, shouting, "Don Bosco is not a friend of Austria! He does a great deal of good. He's a man of the people! Let's leave him in peace. No need to shout for or against him. Let's go somewhere else!" These words had the effect of calming the mob. They changed their plans and decided to demonstrate against the Dominicans and the Barnabites.

Meanwhile an unexpected embarrassment was in store for Don

[7] *See* p. 12. [Editor]

Bosco. The government, which had seized even the furniture of the Servite monastery, sent some of it to the Oratory. Some suggested that he refuse it. Instead, Don Bosco accepted it, without any thanks, and at once sent word to Father Pittavino, the superior of the Servites, to claim his property. However, he asked permission to keep one table which he needed for the boys, and it was gladly given. Thus the Servites regained their property and Don Bosco, without doing anything unjust, avoided offending the government with possible serious consequences to himself. This episode was told to Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi by Father Francis Faccio, a Servite who had formerly been pastor at St. Charles' Church in Turin.

Amid the welter of these events—which redounded to the glory of the clergy, inasmuch as Jesus has taught us that those who suffer for the sake of justice are blessed—the prestige of the priesthood was sorely damaged by the condemnation of a certain Father Anthony Grignaschi. Born in Corconio, on San Giulio Island near Orta in the diocese of Novara, he had been ordained, and in 1843 he had been appointed pastor of Cimamulera.[8] With fraud and deceit he had blasphemously spread the notion that he was God manifesting himself in a new incarnation of Jesus Christ returned to earth to found a new Church that was to supplant Catholicism. His teachings were utterly heretical. He also performed strange, wondrous feats which could be attributed only to diabolical intervention, although his disciples hailed them as miracles. He claimed that a woman named "Lana," whom he convinced to play the part, was the Virgin Mary. This shameless creature willingly acted out this vulgar comedy wearing garments and affecting poses judged proper to the Blessed Virgin. The apostate priest would set her on a bench in the middle of the church, with lighted candles at her feet, as though she were a statue. Simple-minded women who had embraced this new sect knelt before her and prayed to her.

The chancery sent a priest to investigate the matter. Upon entering the church and seeing the blasphemous veneration accorded to this hussy, he had to hold himself in check so as not to cause a scene in church. He went immediately into the sacristy and asked the sexton, "Is there any special feast today?"

[8] A village near Lake Maggiore in the province of Novara. At that time it had about 460 inhabitants. [Editor]

"No."

"What kind of Madonna have you got in church?"

"Oh," exclaimed the sexton, shrugging his shoulders, "do you mean the red Madonna?"

"What? A red Madonna?"

"Yes, Father Grignaschi's Madonna."

When the Bishop of Novara was informed of these sacrilegious events, he immediately dismissed Father Grignaschi from the parish and suspended him from his priestly functions. The renegade thereupon went to Turin. While there he called on Don Bosco and expounded his doctrines. Horrified, Don Bosco tried to persuade him to abandon the evil path on which he had embarked, but all his offers of help were in vain. Father Grignaschi roamed about several towns in the province of Casale and finally, with his red Madonna as housekeeper, settled in a hamlet near Viarigi,[9] a small town in the Asti district. This became his main theater of action for his shabby tricks and wiles. His amazing new feats fooled even the pastors and priests of the neighboring villages, perverting the Faith of a large number of people. He shamefully abused the sacraments, assertedly gained entrance into houses through locked doors, divined hidden thoughts, pretended he had received instructions from heaven, and in general committed abominable acts. The people seemed mesmerized. Young and old would set out and walk as much as twenty and more miles over poor roads, under self-imposed fastings, just to see him and hear him speak. He received his disciples sitting down. They knelt in his presence, and he would "absolve" them with the following words, "I, the Lord Jesus Christ, absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." He spread his heretical doctrines through persons whom he had deceived and trained to feign virtue and sanctity so that people might regard him as a truly extraordinary man, a new savior.

There was indeed a strangely fascinating, mesmerizing power in his look. People talked about it at great length. A certain B . . . made light of what he heard about this "spellbinding look" and decided to call on Father Grignaschi to see for himself. The moment

[9] About fifty miles from Turin with a population close to two thousand people. [Editor]

he entered the house, he was gripped by a mysterious sensation of horror, and once in the presence of the man, he no sooner met his gaze than he instantly felt that he was in his power. When the charlatan said, "I was waiting for you; I knew you would come," the once skeptical visitor fell to his knees. From that moment on he was entirely devoted to him. Father Grignaschi convinced B . . . that he was actually St. Paul, and that another friend of his was St. Peter. So B . . . let his beard grow and, together with his companion, readily obeyed Grignaschi's orders: long prayers and penances, visits to taverns, kneeling down among the tables and imploring people not to offend God by blasphemy, drunkenness or gambling—things which they would certainly have refused to do if they had not come under his spell. Father Grignaschi exercised the same power on all the people of the area almost without exception. Later on, B . . . was unable to explain how all this had come about. He was a well-to-do man, mature, charitable, and sufficiently educated. He owed his return to sanity and the true faith to Don Bosco's sermons.

Meanwhile the members of this sect went so far in their moral turpitude that it came to the attention of the district attorney. Grignaschi and thirteen of his principal disciples, including the red Madonna, were jailed and later tried before the Court of Appeals in Casale.[10] The newspapers of that year are full of details of the scandal and of the trial.

On July 15, 1850, despite the efforts of Angelo Brofferio, his defense lawyer, Grignaschi was sentenced to hard labor; his followers received lighter sentences. Grignaschi's arrest had thrown the people of Viarigi into an uproar. To maintain order among these fanatical disciples of his the government had to set up a garrison. When this proved insufficient, the bishops of Casale and Asti undertook a mission of pacification. Bishop [Philip] Artico of Asti stayed at Viarigi for fifty days; with his sermons, generous assistance to the poor, and visits to the sick, he put an end to conflict and scandals,

[10] On March 21, 1850 he was found guilty of contempt of religion and of fraud in claiming supernatural powers, thus inducing gullible people to donate to him and to his sect large sums of money. Cf. *Requisitoria dell'Ufficio Fiscale Generale di Casale: Sentenza e atto d'Accusa nella Causa del Regio Fisco di Viarigi contro il Sac. Grignaschi Francesco Antonio e Suoi Complici.* Torino, Tipografia Fory e Dalmazzo, 1850. [Editor]

received many back into the Church, and obtained the withdrawal of the troops. Peace was thus restored, even if quite a few continued to persist in their error.

Father Grignaschi meanwhile had been taken to the castle of Ivrea [11] to serve a seven-year term. As if possessed by a devil, he perversely insisted that his was a divine mission. The solitude of the cell must have been a crushing weight to bear. But Don Bosco did not forget him in his hour of sorrow. Ascanio Savio relates that Don Bosco, who used to travel to Ivrea two or three times a year, hastened to visit him. He was able to speak to the poor man on several occasions and so won his confidence that he finally succeeded in making him realize the evil he had done to himself and to others by his scandalous teachings and actions. He also persuaded him to promise to mend his ways; as a first step he urged him to accept his punishment with Christian resignation in expiation of his sins.[12] Realizing that Father Grignaschi welcomed his visits, Don Bosco returned on other occasions and also gave him some money. These visits took place whenever he was in Ivrea preaching missions to the people or retreats to the seminarians or conducting business with the bishop concerning the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] [13] or Church matters.

[11] Ivrea, a Roman town, is located 34 miles northeast of Turin. One of its landmarks is the Castello delle Quattro Torri (Castle of the Four Towers) built between 1393 and 1395. At present only three towers remain; in 1876, lightning hit the northwest tower housing the ammunitions magazine and utterly destroyed it. At the beginning of the 17th century it was converted into a prison and remains so to this day; however, there is a movement afoot to convert it into a regional museum. [Editor]

[12] On April 2, 1857, Father Anthony Grignaschi solemnly abjured his errors in the presence of Bishop James Philip Gentile of Novara, especially delegated by the Holy See, and some other witnesses. The ceremony took place in the castle of Ivrea where he was detained. The documents of his abjuration, properly signed and notarized, were published by *L'Armonia* of Turin on July 3, 1857. [Editor]

[13] A monthly publication started by Don Bosco in 1853. Since 1955 its title has been *Meridiano 12*. [Editor]

CHAPTER 11

Don Bosco and Count Camillo Cavour

DURING these years [1850-1860] Count Camillo Cavour [1] showed great favor to Don Bosco's oratories. Amazingly enough Don Bosco had managed to obtain even the support of eminent persons hostile to the Church, but he had to be constantly on his guard. With their enticing manners, their generous promises to help his charitable works, their offers of honorific titles and decorations, and their favorable response to his many petitions, they seemed to pose a threat to his love and loyalty to the Holy See and his faith. The boys of the Oratory were preferred to others who belonged to long-established institutes of charity, and they were chosen to draw the numbers in the State lottery. On alternating weeks for many years two of the smaller boys, wearing special insignia, performed this official task and in this way earned a fee which was given to the Oratory. Unaffected by this favoritism, Don Bosco continued to uphold the cause of God with heroic fortitude and with no regard to or fear of what people might say.

Nevertheless, as we have often pointed out, in all these situations he admirably abided by the norms of Holy Scripture: "When invited by a man of influence, keep your distance; then he will urge you all the more. Be not bold with him lest you be rebuffed, but keep not too far away lest you be forgotten. Engage not freely in discussion with him; trust not his many words; for by prolonged talk he will test you and though smiling he will probe you. Mercilessly he will make of you a laughingstock, and will not refrain from

[1] Born in Turin on August 10, 1810, Count Camillo Cavour eventually succeeded in bringing about the unification of Italy under the House of Savoy. He was also one of the most clever and successful statesmen of 19th-century Europe. [Editor]

injury or chains. Be on your guard and take care never to accompany men of violence." [Sir. 13, 9-13]

Count Camillo Cavour, a keen judge of men and motives and a master at turning this knowledge to his own advantage, was a frequent visitor at Valdocco, and occasionally he would invite Don Bosco to his residence for lunch or dinner. Charles Tomatis is our authority for this. The count liked to hear Don Bosco talk about festive oratories and he would question him about his projects and hopes for the future, assuring him of all possible help. Don Bosco treated him with the respect due his position, alternating between frankness and circumspection in his answers, but never losing that great charm which people found irresistible. The count's kindly interest never dimmed, even when he succeeded De Rossi as Minister of Commerce and later became premier and the real power in the whole government. "Count Camillo Cavour," Don Bosco told us later, "was one of the anticlerical leaders of Piedmont and greatly harmed the Church, yet he regarded me as a friend. He often advised me to give legal status to the oratories. One day, urging me to follow his advice, he even promised me a million lire to further my work. Not knowing what to make of such an offer or what to say in reply, I remained silent, smiling to myself. The count continued, "Well, what do you say to that?" I replied politely that I was sorry that I could not accept such a generous gift. "Why?" asked the count with amazement. "Why refuse such a handsome sum when you need everything and every supporter you can get?"

"Because," I replied serenely, "what is given to me [by the government] today might be taken away tomorrow. You yourself may be the one to take back what you so generously offer me now." Without a sign of resentment, the count changed the subject.

Don Bosco seemed to realize the future of this man who was to promote the suppression of religious orders and the forcible seizure of Church property. Thus, Don Bosco's frankness in so expressing himself is especially worthy of admiration. He realized clearly that there might possibly be an ulterior motive in the offer of subsidies by Cavour and the government that was perhaps part of a plan.

Don Bosco continued:

I was not too keen about sitting at the count's table, despite his cordial invitations; but since I occasionally had important business to discuss with him, I had to see him either at home or at the ministry. Often, when he was a cabinet minister, he straightforwardly told me he would refuse me an audience unless it be at dinner or lunch, and that if I needed a favor from him, I was to remember that there was always a place at his table for me. "These are the moments," he would say, "when we can talk at leisure. At the office there is too much pressure. We hardly have time to exchange a few words hastily, almost rudely, and then we must part." In this he acted like his brother, Marquis Gustavo. He, too, would listen to me only at table. I had no alternative but to accept this courteous—yet for me, burdensome—condition. Once when I called at Count Camillo's office on an urgent matter, he refused to receive me but had me ushered into a private waiting room, telling me that he wanted me for dinner and that if I accepted he would listen to me. He always granted whatever I had come to ask for.

We have often wondered what pressing matters Don Bosco had to discuss with Count Camillo. It is probable that he pleaded for the Oblates of Mary, and we know for certain that through the count Don Bosco obtained free use of government premises for his first lottery as well as exemption from postal fees. We do not know of anything else. Seemingly no subsidies were involved, for no mention of any has been found in Don Bosco's papers, nor did he ever speak of them. Neither could he have been seeking protection from abuse, for at that time the authorities were definitely in favor of the oratories. Inasmuch as Don Bosco did not elaborate on the favors granted, we may infer that the requests and concessions were shrouded in secrecy, particularly since there is clear evidence that he settled matters of great moment in this way with other influential persons. A question arises in our mind: Was Don Bosco possibly trying to soften somewhat the rigors of his archbishop's confinement? From time to time, he went to Fenestrelle to preach and visit the pastor, Father John Baptist Guigas, a friend of his. According to the testimony of boys from the Oratory, Don Bosco also went to Fenestrelle in 1850. Our notes, dating back thirty-five years, have no mention of the day or month. After researching Don Bosco's trips of that year and checking on the places from which he posted his

mail, we can confidently state that this trip could have taken place only between the end of August and the beginning of September.

Many years later, when asked why he had gone to Fenestrelle that year, Don Bosco replied promptly, "I was planning to write a history of Italy and I wanted to see the mountains where the battle of Assietta was fought." [2] Even then we thought this a rather lame explanation. A trip made solely for this reason was hardly in keeping with Don Bosco's habits, especially at a time when he was beset on all sides by so many duties. Furthermore his *Storia d'Italia* was not published until 1856. We made no further investigations at that time, however, for we had no reason to suspect a more important purpose. But now, recalling the archbishop's imprisonment in the grim fortress and Don Bosco's contacts with the family of Alphonse de Sonnaz, the commandant, we suggest that there may have been some connection between this trip and Don Bosco's words, "He [Cavour] always granted whatever I had come to ask for." Would not Don Bosco try to visit his shepherd in prison or at least send him some desired information either by word of mouth or in writing through some trustworthy person? This may be sheer speculation on our part, but Don Bosco once told us, "No one will ever know a great many of the things I have done!"

Archbishop Fransoni had been stripped of his revenues and banished from the realm by order of Marquis Massimo d'Azeglio,[3] without even the semblance of a trial. On September 28 [1850], he was removed from the fortress and escorted through the Alps to the frontier. The archbishop chose the city of Lyons as his place of exile. In Lyons civil and military authorities, priests and laymen vied with each other to honor him. It was there also that an artistic crozier, the gift of his Piedmontese faithful,[4] was presented to him. Archbishop Fransoni continued to govern his diocese from Lyons as well as he could until his death. His enemies invented all kinds of slander to defame him, even accusing him of plotting against the State, but their efforts bore no fruit. The Pope, the bishops of Pied-

[2] A mountain and Alpine pass in the Cotian Alps. Here Charles Emmanuel III scored an important victory in the War of Austrian Succession. [Editor]

[3] Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866), politician, writer, and painter was premier from 1849 to 1852 under Victor Emmanuel II. He was succeeded by Camillo Cavour. [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 46f. [Editor]

mont, Savoy, Liguria, and other regions, and Catholics throughout the world praised his conduct and offered him testimonials of their highest admiration, often accompanied by rich gifts. Since then he has been vindicated by history, whose pages will always be a glorious tribute to his memory and a mark of infamy to his persecutors.

Though far away, Archbishop Fransoni never ceased to protect and help the Oratory. Likewise he kept pointing out to Don Bosco the need to provide for its future. When Father [John] Borel and Father Robert Murialdo visited him in Lyons, he asked them to repeat his advice to Don Bosco. In turn, Don Bosco always referred to him for counsel. Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi also assured us that he knew without question that Don Bosco visited the archbishop in Lyons not long after he took up residence there, thus displaying his courage to those who had ordered the archbishop's banishment.

Don Bosco's friendly relations with [Camillo] Cavour came to an end in 1855, when many religious institutions were suppressed. Personally, however, the count never showed Don Bosco any hostility.

Don Bosco was blessed when Divine Providence opportunely placed at his side two genuine admirers of the Oratory, both excellent Catholics. The first of these was the aforementioned lawyer John Baptist Gal [5] who at Gioberti's [6] downfall became Count Camillo's personal secretary and until 1861 was in a position to know all the secret intrigues of politics. Later, he was transferred to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where he served for ten years, resigning from public life in 1870. He used to visit his friend, Don Bosco, several times a year, traveling either from Torgnon, his native town in the valley of Aosta, or from San Remo where he spent his winters. The second friend of the Oratory was Chevalier Cugia Delitala, who succeeded Gal as personal secretary to Cavour and remained in that position until the latter's death. We still have the affectionate and beautiful poems which Delitala used to send Don Bosco on his name day. Don Bosco had friends everywhere.

[5] A learned and devout Catholic. He struck up a warm and lasting friendship with Don Bosco in 1841. *See* Vol. III, p. 300. [Editor]

[6] Father Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-52), philosopher and politician, played an important part in shaping Italian national consciousness during the Risorgimento. He was premier of the Piedmontese government from December 1848 to February 1849. [Editor]

CHAPTER 12

Two Memorable Events

IN September [1850] Don Bosco arranged for many of the boys to make a seven-day retreat at the minor seminary in Giaveno,[1] which was normally empty during the summer vacation. The Oratory boarders and a sizable contingent of boys from the three festive oratories who had been able to obtain permission from their families or their employers made the journey on foot. Led by Father Robert Murialdo, they thoroughly enjoyed themselves as they hiked to their destination, singing hymns to the Blessed Virgin and other religious songs. Don Bosco traveled ahead by coach to make preparations for their lunch at Avigliana; [2] accompanying him were a few boys whose physical condition prevented their attempting the journey on foot. At Avigliana the hikers halted for lunch on the shores of the beautiful lake. Here they met and struck up a warm friendship with a zealous, devout priest, Father Victor Alasonatti, a close friend of Don Bosco and an enthusiastic admirer of the Oratory.

Don Bosco had providentially obtained a generous subsidy from the Society of St. Paul to cover the expenses of the retreat. The preachers were Canon [Innocent] Arduino, the scholarly and zealous archpriest of the collegiate church of Giaveno, Father [Stephen] Giorda [pastor at Poirino], and Don Bosco himself. Father Robert Murialdo, director of the Guardian Angel Oratory, helped with con-

[1] Twenty miles from Turin. The seminary, built shortly after the Council of Trent, belonged to the archdiocese of Turin. [Editor]

[2] Fifteen miles from Turin, the town has two lakes dominated by the ruins of the old Arduino-Savoy castle. The larger lake mirrors the shrine of Our Lady of the Lakes where a fine triptych by Defendente Ferrari and two paintings (the Crucifixion and St. Francis of Assisi) of the Caravaggio school are preserved. [Editor]

fessions. To make the retreat helpful to as many souls as possible, the inhabitants of the town were also invited to participate, and many took advantage of the opportunity.

Many years later, Father Michael Rua still spoke feelingly of the fatherly care Don Bosco showed to him and all the boys on that occasion, patiently bearing with the youthful thoughtlessness of many but insisting upon and obtaining silence and attention at the appointed times.

Don Bosco wrote to Father [John] Borel [3] about this retreat in the following letter:

Giaveno, September 12, 1850

Dear Father:

I am sure you will be glad to know that the spiritual retreat has gotten off to an excellent start. The overall number is one hundred and thirty; but we are only one hundred and five at table, because the others are day retreatants from town and go home for their meals. The pastor preaches the meditations and Father Giorda handles the instructions. Both have fully met my expectations and those of the boys.

From four to five the schedule calls for recreation, but today no one cared to take it. On leaving the chapel all chose to go to the study room.

I would like to give the boys a souvenir of this retreat, and I leave it to you to supply me with what you think is best—medals, crucifixes, etc. I forgot to tell you that in my room at the Oratory, under the dresser, there is a supply of rosaries I bought some time ago. Why don't we give them to the boys? Let's do this, then. Please go to my room and take one hundred thirty rosaries. With them you will find copies of *The Companion of Youth* with gold-leaf edges. Take twelve, pack them with the rosaries, and have them sent to me by the Giaveno coach which leaves Turin daily at four P.M. from the Albergo della Fucina. Please tell my mother I am feeling much better. Father Murialdo is somewhat hoarse; Savio [4] has a fever and so has the doorkeeper [5] of our Guardian Angel

[3] A most zealous priest and the first one to help Don Bosco in the early trying years of the Oratory. Don Bosco had met him during his seminary days when Fr. Borel preached a retreat in 1839 in the Chieri seminary. *See* Vol. I, pp. 341f and the index of Vol. II. [Editor]

[4] There were two Savios: Ascanio, the first Oratory boy to don the cassock, later became a diocesan priest; his brother, Angelo, one year his junior, who also made this retreat, remained with Don Bosco. He was ordained a priest and filled very important positions in the Salesian Society. [Editor]

[5] A boy acting as doorkeeper. [Editor]

Oratory. Everyone else is fine. Please pray that everything goes well. Regards to Father Pacchiotti,[6] Father Bosio,[7] and all our other priests at the Oratory.

I must close now. Please share the contents of this letter with Father Cafasso. May the Lord accompany you. *Dominus det. . . .*[8]

Your friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I forgot a small bundle and a paper-wrapped package in the kitchen. Please send them up with the rest.

This letter mentioned a recreation period. At such periods, as well as after dinner and supper, Don Bosco enjoyed talking with the boys who flocked around him. Joseph Brosio tells us about the practice.

Don Bosco always had some amusing little story to tell, some new joke for them to laugh at. He did not take snuff and he forbade his boys[9] to use it, but one day, at the beginning of the retreat, he took a well-filled snuffbox from his pocket. Immediately all the boys pestered him for a pinch. Don Bosco answered, "Gladly, if you really need it. I shall give some to all those who have a snuffbox." At once some of the grownups, including John Gilardi [18 years old] and Joseph Randù [45 years old], held them out. They took snuff for health or out of habit. Don Bosco filled their snuffboxes and kept them supplied for the rest of the retreat. His thoughtfulness in even minor matters such as this won him everybody's heart.

During these recreation periods, however, Don Bosco was mostly interested in finding out what the boys had learned from the sermons. On one occasion, as he was surrounded by many boys, some of whom were from the local parish, he asked about the topic of his morning instruction. (It had been scandal.) The first boy he

[6] Fr. Sebastian Pacchiotti was chaplain at the Rifugio. *See* Vol. II, p. 242. [Editor]

[7] A fellow seminarian of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. I, pp. 316, 384. [Editor]

[8] *Dominus det nobis suam pacem* [May God grant us His peace]. Don Bosco deliberately left out the last three words. The political turmoil of those days counseled prudence. [Editor]

[9] The age of the youngest was sixteen. *See* Appendix 3. [Editor]

singled out did not know; the second seemed embarrassed, so Don Bosco questioned a few more. The youngsters scratched their heads but could give no satisfactory reply. "Oh, my!" exclaimed Don Bosco. "Was I talking Chinese or were you all asleep?" Then one of the smaller boys piped up, "I remember, I remember!"

"What do you remember?"

"I remember the monkeys."

Don Bosco had told them a tale. A peddler was going from village to village trying to sell his wares which he carried in a small display case strapped to his shoulders. However, night overtook him before he reached a certain town. It was summer; the pale moon shone in the sky and the peddler, weary after his long trek, decided to spend the night under a large tree. He opened his case and, taking out a white cap, of which he had quite a good supply, he put it on his head as protection against the evening chill and fell asleep. There were a number of monkeys up in that tree. The sight of a man sleeping with a white cap aroused their instincts. One of them slipped down very quietly, poked around in the box which had been left open, pulled out a cap, put it on its head, and climbed the tree again. The other monkeys did likewise and their mischievousness ended only when they had emptied the box. The merchant slept peacefully throughout the night, and so did the monkeys. With white caps on their heads they were quite a sight! At dawn the merchant arose and prepared to resume his journey. Imagine his amazement and grief at seeing that all his caps had been stolen! "I've been robbed," he cried. "I'm ruined." But on second thought, realizing that only the caps were missing, he came to the conclusion that it could not have been a robbery. "I don't understand it," he told himself. Just then he chanced to glance upward. "Ah," he cried, "look at the rascals!" He tried to frighten them into returning his wares by flinging stones at them, but the monkeys merely leaped lightly from branch to branch, holding on to their caps. After many useless efforts, the poor peddler clutched his hair in utter despair and angrily flung the cap he was wearing to the ground. The monkeys instantly did likewise and down rained the white caps to the delight of the harassed peddler.

Don Bosco had drawn the moral that boys behave much in the

same way as monkeys. If they see others doing good, they also do it; if they see someone do evil, they imitate it even more quickly. He had concluded by stressing the utter need of setting an edifying example for boys and of keeping them far away from any scandal.

Upon realizing that the boys barely remembered certain points he had made in his sermons, Don Bosco took great pains thereafter to intersperse his sermons with concrete examples and parables to capture their imagination and by this means to enlighten their minds and stir their hearts. He found this approach very effective.

His preaching was animated with ardent concern for the salvation of souls. One day he was so moved by his own words that he broke into sobs and had to step down from the pulpit. Humbly and with some embarrassment, he remarked to Ascanio Savio: "I couldn't control myself." But the effect on his young listeners was beyond words.

In the closing sermon, Don Bosco gave the following souvenir: "Make the Exercise for a Happy Death *every month;* make it *well;* make it *unfailingly well!*" The following day, to reward their cooperation and give them a little relaxation, Don Bosco took the retreatants on a hike to St. Michael's Abbey and Shrine.[10] The climb up the steep mountain road did not seem so arduous, for it was enlivened by the blaring melodies of the Giaveno town band.

Don Bosco rode on a small donkey and the boys clustered around it, patting it lovingly. At intervals they would break out into a familiar song: "Long live Don Bosco, etc. . . ."

Don Bosco introduced a variation in the first verse by singing "Long live Robert," thus turning the song to the praise of his fellow traveler, Father Murialdo. Brief halts were called now and then. The musicians would then blow their trumpets; their notes, bounding from peak to peak, reverberated majestically in the valley below. Startled birds flitted excitedly from tree to tree, peasants came out of their cottages to listen, and the tiny donkey, pricking up its ears, added his off-key braying to the music. It was an unforgettable hike.

[10] A massive construction on Mt. Pirchiriano, 2,710 feet above Avigliana. Built in 998 it is one of the most important monuments of European Romanesque architecture and an extremely bold engineering feat. It was dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel. As a seminarian, Don Bosco had hiked to this shrine in October 1840. *See* Vol. I, p. 368. [Editor]

When they reached the abbey, the Rosminian Fathers [11] gave them a hearty welcome. Don Bosco was a close friend of theirs and would act as their host whenever they went to Turin since they had no house of their own in the town. The boys visited the church and the ancient abbey while Don Bosco enriched their minds with the history of the shrine. This was his invariable custom whenever he would escort his boys to an historic site. After briefing them on its history he would recall some memorable event. On this occasion he told them:

This shrine, named after St. Michael, is one of the most famous Benedictine abbeys in Piedmont. It began as a simple hermitage around the year 990, when a saintly hermit named John of Ravenna [12] built it in honor of St. Michael. A few years later a certain Hugo of Montboissier, a gentleman of Alvernia, converted it into a magnificent Gothic church and built a large monastery adjacent to it. Hugo, who built the monastery at his own expense in penance for his sins and who made a pilgrimage to Rome to obtain absolution, entrusted the supervision of the work to Atvert, the abbot of Lusathe in France. When the work was completed, Atvert called in the Benedictine monks and they elected him as their first abbot. Reports of their holiness quickly spread and in a short time the monastery had three hundred monks. Popes and bishops, kings and dukes vied with each other in bestowing privileges and endowments on it. Later, however, the monks lost their primitive fervor and discipline. In 1383 the abbey was placed under the patronage of the counts of Savoy and thus it remained until the French invasion at the beginning of this century when the famous abbey was suppressed along with all the others. Our good sovereigns Charles Felix and Charles Albert restored it from decay to its present splendor and called in the Rosminian Fathers who gave you such a cordial reception today. Between this mountain where we now stand, called Pirchiriano, and the one in front of us, known as Mount Caprasio, lies a valley slightly over a thousand feet wide. It forms the lock or gorge of Susa, so called because it bars the way to invaders across the Alps. This pass is famous in history because Charlemagne, in order to come to the aid of the Pope [13] in Rome, after negotiating the

[11] They had established a community here in 1836 at the invitation of King Charles Albert and with the approval of Pope Gregory XVI. *See* Vol. I, p. 368. [Editor]

[12] Giovanni Vincenzo, archbishop of Ravenna. He was a member of the noble Morosini family of Venice. [Editor]

[13] Pope Adrian I. [Editor]

gorge, attacked Desiderius, the Longobard king, from the rear and defeated him [in 773], thereby ending the reign of the Longobards in Italy.

Although the boys certainly enjoyed learning things which they had never heard before, another kind of interest began to occupy their minds toward midday. The morning hike and the bracing mountain air had stimulated their appetite and they were ravenously hungry. Thus during the inspection tour of the monastery they could not help casting furtive, impatient glances in the direction of the refectory; they could hardly wait for the moment to eat. When at long last they were summoned, they ate with enormous gusto.

Since they had no other way of repaying the hospitality of their hosts, the boys regaled them with music and song. The good Rosminian Fathers were as delighted as their guests; mingling with them, they then took them on little side tours to point out other objects of interest. After a couple of hours they all gathered in church and sang the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and received Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Afterward the band played a last piece; it was almost five o'clock when they bid the Rosminian Fathers a cordial farewell and gratefully started the trek down the mountain with provisions of bread and fruit for the return journey. A brief halt was called at San Ambrogio, at the fork of the road. The band played a lilting tune, there was an exchange of good-byes, and then they parted as genuine friends, one contingent heading for Giaveno, the larger one for Turin by way of Rivoli. During the march they sang, prayed and listened to a string of amusing stories spun by Don Bosco and Father Murialdo. Recalling the spiritual retreat just ended, Father Murialdo urged them to recite a Hail Mary every day for the intention that none of the retreatants would ever go astray and merit eternal damnation. "What a great joy it will be," he told them, "when one day we shall be able to go together on delightful excursions over the eternal, beautiful hills of heaven!"

They reached Rivoli late in the evening. Most of the boys were so exhausted that they could hardly take another step. There were still seven miles to go, but Don Bosco didn't have the heart to make them walk any further. He took them to an inn and chartered as many coaches as he could find. However, there were not enough coaches to accommodate all of them and about twenty boys had to

continue on foot. Don Bosco cheered them up and then gave a sum of money to Brosio, "the bersagliere," to treat the boys to a hearty supper before starting on the last lap to Turin.

This incident recalled our dear Lord, who, seeing that the crowds who had followed him into the desert were fatigued to the point of exhaustion, cried out as a good father, "I have compassion on the crowd," and provided for them lest they faint on the way.

Rested and nourished, the rear guard then set out. Night had fallen, and to dispel the fears of the more timid youngsters and make the walk seem shorter, "the bersagliere" picked up two stones from the road and told the others to do the same. Then he made them strike them together rhythmically. And so they had music of a new sort and sparks to light their way to the Oratory, which they reached at about eleven o'clock.

On September 21, 1850, Don Bosco compiled a list of the one hundred boys who had made the spiritual retreat, and sent it on legal stationery to the directors of the Society of St. Paul who had offered to defray the retreat expenses. An additional list of nine names completed the roster. From records in our archives we now know the names and the age of most of the boys who went to Giaveno for their retreat.[14]

We have given a detailed account of this spiritual retreat and trip because the boys long remembered the experience as one of the happiest events of their youth; it also provides an admirable illustration of how anxious Don Bosco was for his boys to learn that cheerfulness and serving God go hand in hand.

This excursion also gave some boys a clearer insight into Don Bosco's singular virtues. He used to suggest special prayers, or even vows on occasion, to those who came to him to obtain cures or other favors from God. Young Felix Reviglio had been suffering for several months from malaria. It had so undermined his health that the doctors had declared him to be consumptive. Don Bosco brought him to Giaveno along with the others. Reviglio himself told us that, after his confession, Don Bosco suggested that he make a vow to go to confession every week during the succeeding six months. At the same time he suggested additional acts of devotion. This advice

[14] In this edition we have placed this list in Appendix 4. [Editor]

proved more helpful than all the medicines he had been taking, and in a short time the boy recovered completely.

Another young man, whose name we shall not disclose (he was one of the oldest at the Oratory—about twenty-seven), also made this spiritual retreat. One morning he walked into the sacristy just as Don Bosco was about to go to the altar for Mass. Joseph Brosio, holding the missal, was ready to serve, when this fellow rudely snatched it from him and rushed out. Don Bosco, ever prompt to forgive, saw Brosio flush with anger and he motioned him with a look to restrain himself. After Mass, he took Brosio aside and said: "It was good of you to yield. You'll soon see what kind of fellow he is!" Unfortunately, Don Bosco had guessed correctly. Shortly thereafter this young man stopped going to the Oratory; he joined the Waldensians and became one of the biggest troublemakers at the La Giardiniera wineshop. He often prowled about the Oratory to frighten the boys away from Don Bosco. But Don Bosco had already informed Brosio of the young ruffian's conduct and asked him to be on the lookout. One day he showed up at the playground gate, armed with a long stiletto which he was prepared to use on anyone trying to bar his way. A young boy ran to call Brosio, while the rest, greatly terrified, raced to safety. Brosio walked up to him and asked him to leave, at first gently, and then in sterner language. Words were of no avail, for the man was drunk and obviously spoiling for a fight; therefore, Brosio wisely withdrew and watched him from a safe distance. It was not long thereafter that the ruffian fell into the hands of the law. Don Bosco, called to testify against him, requested that the charges be dropped. He merely asked the court that police protection be provided for himself and the boys of the Oratory. The culprit was subsequently banished from Turin. Father Michael Rua learned of this incident from the person who had accompanied Don Bosco to court.

CHAPTER 13

Apostolic Frankness

SOME months had passed since Don Bosco proposed a joint building project at the Oratory to Father Rosmini. To get things started, on June 20 [1850], Don Bosco had the notary Turvano draw up a deed for the purchase of a triangular-shaped lot, measuring about 40,903 square feet, which was then used as a vegetable garden. It belonged to the Turin seminary, to which Don Bosco paid 7,500 lire. After subsequent business transactions, this lot now [1] contains the church of Mary Help of Christians, a print shop, and an adjacent playground.

Meanwhile Father Charles Gilardi wrote to Don Bosco from Stresa to inform him that Father Rosmini was willing to grant him a loan. Don Bosco's reply follows:

Turin, July 13, 1850

Dear Father:

I was very pleased to receive your kind letter informing me of Father Rosmini's decision. I was all the more gratified since his offer exceeded my expectations.

Indeed I accept the loan of twenty thousand lire for the building construction we have already discussed. We shall take out a mortgage and postpone all details of time, place, and persons to a more convenient date. Since at present I am heavily burdened by rents, I ask you to waive the interest for three years, by which time I will be moving into the new building and be at least partly free from some rents. I ask this only as a favor, not as a condition for the contract, since I gladly accept your offer and press for no further advantages.

[1] That is, in 1904, when this volume was first published in Italian. [Editor]

I realize that both parties must meet to arrive at a more definite understanding; therefore, as soon as the plans for the new building are completed, I will personally bring them to Father Rosmini and request his valued opinion.

Please express my deepest gratitude to your revered superior. Hoping that the Lord, who permitted negotiations to begin, will allow them to be brought to a successful conclusion for His greater glory and for the spiritual advantage of ourselves and of others, I have the honor to remain,

Your most humble friend and servant,

Fr. John Bosco, *Leader of the Little Rascals*

In his capacity as procurator of the Rosminians, Father Gilardi sent Don Bosco the following note:

Stresa, July 26, 1850

[No salutation]

Please forgive the delay in replying to your kind letter of July 13. I must inform you that my superior, Father Antonio Rosmini, cannot possibly waive the interest for the first three years. He could, however, agree to a deferment of payment and accept promissory notes.

He was very glad to hear that you have decided to visit us soon and hopes that it will be in the very near future, since the loan is practically waiting for you.

Fr. Charles Gilardi

Don Bosco replied:

Turin, August 27, 1850

Dear Father Charles:

I fear that my delay in visiting Stresa may cause some uncertainty regarding our agreement. Therefore, I think it advisable to inform you that my only reason for delaying is that I am still waiting for the completed plans of the building. Mr. [Frederick] Bocca has assured me that he will have them ready this week. I hope, therefore, to see you in Stresa next week. If, however, that should prove impossible, I will not be able to come until September 16 because on the ninth I am scheduled to start preaching a spiritual retreat.

I repeat, this is the only reason that I have not yet come to Stresa, as

I had planned. Please extend my apologies to Father Rosmini and assure him that I have not changed my mind.

With the deepest respect, I remain,

Your most obedient servant,

Fr. John Bosco

On September 16, 1850, Don Bosco did go to Stresa. It was a business trip, to be sure, but he also wanted to take a closer look at the Rosminian rules and at the observance of religious discipline in the principal house of the congregation which was also the novitiate.

Arriving at Santhià shortly before midnight, he heard the confession of the coachman; then, after passing through Vercelli and Novara, he got off at Arona [on Lake Maggiore]. Don Bosco had planned to go to Stresa [2] by boat, but at the stagecoach station he met Marquis Arconati, a friend and benefactor of the Oratory, who offered to take him there in his own coach so that the trip would be less fatiguing for him. The marquis also suggested a visit to Alessandro Manzoni who was vacationing at nearby Lesa. Don Bosco gladly accepted the invitation. The horses were harnessed, and after a short ride they reached their destination. Manzoni received them very warmly and invited them to lunch with him and some of his relatives who were staying there. He also showed Don Bosco his manuscripts which were liberally covered with corrections on every page. This was Don Bosco's only meeting with Manzoni, but the few hours he spent with him were enough to convince him that a simple style in writing was the result of persevering effort.

In the marquis' company, Don Bosco reached Stresa and was warmly welcomed by Father Rosmini and his religious who cherished the hope that some day Don Bosco would join them. He stayed five or six days and had long meetings with Father Rosmini. Among other things, they discussed the threat to church property. Clearly the old structure of religious orders could no longer protect collective property from being confiscated by a government. Some way of insuring the existence of a congregation had to be found so that its members would retain their inviolable citizenship rights after

[2] International tourist center on Lake Maggiore. [Editor]

their profession of religious vows. Don Bosco had already solved the problem in his mind, but Father Rosmini was among the first to introduce this concept into the rules of an institute. He showed them to Don Bosco and described their history, the reasons underlying them, and how approval had been obtained from Rome. In his congregation each member retained ownership of his possessions vis-à-vis the civil authority, but could in no way sell, transfer, or dispose of them without the superior's consent. Thus the essentials of the vow of poverty were respected and the dangers of collective property avoided. At first this solution had seemed so novel that the Sacred Congregation charged with examining the constitutions had raised serious objections. However, when it was pointed out that the essence of the vow depended on interior disposition and that religious poverty consisted in detachment from wealth, a readiness to strip oneself of it and the desire to effectively practice poverty, the approval was granted. Father Rosmini concluded by saying, "Our congregation will never be suppressed, because there is nothing to be gained!"

A noteworthy event occurred at Stresa. A wealthy, cultured lady, Anne Marie Bolongaro, had given Father Rosmini a beautiful villa on the shore of Lake Maggiore. Since there was a steady flow of scholars calling upon him either to make his personal acquaintance or for reasons of studies, Father Rosmini had this group moved to the villa so as not to disrupt the novitiate routine. Here, too, he had facilities for guests.

One day Father Rosmini invited Don Bosco (who was staying with the other Rosminians) to dinner at the villa with his other guests. Don Bosco found himself among eminent scholars and philosophers from near and far. At table there were some thirty guests, including Niccolò Tommaseo,[3] the poet and novelist Tommaso Grossi, Ruggiero Bonghi,[4] and Carlo Luigi Farini,[5] as well as sev-

[3] Niccolò Tommaseo (1802-74) authored several dictionaries, in addition to other writings on moral and political philosophy, literary criticism, poetry, biography, and history. [Editor]

[4] Ruggiero Bonghi (1826-95), a writer, political philosopher, and journalist. He founded *La Stampa,* the main Turin newspaper. From 1874 to 1876 he was Minister of Education. [Editor]

[5] Carlo Luigi Farini (1812-66), a statesman and historian. In 1850 he wrote his chief historical work, *Lo Stato Romano dal 1815 al 1850.* From October 1851 until May 1852 he was Minister of Education in the d'Azeglio cabinet. He became

eral others who were to play leading roles in the Italian revolutions. Farini had published his *Storia dello Stato Romano* [History of the Roman State] and seemed moderate in his judgments. Don Bosco had read the book, but he did not know the author personally and had no idea that he was present at the gathering.

At table, politics and religion were discussed, but the guests' opinions were somewhat questionable. Nearly all leaned toward liberalism in the true current sense of the word, criticizing the decisions of the Holy See while praising the government of those Italian states which had illegally curtailed the rights of the Church. Father Rosmini did not object to some of the political opinions expressed, but Don Bosco, who was deeply attached to the Holy See and particularly to the Pope, was deeply annoyed. However, he made no comment, since he was a guest among allegedly learned people. At one point the conversation turned to the new relations between Church and State in Piedmont. Rosmini's pamphlet, *La Costituzione Secondo la Giustizia Sociale* [The Constitution in the Light of Social Justice], which had been published in 1848 and put on the Index of Forbidden Books, was defended. The opinion was also expressed that the appointment of bishops should be left to committees composed of the clergy and laity. The discussion became so heated that soon all the guests were taking part. Don Bosco just sat there and looked disinterested. At one point, Father Rosmini, motioning to his guests to lower their voices and then to drop the subject altogether, said in a whisper to Bonghi, "Don Bosco is here!" But Bonghi, with youthful insolence, thinking that Don Bosco could not hear him, replied, "The fool doesn't understand a thing!" Don Bosco pretended not to hear the insult, but Father Rosmini, who disliked such talk and who appreciated Don Bosco's worth, felt hurt. Toward the end of the dinner the talk switched to Farini's *Storia dello Stato Romano* which had just then been published. Father Rosmini, noticing that Don Bosco had been silent throughout the meal, now called on him to express his opinion. Don Bosco gladly seized the opportunity. Without anger but very frankly, amid the general curiosity, he remarked that Farini's history did not deserve much praise be-

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Minister of the Interior in 1860 and premier in 1862, but resigned this post the following year. [Editor]

cause it contained historical inaccuracies and occasionally smeared the temporal power of the popes. His remarks showed that he was well acquainted with Farini's book. All the guests began to laugh at the unexpected criticism and nodded in approval, egging him on. Still unsuspecting, Don Bosco continued his analysis. He was not one to pussyfoot when the honor of the Church and the Pope was at stake. Farini, showing no emotion, kept silent while the rest of the guests were highly amused. We can imagine Don Bosco's surprise when finally someone asked, "Do you know Dr. Farini?"

"No, I don't."

"Here he is," he said and introduced him. Completely undismayed, Don Bosco greeted Farini courteously and asked him to excuse his frankness. Stating that he had no intention of offending him, he continued his critique and courteously pointed out several serious mistakes Farini had made in the chapter on Romagna.[6] Everyone expected Farini to be resentful and to speak up in angry rebuttal; instead, he seemed to welcome this sound criticism and thanked Don Bosco, saying, "It's obvious that you know the subject very well and that you are an expert on history; I like your frankness. No one has ever yet pointed out these things to me."

Father Rosmini himself was amazed at Don Bosco's boldness and, when they were alone, he exclaimed, "I would not have dared to say such things to Farini." Another of the guests, Niccolò Tommaseo, also expressed his admiration for Don Bosco. But, anxious to spend Sunday with his Oratory boys, Don Bosco returned to Turin by stagecoach at the end of the week.

Toward the end of September he set out for Castelnuovo. We must not forget that he had worked hard that year with his round-the-clock Latin lessons to [Joseph] Buzzetti, [Charles] Gastini, [James] Bellìa, and [Felix] Reviglio. Now he took them along to Becchi [7] for the feast of the Holy Rosary which he intended to celebrate with special solemnity in thanksgiving for the spiritual favors he had requested and obtained from the Pope.[8] He also wanted them

[6] A papal province in central Italy. In 1831 it rebelled against the Pope and with other territories formed the so-called United Italian Provinces. [Editor]

[7] Don Bosco's birthplace, not far from Castelnuovo d'Asti. [Editor]

[8] A lengthy footnote reporting Don Bosco's petition to the Holy Father for some indulgences has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

to enjoy a deserved vacation after the intense effort they had put into their studies. Several other pupils were also taken along.

On his way to and from Becchi, Don Bosco would frequently stop and chat with the people he met. After inquiring about the crops, he would always manage to inject some spiritual advice into his conversation with such remarks as, "How beautiful heaven must be! But it's not made for simpletons! Take heart!" Or, "How wonderful it will be to see God face to face!" He often asked, "Do you send your children to catechism class and to the sacraments? Put your trust in the Blessed Virgin. Shun sin if you want God to bless your crops!" His conversation was like a sermon, no matter what subject was being discussed. At Buttigliera everyone still recalls what Don Bosco said on some occasion or other.

From Becchi he never failed to write to Father John Borel, who took over the Oratory in his friend's absence.

Castelnuovo d'Asti, September 30, 1850

Dear Father:

Since Comba [9] is coming to Turin on several errands, I am sure you will be glad to receive some news from us.

In the five days I have been here I believe my health has improved considerably, though not perhaps in the same measure as in former years. *Senescimus annis* [10] [We grow old as the years slip by]. Savio is definitely over his fever; Reviglio also seems improved; all the others are well, except for the disturbance of an ever ravenous appetite. But we have good polenta here.

I am busily correcting a condensation of a history of the House of Savoy which the Marietti Press plans to reprint.

We did not have much chance to talk before I left, but please be a good paterfamilias to yours [11] and mine. If you need money, see Father Cafasso and he will give you what you need.

I think a trip to Castelnuovo would benefit you. It would also do me good to see you again. If you agree, also invite Father Vola, Father Carpano, Father Murialdo (who told me he would be glad to come from Moncalieri), and Father Ponte. As soon as you know the day and can

[9] An eighteen-year-old student. [Editor]

[10] From Ovid: *Tempora labuntur, tacitisque senescimus annis* (Time slips away and we grow old as the years silently slip by). *Fasti* 6:771. [Editor]

[11] Father Borel was chaplain at the Rifugio. [Editor]

arrange early train arrival, write to me, and I will send someone to meet you and perhaps give you a lift to spare you a long walk. "Behold, how good it is and how pleasant where brethren dwell as one!" [Ps. 132, 1]

Write to me about yourself, the Oratory, and the Rifugio. The Lord be with you. Please remember me to our friends at the Oratory. As ever,

Your friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. The authorization to give Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament reached me in ample time. Thank you.

While writing, I received your letter which tells me many things I was anxious to know about. Please keep an eye on one of our boarders, Joseph Rossi, the apprentice shoemaker, and on [John] Costantino. I have seen them roaming the streets of Turin instead of going to work.

Don Bosco had instructed Father Borel to see Father Cafasso in regard to money matters, but his needs must have been many since Don Bosco instructed his broker to sell some lots he owned at Valdocco. In fact, on October 6, 1850, a deed of sale was drawn up by the notary Turvano, assigning 409 square feet of land to Michael Nicco for 250 lire, 4,187 square feet to Marianne Franco, the widow of a man named Audagnotto, for 2,250.62 lire, and about 65 square feet to James Ferrero and Juvenal Mo for 16 lire.

At Castelnuovo Don Bosco first met a local boy named John Cagliero. The lad, who was then around twelve, was introduced to him by his pastor, Father Anthony Cinzano, as a prospective candidate for the Oratory and the priesthood. Cagliero, now a bishop,[12] has told us of that first meeting with Don Bosco. "The first impression Don Bosco made on me was that of an outstanding priest, a fact indicated by the kindly way he received me as well as by the honor and respect shown him by my pastor, my teachers, and the other priests. This impression was never erased or dimmed. Rather, it has grown stronger throughout the years I have lived at his side. After questioning me, Don Bosco agreed I could enter the Oratory during the coming year."

After accepting Cagliero, Don Bosco remained a while longer

[12] In 1904 he became an archbishop, and in 1915 was named a cardinal. He was the first Salesian in the hierarchy. He died on February 28, 1926. [Editor]

at Becchi, taking advantage of the time to close his deal with Father Rosmini in the following letter:

Castelnuovo d'Asti, October 25, 1850

Very Reverend Father:

Reasons of health prompted me to prolong my stay in the countryside for a few weeks. Now, however, I feel fine and hope to return to Turin tomorrow. In the meantime you may go ahead as regards the loan we discussed. I think that the guarantee can be either in the form of a mortgage on the building or by immediate testamentary instructions. I leave the final decision to you.

I must thank you again most cordially for the warm welcome and courtesy extended to me during my pleasant stay at Stresa. May the Lord keep you in good health and make your institute prosper. I am highly honored to remain,

Your most humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

There was a reply on the following day:

Stresa, October 26, 1850

Rev. and Dear Father John:

I am replying to your welcome letter of October 25 at the request of my superior, Father Rosmini, who sends you his warmest regards.

He is ready to give necessary instructions on the loan that has been agreed upon, but he would like you to commission a good architect to draw the plans of the building you intend to erect and to send a copy to him for his approval.

To simplify matters, twenty thousand lire will be paid to you in a lump sum when you sign the guarantee and the receipt. Part of the loan, if not needed, could be deposited in a savings bank at a rate of interest possibly higher than what you will pay us. Finally, Father Rosmini would prefer a guarantee by a mortgage on the land and building to be constructed, rather than by testament, to avoid paying the 10% inheritance tax for extraneous legacies, etc. . . .

Fr. Charles Gilardi

CHAPTER 14

Gain and Loss

DON BOSCO'S four Latin students [1] now seemed ready for the examination they had to pass for permission to don the clerical habit. Besides, Don Bosco badly needed their help in the oratories. He therefore wrote to his archbishop from Castelnuovo for the requisite authorization. Archbishop Fransoni's reply follows:

Lyons, October 23, 1850

Dear Don Bosco:

I regret I cannot grant your request to admit Felix Reviglio, James Bellìa, Joseph Buzzetti, and Charles Gastini to an off-schedule examination for permission to don the clerical habit. My predecessor established the custom of a single examination per year for all applicants; an exception would undermine this policy. On very rare occasions I have permitted a candidate to don the habit first and then take his examination at the scheduled time. I can do this also for your students, and I suppose you will find this satisfactory since in this way you will achieve your main purpose. Keep this letter as proof of authorization. In the meantime, please see to it that the candidates diligently continue their studies so that there may be no doubt as to the outcome of the examination.

Pray for me. With all my heart I am

Your devoted servant,

✠ Louis, *Archbishop of Turin*

Thankful for the archbishop's gracious gesture, Don Bosco, on his return to Turin, resumed his teaching until the end of the year.

[1] In late summer 1849 Don Bosco began teaching Latin to four of his young boarders to prepare them to don the cassock, help him with the other boys, and possibly become priests. *See* Vol. III, pp. 385ff, 402f. [Editor]

During the last fourteen months he had daily been giving his students five or six consecutive hours of class before noon. He thought it was now time to assign at least a private examination. He gave this task to Father Chiaves, doctor of theology, and to Father Matthew Picco, professor of rhetoric. After the examination both expressed amazement at Don Bosco's ability to train students so thoroughly in so short a time, and they declared that all four could unquestionably take their places with other philosophy students.

Don Bosco's satisfaction with the results was preceded by an appreciable gain and by a considerable loss. Young Michael Rua, as we know, had attended the spiritual retreat at Giaveno after graduating from the Christian Brothers' grammar school. During the year, Brother Michael, his teacher, impressed by Rua's intelligence, piety, amiability, prudence, and love of work, had suggested that he join the order. Rua, who thought highly of his teacher, welcomed the invitation and replied, "If you teach here next term, I'll follow your advice."

Rua lived in Valdocco, near the Oratory. His father, a vegetable farmer, was a devout Christian of the old school, and his mother was as zealous as Mamma Margaret in bringing her children up properly. Since the Oratory was so near, Michael Rua went there even on weekdays. When school closed, Don Bosco, aware of the boy's potentialities, asked him if he would like to become a priest.

"Oh, yes! Very much!" answered Michael. "Fine!" Don Bosco commented. "Then get ready for Latin!"

At this point Rua told him about Brother Michael's proposal and his own reply. On hearing this, Don Bosco said nothing further, but his suggestion had obviously made a deep impression on the boy. Meanwhile Divine Providence was directing events. Brother Michael was transferred to a distant school; Rua, thus released from his prior commitment, asked and obtained his parent's consent to follow Don Bosco's advice. In giving this joyful news to his spiritual father, Michael showed him all the monthly honor certificates for conduct and diligence he had earned in 1848-49 and 1849-50. Don Bosco was so pleased with them that he kept them himself until his death. They are now in our archives.

During the three-month summer vacation, Don Bosco had Father [Peter] Merla teach elementary Latin to Michael Rua and two other

boys, [John] Ferrero and [Dominic] Marchisio. After the feast of All Saints, unable to handle the class himself, he sent them to a private junior high school conducted by Professor Joseph Bonzanino who graciously admitted them. The professor had his classroom in a building belonging to the Pellico family, near San Francesco d'Assisi Square, in the very rooms where Silvio Pellico had written his book *Le Mie Prigioni.* In the evening Don Bosco coached his boys in grammar, taught them the metric system, and had them also do arithmetic problems. While Michael Rua stayed on for another year as a day student, another classmate, Angelo Savio, joined him as a boarder. Michael was a diligent student and made rapid progress, so that at the end of the scholastic year, 1850-51, he passed the examination of the first three years of high school with honor, much to his teachers' amazement.

Even at that time Don Bosco used to send Michael with Angelo Savio and others to his other two oratories at Borgo Vanchiglia and Porta Nuova to teach catechism, a practice that lasted for several years.

Don Bosco often called on Professor Bonzanino to check on the progress of his pupils. One day when Ascanio Savio and Michael Rua were en route to the St. Aloysius Oratory, Ascanio confided to his companion, "Don Bosco told me that Professor Bonzanino spoke of you in glowing terms. He also told me that he has great plans for you and that some day you'll be a great help to him." Michael Rua never forgot those words. In him Don Bosco had acquired a prize pupil.

At about the same time, however, Don Bosco was losing a dear friend. Canon Lawrence Gastaldi of the St. Lawrence Fathers in Turin, a great mission preacher, decided to resign his canonry and devote himself to a more austere life of study and prayer. A great admirer and disciple of Rosmini whose theories he defended in his writings, he was strongly drawn to the Institute of Charity. Renouncing comforts and honors, he therefore entered the novitiate at Stresa. Here, however, he gradually changed his philosophical views. At the termination of his novitiate his superiors relieved him of teaching philosophy and, at his request, sent him as a missionary to England. Here he was given permission to write for Italian news-

papers, provided that he steered clear of philosophical matters. In fact, the articles he sent to *L'Armonia* from England dealt exclusively with historical events. Zealous and intellectually gifted, Gastaldi soon became fluent in English and preached Catholicism to Anglicans for many years.

Yet he never forgot Don Bosco. Before leaving for Stresa and later for England, he told his mother, "I'm leaving you to follow my vocation, but you must not grieve. Resign yourself to God's will. Consider Don Bosco and his poor boys as sons in my place. Lavish on them the care you would give me, and you will greatly please me and find rich merit in the eyes of the Lord." The mother followed her son's advice to the letter. Despite her advanced age, she hardly let a day pass without going to the Oratory with her daughter and grandchild. She washed and mended the boys' linen and provided new clothes whenever necessary. To her last days she remained an outstanding benefactress of Don Bosco.

While Canon Gastaldi was eager for missionary life in England, Don Bosco with equal zeal was striving to preserve the faith in Italy. He wrote and published a new booklet, entitled *Maniera facile per imparare la Storia Sacra, ad uso del popolo cristiano* [A Popular Approach to Bible History]. Episodes of the Old and New Testaments were condensed in thirty chapters in dialogue form with questions and answers that were brief, clear, and to the point, making it easier for the reader to remember them. Don Bosco's Foreword follows:

> This bible history is for the use of the faithful, especially for those who, because of their work hours or limited education, cannot read more extensive or scholarly works.
>
> Its aim is to show that many truths professed by Catholics and denied by those outside the Church are contained in the Bible. This booklet is a condensed version of the bible history which I compiled some time ago and which is now used in many public schools. In its preparation I tried my best to follow the outlines of bible history contained in approved catechisms of different dioceses. I am convinced that our Faith will benefit from its use. I hope that all who read this book will endeavor to encourage its use in schools and families. May God bless all who labor for the welfare of souls, make them strong, courageous, and steadfast in the pursuit of truth, and grant them abundant favors for time and eternity.

In an attempt to convert Jews to the Faith, Don Bosco expounded the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and its fulfillment. To refute Protestant teachings, he discussed the Bible and Tradition as well as the government and marks of the true Church and of dissident sects. He assigned various dialogues to his boys for recitation at musico-literary entertainments. Here are a few samples of statements contained in the dialogues:

Jesus Christ Himself appointed St. Peter as head of the Church and His Vicar.

The Apostles and their successors recognized St. Peter as their head.

The popes are the successors of St. Peter and inherit his full authority.

Only the Catholic Church can give us an authentic explanation of the Bible and of Tradition, for Jesus Christ gave to her, and to no other Church, the infallible authority for the preservation of the Faith.

The popes have always condemned errors against the Faith, and true Christians have always respected their pronouncements as utterances of Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus Christ promised to assist His Church to the end of time.

The booklet also included a map of the Holy Land. Reprinted in 1855, it ran through seven more editions. We have lost count of the number of copies.

CHAPTER 15

Mamma Margaret

"HONOR your father and your mother," the Lord has said. [Ex. 20, 12] Don Bosco's love for his parents provided a wonderful example to the Oratory boys. He had hardly known his father,[1] yet he spoke of him often and lovingly and daily prayed for the repose of his soul. Ever solicitous for his mother, he showed her the greatest respect and gladdened her old age with filial piety. Without putting his love for her before his love for God, he helped her in every way possible, obeyed her, accepted her advice, and never took an important step without first talking it over with her. It pleased Don Bosco immensely to see how zealously she cooperated with him in the boys' welfare, acting as a mother to all of them. He always spoke of her with reverence, expressing gratitude for her untiring self-sacrifice and solicitude in raising him. He especially praised her for having taught him to love and serve God from his youngest years and for having imbued him with a deep horror of sin. Even in his last years, Don Bosco recalled his mother with fond tenderness, filial respect, and deep feeling. Humble as he was, he delighted in his lowly birth and he always spoke of Mamma Margaret as being a simple peasant woman. Nevertheless, he always showed her great respect in the presence of others, regardless of their social rank or distinction.

He wanted his boys to do likewise. If at times, through thoughtlessness or caprice, they were not sufficiently respectful, he would speak on obedience at the "Good Night," [2] saying, "I am director

[1] John Bosco was not quite two when his father died. *See* Vol. I, pp. 27f. [Editor]

[2] A short talk, immediately after night prayers, giving advice, exhortations, or occasional suggestions. It is a custom in Salesian houses throughout the world. For its origin, *see* Vol. III, pp. 88, 142. [Editor]

of this house, yet I obey and respect my mother. I expect you to do likewise!" At the same time, he reminded them how hard she worked on their behalf, enumerating all the things she did for them. He would remind them of their own mothers at home and repeat the words of Tobias, "Thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life. For thou must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee in her womb." (Tob. 4, 3-4)

While Don Bosco never missed a chance to honor her, Mamma Margaret on her part always rose to the occasion with delightful affability. Her name day fell in November and the boys kept it affectionately.[3] The evening before, Don Bosco himself would lead the boys to the kitchen so that they might present her with a bouquet of flowers. She would receive her well-wishers with a hearty smile, listening silently and calmly to the prose and poetry they recited in her honor. Afterward, she would thank all of them in a few words, "Well! Well! I thank you even if what I do is hardly worth mentioning. Don Bosco is the one who does everything. But I am grateful for your good wishes and the nice things you have said, and if Don Bosco has no objection, tomorrow I'll have something extra for you at dinner." With loud hurrahs that made the Oratory shake to the rafters the boys would then withdraw.

Mamma Margaret's words clearly showed how much she wanted to uphold her son before his boys as the one and only authority. Such humility endeared her to everyone. She was revered by all who knew her, even by those who met her only briefly at the Oratory. From the time she arrived at Valdocco, her neighbors, once they got to know her, never called her by any name save that of "Mamma." She treated everyone with gentleness and charity. It made no difference if the caller was a duke, a marquis, a wealthy banker, a cobbler, or a chimney sweep.

Whenever ladies and gentlemen of the Turin aristocracy or bishops (all benefactors of the house) came to see Don Bosco, they never failed to pay their respects to Mamma Margaret. Her genuine virtue, her simple ways, and her forthright common sense delighted

[3] In Italy, as in many other countries, the name day is observed with greater festivity than the birthday. It is a reminder that at Baptism, a spiritual birthday, a child is placed under the protection of a saint whose virtues he should imitate. [Editor]

them. The Oratory had no waiting room in those days, and if Don Bosco was out or otherwise occupied, the callers, not wishing to barge in or wait outside in the open air, would knock at Margaret's door, asking, "Mamma, may we come in?" The good woman, seated amid a few chairs piled high with clothes to be mended, would answer affably, "Come right in, gentlemen, and may God bless you." She would then clear a place for them and ask them to be seated. Even when her visitors were the most learned, educated, and prominent people of Turin, she never felt abashed or ill at ease in their company. Sometimes, with touching simplicity, she would say, "If you'll allow me, I'll finish my three Hail Marys. Then I will be all yours."

"Do, please do," the distinguished visitors would say smilingly, for they had come in just to savor her simplicity. When she was through with her prayers, Margaret would entertain her visitors. If the conversation lagged, she would again begin softly to recite other prayers.

The visitors often spent half an hour, sometimes whole hours, chatting with her and asking questions. They enjoyed hearing her opinions and the timely proverbs ever present on her lips. In their closeness to her they even occasionally consulted her on moral, historical, or political questions. Margaret never lost her composure or betrayed the least confusion, impatience, bashfulness, or embarrassment. Nor were her answers ever fatuous, presumptuous, or superficial. Her native common sense and her knowledge of the catechism often came to her aid. If they ever asked her something beyond her understanding, she would reply with some quip or proverb about her own ignorance, or tell about something she had either seen or heard, or that had happened to her. This pleased her visitors immensely since they had deliberately steered the conversation to such topics to see how cleverly this simple peasant woman, with no formal education, would manage to extricate herself. And Margaret would laugh heartily along with them. We must also remark that this good woman could remain even-tempered under all circumstances, even when laughed at, provoked by disrespectful words, or thwarted in her plans.

She was deeply and unswervingly grateful to the benefactors of her son and the Oratory. She wanted to repay their charity, but felt

unable to do so adequately. Her words of regret for her inability to match their acts of kindness were heartfelt. With her gentle manners she tried to do all she could to please them. If she thought her visitors might like some refreshment, she promptly offered them a cup of coffee. If her guests declined or demurred, she would insist so engagingly and persuasively that they would finally accept. She would then be satisfied and happily begin to prepare it.

If priests chanced to drop in around noon, she could think of nothing nicer than to invite them to lunch, repeating, with her usual cordiality, "I would have prepared something better if I had known you were coming, but please stay anyway. My son will be delighted." To please her and to have a chance to talk at leisure with Don Bosco, the priests would occasionally accept. If they were from town, however, they would often go home for another meal, and if from out-of-town, they might look for a restaurant, for in those days the Oratory fare was even more austere than that of monks.

However, Mamma Margaret would prepare some pleasant surprise for those whom she regarded as—and who indeed were—the emissaries of Divine Providence. Whenever she received the first-fruits of the season from Becchi, or whenever her son Joseph brought her a rabbit or some venison, she delighted in making a gift of it to the families of benefactors. Above all, she kept the promise which she often made to them: "I'll pray to God that he will repay you on our behalf and grant you all the blessings you deserve."

These contacts with upper-class persons in no way altered her outlook and habits. Taking her cue from the lifelong privations suffered by Our Lord, she would often say, "I was born poor and I want to live and die poor."

Now and then she would repay a visit and call at the homes of benefactors, where she was always warmly received. Even on these occasions she always dressed in peasant's garb, since she never consented to buy or use expensive materials. "These people know I'm poor," Mamma Margaret would say, "so they'll forgive the coarseness of my clothes." Needless to say, though poor and coarse, her clothes were spotlessly clean.

As time went by, however, her dress, though spotless, would become faded and be little more than a quiltwork of patches. One

day Don Bosco suggested, "Mamma, why don't you buy yourself another dress? You've been wearing that one for years!"

"Well now! What's wrong with it?"

"What's wrong with it? It's not even halfway decent anymore. It's terribly shabby. Count [Louis] Giriodi and Marchioness [Mary] Fassati often call on you and it's not right to receive them in that dress. Street sweepers wear better clothes!"

"How do you expect me to buy a new dress without money?"

"True, we have no money, but, rather than see you going about in rags, we'll do without wine or a main dish so that you can buy yourself one."

"If you think so, we'll do just that."

"How much would a dress cost?"

"Twenty lire!"

"Here!"

Margaret took the money and went about her chores. A week passed, two weeks, a whole month went by, and Margaret was still wearing the same dress. At last Don Bosco asked, "Mamma, what about the new dress?"

"Oh yes! You're right! But how can I buy one if I haven't got a penny?"

"What about the twenty lire?"

"Oh, I've spent that already. I needed salt, sugar, onions, and other things. Then I saw a boy who didn't have shoes, so I just had to buy him a pair. There was still some change left over, so I bought a pair of trousers for so-and-so, and a tie for someone else."

"Well, you did right, I suppose, but I can't bear to see you dressed like that. It reflects on me!"

"I'm sorry to hear that, but what can I do?"

"I'll give you another twenty lire, but this time I must insist that you spend it on yourself."

"I promise, if it will make you happy."

"Here's the money. But remember, for once I want to see you in a suitable dress."

"Don't worry, son!"

But it was the same thing again; the money went to buy things for the boys. One day a benefactress gave her a very wide and beau-

tiful silk mantilla. After examining it carefully, Margaret remarked to Father Giacomelli's [4] sister: "What shall I do with this rich cloth? A poor peasant woman like me would look silly dressed in silk! I don't want to make a fool of myself!" So, reaching for her scissors, she cut it into several pieces and made waistcoats for some of the young boarders.

When Don Bosco began boarding seminarians and priests in the house, he improved the meals for their sake. Margaret could have partaken of that food, but instead she chose to continue as before and have some cold polenta, a pepper or onion, or a few radishes seasoned with salt. She was perfectly satisfied with this Spartan fare. "The poor don't always have food to eat," she would often say, "but I have, so I can consider myself quite rich."

Sometimes a distinguished visitor, perhaps a bishop or a pastor, would open a rich snuffbox and offer her a pinch of snuff, but she always refused, with thanks.

"Don't you think it might do you good, after you sit here hour after hour working so hard?" the visitor insisted.

"I can't afford snuff. I have to buy socks for the boys," she would reply.

"Well then, I'll give you the whole thing," the guest would say, offering her his snuffbox.

"You're very kind, but as you know, habits are expensive, and we're poor."

However, despite the great poverty of her home she was scrupulously just in giving everyone his due and was always sensitively alert to everyone's needs. One day she went shopping for sewing articles with the young Giacomelli girl at a store opposite the Corpus Domini Church. On her way back with her purchases, she counted her change and found an error of three or four lire in her favor. She was very upset, and when she reached the Oratory she told the girl, "Please go back to the store at once and see if the clerk made a mistake, but be sure to talk privately to him and don't let his boss hear you."

The girl did exactly as she was told, and upon finding that indeed there had been an error, she returned the money. The clerk was

[4] Fr. John Giacomelli had been a fellow seminarian of Don Bosco. [Editor]

amazed and asked for the person who had been so thoughtful as to send her back.

"Don Bosco's mother," the girl replied.

"Well thank her very much for me. I'd have been in trouble if you had spoken to the boss. He would have fired me at once and I'd be without a job. Please thank this good lady and tell her that if she will do her shopping here I'll give her the best of service."

All the above we learned from Father Ascanio Savio, Charles Tomatis, Joseph Buzzetti,[5] and, above all, from Don Bosco himself.

[5] A Salesian coadjutor brother of the early years. *See* Vol. II, pp. 72, 236, 240, 396, 411. [Editor]

CHAPTER 16

Priestly Zeal

DON BOSCO emulated Mamma Margaret's sterling virtues and practiced them to a heroic degree. For this reason people in trouble felt drawn to Don Bosco with a boundless trust. He was so well-known in Turin for his solicitude toward the sick and dying that not only boys attending the oratories, but other people as well, when they were seriously ill, would often send for him to hear their confession. Their families looked forward to his coming because they knew he would comfort their loved ones and, if necessary, gently and reassuringly persuade them to receive Holy Viaticum. With his living Faith he also saw to it that they received the Anointing of the Sick and the papal blessing, thus preparing them for a truly Christian death. Father [Michael] Rua stated that his faith and solicitude were often rewarded by the recovery of the sick person to whom he had just given the Last Sacraments.

He also had a wonderful way of dispelling the anxieties of some devout souls who, on the threshold of death, felt great trepidation about the pains of purgatory. He spoke so convincingly of the value of merits gained by indulgences, by resignation in their suffering, by the generous offering of their life to God, and by perfect contrition that he filled them with confidence in God's mercy. In addition he would assure them that many Masses would be said for them and that he himself would pray and have others pray for them. If at times this did not suffice to comfort and reassure them, Don Bosco in his great charity would assure them that he would take it upon himself to expiate at least partially whatever was due to Divine Justice. Once in fact he was afflicted with an agonizing toothache which gave him no peace day or night for a whole week. When Father Rua asked him how it had come about, Don Bosco confided

that in order to console a dying man he had promised to take upon himself the sufferings he would have to undergo in purgatory.

Such goodness and tact in performing his sacred ministry drew people to call on him when their ailing relatives or friends obstinately refused to make, or kept putting off, their reconciliation with God. They sent for him in preference to any other priest because they were convinced that he would be able to change the attitude of the sick person and help him to a peaceful death. To a remarkable degree Don Bosco possessed what St. Paul called "gifts of healing." [1 Cor. 12, 28]

A Turin lawyer who was a parishioner of St. Augustine's fell sick one day; shortly thereafter, particularly because of his advanced age, his condition became critical. The man had lived practically like an atheist, abhorring anything connected with religion. As soon as the pastor was apprized of his condition, he called upon him and did everything possible to arouse some Christian sentiment in him and induce him to make his confession. All his efforts were in vain; in fact, he was curtly turned away. Other zealous priests visited him and tried their best, but again without success, and those who persisted were rudely dismissed. The sick man kept repeating that he would have nothing to do with priests or confession, and he finally warned his family not to allow any other priest to come near him for any reason whatsoever.

There was no hope for his conversion; yet, undaunted priestly charity tried again. Father Robert Murialdo, one of those who had approached the sick man, came to the Oratory one morning to ask Don Bosco to attempt to save that soul. Don Bosco willingly promised to do so. After trying in vain to invent some pretext for calling on the man, he started out for the man's house, still not knowing how he would go about it. On his way he stepped inside the church of Our Lady of Consolation to invoke the Blessed Virgin's help. Then he went directly to the lawyer's home. He walked into the building and climbed the stairs to the man's apartment without the remotest idea of how to introduce himself and wondering about the reception awaiting him. Unexpectedly a boy who frequented the Oratory emerged from a corridor. As soon as he saw Don Bosco, he shouted, "Father! Father! How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you," answered Don Bosco. "Do you live here?"

"Yes, I do. Come and meet my mother. Mamma, Mamma, Don Bosco is here!"

Don Bosco followed the boy and was introduced to his mother, who had opened the door to invite him in.

They sat down and chatted for a while, and then suddenly the boy said, "Don Bosco, do you know there's a very sick man in this building?"

"Oh, yes? How is he?" asked Don Bosco, feigning ignorance.

"Pretty bad! You'd better see him."

"I'd like to, but would he want to see me? It would be good to find out first. I don't want to call on him at the wrong time. Why don't you go and ask him? Just tell him this: 'Don Bosco came to see my mother. We told him you were sick. If it's all right with you, he would like to pay you a visit.' "

"I'll go at once," said the boy.

He ran to the man's apartment and through the various rooms until he reached the lawyer's bedside. Totally unconcerned about the members of the household, he said to him, "Mister, Don Bosco paid a visit to my family, and we told him about you. Before leaving he would like to say hello to you. Could he drop in? He can give you his blessing and cure you. I know of lots of people who were sick and who got well again after Don Bosco blessed them."

"Who is this Don Bosco?" the old lawyer asked.

"He's the priest who runs the Oratory in Valdocco," replied the boy. "He even takes a lot of poor boys into his house and gives them food and shelter. He also finds jobs for them."

"Oh yes, I know who Don Bosco is," the sick man said. Then, after a moment's deliberation, he continued, "All right, tell him to come."

The boy ran back immediately to tell Don Bosco, who without further ado went to the lawyer's bedside. As soon as the man saw him, he greeted him graciously: "I'm glad to see you, Don Bosco. It was kind of you to take this trouble."

"Oh, it was no trouble at all," replied Don Bosco. Then laughingly he added: "Tell me. Do I look like an honest fellow?"

"Oh, I guess I can take a chance on that," the lawyer answered smilingly.

"Well then, here is an honest question: What is a strong and brave man like you doing in bed?"

"Oh, I'm not as I used to be . . . but please sit down."

"Never mind, I'll only be here for a few moments."

"No, no, please sit down or I'll feel uncomfortable."

Don Bosco obliged and began chatting with him about politics, law, medicine, war, and philosophy, steering completely clear of confession. He never objected to the lawyer's point of view and so impressed him with his wide knowledge that at the end the lawyer remarked in amazement, "You're like a walking encyclopedia!"

Almost an hour had gone by. Don Bosco rose as if to say good-bye but the man objected, "You're not leaving yet? Please stay longer if you can."

"I have to go home now to take care of a couple of things," Don Bosco replied. "I'm sorry I can't stay any longer."

"Oh, please stay a bit longer."

"No, I really must go. But if it's all right with you, I'd like to drop in again."

"Do, please do!"

The old lawyer grasped Don Bosco's hand and held it fast. Don Bosco exhorted him to keep his spirits up, bade him good-bye, and once more made a move to leave. But the man, without saying a word, did not let go of his hand and kept looking at him. Thereupon Don Bosco smilingly said, "I know what you want."

"You do? Tell me!"

"You want me to give you my blessing."

Amazed, the old lawyer exclaimed: "That's true! But how could you have guessed? I haven't been able to stand the sight of a priest for the past thirty-five years; and now, when for the first time such a thought comes into my head, you guess it immediately! By all means, give me your blessing."

"Gladly; and what shall we ask of God?"

"That I recover."

"I regret to tell you this, but what if it should have been decided up there that you have reached the end of the line?"

"What makes you think so? The doctors tell me that I'm getting better, that I'm to take heart because I'll soon be well again!"

"Well, I also tell you to take heart," Don Bosco rejoined with great gentleness, "but your fate has already been decided. You will not recover. There is nothing I can do to reverse that, but I can give you my blessing. I will ask the Lord to allow you time to settle matters with your conscience and to put your soul in the state of grace so that you may die a holy death!"

These words did not make a great impression on the sick man; he seemed almost indifferent. Nevertheless, he received the blessing, and before Don Bosco left, he said with feeling, "Don't forget to come and see me again!"

A servant came to the Oratory about four or five hours later and told Don Bosco that the lawyer wanted very much to see him. It was now nearly dark, but Don Bosco went anyway. The lawyer beamed when he saw him and said, "I couldn't wait to see you again! This morning you cheered me up, and that did me a lot of good."

"This morning was nothing; we'll have even more fun now. But first let me ask you: Is it true that you serve only the best coffee? I'd like to verify that rumor!"

"By all means," the gratified lawyer replied.

Immediately he sent for coffee. Although coffee was more of a penance than a treat for Don Bosco, he drank it. Then, turning to the other members of the household, he said, "Would you please excuse us now? We have something to discuss."

When he was alone with the patient, Don Bosco sat close to him and gave him the blessing preparatory to confession.

"The Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may properly confess all your sins." But the old lawyer did not understand, nor did he make the Sign of the Cross. Instead, he asked, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing; just make the Sign of the Cross."

"Why?"

"Don't ask why; just do as I tell you."

"Are you trying to get me to make my confession?"

"Forget about confession now. Just make the Sign of the Cross. Don't tell me that you, a lawyer, don't even know how!"

"Of course I know!"

"Let's see then. Seeing is believing!"

"All right. Look!" And he crossed himself.

Don Bosco then made use of his special gift of insight into the spiritual condition of penitents.

"Tell me," he went on, "how long is it since you last went to confession?"

"So you *do* want me to make my confession!"

"Let's not talk about that now; leave everything to me. You know what I promised you, and I mean to keep my word. Just listen. It's so many years (and he gave the number) since your last confession, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I want you to know I have no intention of making my confession!"

"Who ever mentioned that?" Don Bosco replied. Meanwhile he was continuing with the patient's life story. "During those years things were going this way and that, weren't they? And you were in such and such a condition." Everything he said was amazingly exact.

"Precisely. It looks like you know my whole life story!"

"And afterward, when this and that happened, you did such and such a thing, right?"

"That's true; and I regret it. I wish I hadn't done that."

Thus Don Bosco recited all the man's sins. As Don Bosco was laying before him one sin after another, the old lawyer became more and more moved and remorseful, and he exclaimed, "I regret that. I'm truly ashamed. I really did a great deal of wrong!" At each expression of repentance, Don Bosco pressed his hand and said, "Take heart!" These words, however, seemed to intensify the patient's remorse, and each time Don Bosco repeated them, the lawyer's feelings were stirred even further and tears would form in his eyes. By the end of his confession, overcome by sincere remorse, he was crying like a child. After Don Bosco gave him absolution, he exclaimed, "Don Bosco, you have saved me! I had absolutely no intention of making a confession, no matter what! There was no idiocy I would have stopped at rather than yield on this point, but you knew just how to handle me. You won! My thanks to you. Now I would go

to confession a thousand times. My heart is torn by sorrow; yet I experience a happiness I never tasted before or would have believed possible. Please bring me Holy Viaticum."

Just then two or three friends of his who certainly would have tried to undo Don Bosco's work knocked at his door. When Don Bosco heard of their arrival, he asked the sick man, "Should visitors come, may we say that you are not to be disturbed and ask them to return tomorrow?"

"Yes, that's a good idea," answered the old lawyer.

This was done, and the visitors departed quietly, saying they would be back the next day. Then Don Bosco left him while he filled the members of his family with joy by telling them how Don Bosco had brought him back to God.

Next morning he received Holy Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick. When his old irreligious friends were ushered in and informed of this, they made fun of him for having yielded to the pressures of a priest. But the sick man, to whom Don Bosco had suggested what to say in just such a case, firmly replied, "Things look quite different when one is dying, and soon it will be your turn too. Death is not the end of everything; there is a hell beyond death, and I am not such a fool as to jump into it. You can say what you please; he laughs best who laughs last. You claim not to believe in it; all right, but there are many people who do. You are not logical at all! Even if hell were doubtful, wouldn't it be smarter to play safe? Why laugh at me? You should be laughed at!"

His friends did not know what to reply to this. After exchanging a few more words, they left. The patient lasted another week, during which he received a comforting visit every day from Don Bosco. He thanked Don Bosco with his dying breath.

On another occasion, a distinguished lady called on Don Bosco at Valdocco, entreating him to see a man who was critically ill. He was a prominent politician of high rank in a secret society. He had steadfastly refused to be visited by a priest, making threats if any of them would dare to approach his bedside. It was only with the greatest difficulty that he had been persuaded to admit Don Bosco, who, full of trust in God and the protection of the Virgin Mary, went to see him. The moment he was inside the room and had closed the door, the man summoned all his remaining strength and said

rudely: "It's only to please someone I love and respect that I consented to let you in. Are you here as a friend or as a priest? I have no use for any make-believe or tomfoolery. Woe betide you if you so much as mention the word 'confession.' " So saying, he seized two pistols which were lying on either side of his pillow, and he aimed them at Don Bosco, saying, "Remember, the moment you talk about confession, the first shot will be for you; the second one will be for me, since I have only a few days left to live anyhow."

Unperturbed and smiling, Don Bosco told him to relax, since he had no intention of mentioning confession without his express permission. Instead, he asked him about his illness, the doctors' reports, and the treatments prescribed.

Don Bosco's ways were so charming, interesting, and comforting that he never wearied his listeners; indeed, he could soften even the most obdurate individuals and evoke a sympathetic and trustful response. With educated people he followed a special tack which often was very successful. He would bring the subject around to some interesting contemporary event, and then compare it with some episode in the past centering on the life of some unbeliever well-known for his evil deeds or writings. His presentation of this information was so made as to elicit questions. In describing how the person under discussion had died outwardly unrepentant, he would conclude: "Some say that he was damned; but I don't agree with that, and I don't think it's justified, because I know that God's mercy is infinite, and that He does not reveal His secrets to men."

Don Bosco had taken this approach with this particular man. Surprised and visibly moved, the man exclaimed: "Do you really think there is hope even for him?"

"And why not?" Briefly and persuasively Don Bosco proved to him how God readily forgives even the most heinous sins if one is truly repentant and that the gravest sin of all is to lack confidence in His mercy.

For a time the man seemed absorbed in thought; then he held out his hand, saying, "If that's how it is, please hear my confession!"

Don Bosco prepared him and heard his confession. As soon as the patient received absolution, he told Don Bosco with tears of joy that he had never before experienced or believed such happiness was possible. He willingly complied with all that the Church pre-

scribed in cases of membership in secret societies. He was then informed that two grim-looking men had come to see him and stood waiting in the living room like two prison guards. They were fellow members of his lodge. The sick man had them brought to his bedside, and as soon as they appeared, he shouted at them, "I want you to leave my house at once."

"You know what the agreement is," they replied. The man then pulled one of the pistols out of the bedside table, waved it at the men, and said, "I had prepared this for a priest, but now it's for you if you don't get out of here right away."

"In that case, we'll go," the intruders answered, casting a threatening look at Don Bosco as they hastily made for the door.

Next day Holy Viaticum was brought to the patient. He called in his family, and after publicly asking their pardon for the scandal he had given them, he received Our Lord. Afterward he regained considerable strength and lived for another two or three months. He spent this time in prayer, often asking pardon of those who came to visit him, and receiving Communion several times, to the great edification of his immediate family and circle of friends.

This conversion, however, put Don Bosco in a serious predicament. Shortly before his death the man had handed over to him the certificates and insignia of his rank in the lodge and membership lists which he had until then safely deposited elsewhere. Don Bosco read the names and was aghast; many of them passed for good Catholics but later on would play decisive roles in the Italian revolutionary uprisings. Among them were priests from other dioceses who had taken up residence in Turin. Don Bosco immediately sent for Joseph Buzzetti, whom he greatly trusted, for he had given proof he could guard a secret. (Up to 1849 Buzzetti had been working as a bricklayer's apprentice but he was now finishing his studies and spent his free time helping Mamma Margaret with the housework and taking care of the infirmary. He was also Don Bosco's treasurer, so to speak. Once Don Bosco, forgetting that he had already given him a scudo for some purchase, handed him another, but Buzzetti asked him, "Why two?" His honesty and dependability were proverbial.) Don Bosco instructed him to make two copies of those documents, burn one of them, and hide the other with the originals in some place known only to him; Don Bosco himself was not to be

told of the hiding place. He wanted to play for time while asking advice from his ecclesiastical superiors. He had thought it best that a copy, rather than the original, be delivered to the chancery, to prevent possible reprisals and vexations against the chancery in those difficult days.

Meanwhile some agents, sent by their leaders, had gone to the house of the deceased as soon as he had died to appropriate the compromising documents. After searching in vain for them everywhere, they guessed who might have them. They called on Don Bosco that same day, and at first courteously, but then in sterner tones, demanded that he hand over the papers. Don Bosco tried to parry their demands, looking for pretexts to put them off. Finally he admitted that he had seen the papers but had no idea where they might be. Fortunately some visitors arrived just at that moment and he begged to be excused. Muttering threats against him, they left.

He hastened to the chancery for instructions. Just as he had foreseen, the two men returned a few hours later, this time openly threatening him. Don Bosco retorted by challenging their right to papers given him by a friend whose trust he did not feel authorized to violate. He added that those papers were rather unimportant anyway since they contained only names.

Believing that Don Bosco had not grasped the nature of the documents, the two men breathed easier. They courteously pointed out that if those names were ever made public the disclosure could bring dishonor and harm to the individuals concerned and to their families.

Don Bosco allowed himself to be persuaded and returned the original documents. At the same time, taking them up on their own words, he pointed out to them the evil path upon which they had ventured and the dangers to their own spiritual welfare and that of society itself.

They let him talk, stammered some lame excuses, and left. They returned to the Oratory a third time. After some introductory remarks they asked him point-blank if he had any copies of the documents. They also let him understand that they had ways and means of avenging themselves.

Don Bosco replied frankly that he had no copies. It was true; the only extant copy had been delivered to the chancery. The agents

were not satisfied. Since they insisted, Don Bosco admitted that one copy had been made but had been deliberately burned and that therefore they had no reason whatsoever for concern. There had been no fear in his replies.

The two agents were already on their way out when suddenly they came back into his office and asked him to swear secrecy. Don Bosco showed himself offended that they would believe him capable of doing harm to anyone and absolutely refused. He did, however, promise that no one would ever hear from him anything which might compromise them. The matter should seemingly have ended there.

Instead, something happened later which we cannot positively consider an aftermath of this conversation. One night that same year, while Don Bosco was walking across a dark stretch of Piazza Castello, two unidentified men followed him closely and then lunged at him with drawn daggers. Fortunately, at that very moment a certain Mr. Rolando happened to be passing by with a friend. To him we owe this account which he gave to Father Michael Rua. Suspicious about those two men, Mr. Rolando and his friend watched them. Seeing them attack Don Bosco, they ran to his aid and, brandishing their stout walking sticks, put the assailants to flight.

CHAPTER 17

A Jubilee Mission

WITH each passing day Don Bosco's life became richer with new undertakings and merits. Toward the end of 1850 he was preparing to journey to Milan to preach the jubilee proclaimed by Pius IX in reparation for the great spiritual harm wrought by partisan hatreds, wars, and rebellions. The invitation had been extended by Father Seraphim Allievi, director of the St. Aloysius Oratory located in Via Santa Cristina. This very successful oratory had been founded for the purpose of imparting a Christian education to the poorest and most neglected boys of the city and keeping them off the streets. Don Bosco was eagerly awaited by Father Blaise Verri who resided with Father Seraphim. Father Verri was an unassuming priest, pious and zealous in preaching and hearing confessions. He had many priestly and religious vocations to his credit and was a great friend of Don Bosco whose virtues he knew from personal experience.[1]

The invitation had been extended with the full approval of Archbishop [Bartholomew Charles] Romilli. Moreover, the pastor of St. Simplician,[2] the parish church of the St. Aloysius Oratory, had not only approved the idea but had in his turn extended a personal invitation to Don Bosco in the hope of availing himself of his priestly ministry for his own parishioners.

Don Bosco gladly agreed to make the trip and took the necessary steps: permission from his ecclesiastical superior, from the civil au-

[1] In 1849 Father Verri had been a frequent guest of Don Bosco in Valdocco. *See* Vol. III, pp. 399ff. [Editor]

[2] St. Simplician, as bishop of Milan, was instrumental in the conversion of St. Augustine. [Editor]

thorities, and from the Austrian embassy. His passport contains the following data: age, 35; height, 5′4″; hair, dark brown; forehead, medium; eyebrows, dark brown; eyes, brown; face, oval; complexion, olive; profession, elementary school teacher. Before leaving for Milan, however, Don Bosco wanted to give his support to certain measures that sought to counter false religious teachings.

What God wanted of him had always been clear in his mind ever since he had started his oratories. Even at that time he had given much thought to the help that Catholic laymen could give to bishops and priests, provided that they were trained to participate in the defense of a Christian society. Many were not to grasp the significance of this concept until later. He also realized the importance of an association which would unite his benefactors in the pursuit of his aims. He was then toying with the idea of starting, on a small scale and cautiously, an association whose members later were to be known as "Salesian Cooperators." The following document describes what Don Bosco had in mind.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Turin, November 17, 1850, 8 P.M.

The abuses of a free press in matters religious and the sacrilegious war being waged by many apostate Christians against the Church and her ministers have prompted the undersigned laymen to issue this solemn declaration. Fearful that the true Faith may be supplanted in Piedmont by Protestantism, we have, with the approval of five learned priests who are among the more eminent and zealous members of the clergy in this capital, adopted the following resolutions:

1. To form a provisional pious union under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales. This saint has been chosen because of the similarity between present conditions in our country and those in Savoy during his times. By his enlightened zeal, prudent preaching, and boundless charity, St. Francis de Sales freed Savoy from the errors of Protestantism.

2. This provisional pious society shall be the nucleus of a larger association, which, through the contributions of all members and through all other available lawful means, shall sponsor such educational, moral, and material undertakings as may be considered most opportune and

effective in checking the spread of irreligion, and, if possible, in eradicating irreligion wherever it may have already taken root.

3. This provisional union, society, or association, whatever it may ultimately be called, shall be run by laymen to forestall certain prejudiced persons from calling it, in their modish jargon, "a priestly front." Nevertheless, this society will welcome those zealous priests who wish to favor it with their advice and assistance in keeping with its spirit and purpose.

4. Since this society is a moral body, those present have agreed to accept its various responsibilities as follows:

1st Promoter: Joseph Maria Bognier
2nd Promoter: Dominic Roggieri
3rd Promoter: Dominic Donna
4th Promoter: Peter Battistolo
5th Promoter: Leander Bognier
6th Promoter: John Baptist Gilardi
7th Promoter: Amadeus Bosso

Mr. Joseph Bognier shall also act as secretary, and Mr. Dominic Roggieri as treasurer of the society.

A first contribution of five lire made by those present was handed over to the treasurer with the stipulation that it be spent only in conformity with the society's rules.

5. All the promoters, with the addition of Mr. Joseph Borel who came in after the opening of the meeting, pledge themselves to work assiduously to enlist as many new members as possible, while taking all due precautions to exclude non-practicing Catholics, those of dubious orthodoxy, or the overzealous.

6. Another meeting shall be held next Sunday at a time and place to be determined and announced by the first promoter. At this meeting new members will be admitted.

7. During the week Mr. Bognier will submit a copy of this document to prominent laymen and clergymen considered inclined toward our aims and will invite them to join. Should they demur, he shall not insist.

Signed by:

Joseph Bognier
Dominic Roggieri
Dominic Donna
John Baptist Gilardi
Leander Bognier
Joseph Borel
Peter Battistolo

There followed the signatures of the other members, a list of voluntary contributions, and this instruction:

INSTRUCTION

Our society should be first presented as something necessary, and then as something feasible, according to the reaction of the listener. Should he demur, the matter should be dropped, no matter how good the person in question may be. The answers received and the remarks of prospective members are to be reported for the information of the society.

If some applicant should wish to remain anonymous, he shall be listed only under his initial or with the word "benefactor."

Perhaps three categories of membership could be set up: members, friends, and benefactors. Members should be told about their monthly dues of twenty soldi besides the initial offering; all others are free to make a small voluntary contribution each week.

This matter settled, Don Bosco left Turin on November 28 at two in the afternoon. Traveling nonstop by way of Novara and Magenta, he arrived in Milan on the next day at about eleven after a very uncomfortable journey.

Trouble was still brewing. In the aftermath of the "Cinque Giornate," [3] Milan still seemed to be hovering over a small volcano. The liberals and the revolutionaries were still concentrating all their efforts on Lombardy, waiting for an opportunity to drive the Austrians out again. The latter were equally watchful; knowing almost all the plans and attempts of the revolutionaries, they had redoubled their vigilance. From time to time mass arrests and the infliction of harsh penalties for treason sowed terror among the citizenry. The Austrian police kept a wary eye even on the clergy, fearing that allusions to the recently-quelled insurrection might be made from the pulpit. Meanwhile, afraid of government reprisals, pastors hesitated to begin missions in preparation for the jubilee, lest the large gatherings in the churches might occasion political outbursts or provoke suspicion and repressive measures. Indeed, preachers mounted pulpits with great trepidation, since any misinterpreted utterance could easily plunge them into deep trouble.

[3] The "Five Days" of March 18-22, 1848, when the Milanese rose in revolt against the Austrians and drove them out. The effort, however, was premature; the Austrians returned a few months later. [Editor]

In Milan Don Bosco was the guest of Father Seraphim Allievi and Father Blaise Verri. As soon as he arrived, he sent word to the pastor of St. Simplician that he was ready to start the mission in the parish church. But the pastor, perhaps at the request of timid advisers, had changed his mind. He told Don Bosco that it was one thing to preach privately, so to speak, at the St. Aloysius Oratory, and quite another to preach to a large congregation in a public church. He therefore would not permit the mission to begin until the archbishop had been consulted. "Oh, I'll see to that immediately!" replied Don Bosco. At once he went to the archbishop's residence.

The prelate, who was well-liked at the Viennese court, did not refuse permission, but he did try to dissuade Don Bosco from his plans. However, seeing Don Bosco's fearlessness, he added: "I am not forbidding you to preach, Father, but remember, you will be entirely on your own. If you get into trouble, I deny all responsibility. You know we are living in dangerous times."

"Don't worry," Don Bosco replied. "I shall preach as they used to five hundred years ago."

"Do as you think best," concluded the archbishop. "If you feel that bold, go ahead and preach. I am neither ordering you nor advising you to do so, but I willingly grant you permission. Remember, though, that no matter how prudent you may be, you can never be prudent enough."

So Don Bosco began to preach at St. Simplician. At his first sermon an inquisitive and anxious crowd filled the church. The revolutionary fever was at such a high pitch that it seemed impossible that the subject could be ignored even in a sermon. But what the crowd expected and what they heard were totally different things. Don Bosco preached exactly as any preacher would have done centuries earlier: his sermon was a frank and solicitous exhortation to sinners to repent. What he had to say about self-reform he said clearly, without regard for anyone's sensibilities. He totally ignored the ferment that filled the hearts of his listeners and that kept the government jittery. He avoided comparisons with past happenings, no matter how ancient, that could even remotely hint at contemporary events. In a word, Don Bosco conducted himself as if political troubles did not exist or had never existed. The authorities

found no reason for even the slightest objection because all his sermons were about death, judgment, hell, heaven, and the manner of making one's confession and receiving Holy Communion.

The Milanese were suprised. Don Bosco's style resembled that of St. Alphonsus Liguori. We still have Don Bosco's sermon outlines written in his own hand; they help us understand how his words were always so effective. He spoke slowly, letting his words sink into the hearts of his audience. As a sample, we present the introduction of his sermon on the Last Judgment.

How long, O sinners, will you abuse God's goodness? How long will you continue to offend Him? The companions you have scandalized already cry out for vengeance. The cry is taken up by the churches in which you committed so many acts of irreverence; by the sacraments that you have profaned by so many sacrileges; by the sun, the moon, and the stars, all witnesses of your revolt against their Creator; by the very earth which you have made the theater of your iniquities. The very angels clamor to avenge your insults against their God. How long will you abuse the patience of your most merciful Lord? Are you perhaps unwilling to change your way of life? Do you not tremble before the sword of heavenly justice, already drawn and ready to strike you down? Well then, go on blaspheming His holy name, go on speaking ill of our holy Faith and its ministers, go on speaking evil of your neighbor, indulging in obscene conversation, profaning holy days, crucifying our loving Jesus anew on the hard wood of the cross. Go on, because your time is running out. Eternity is drawing near; it is imminent; thunderbolts already flash in the sky, ready to strike you; the tribunal where the Divine Judge shall sit is being prepared. Do not deceive yourselves; do not hope for unmerited salvation; the arm of the Lord is already stretched out, and you have no way to escape it. I await you before the judgment seat where we must all appear to render a very strict account of our life, of all that we have done, whether good or bad. . . ."

Don Bosco's politics were those of eternity. It was amusing to watch certain moustached men lurking in various parts of the church, on the lookout for some utterance against the government. Even among them there were some who from time to time could not refrain from wiping away a tear, terrified at the thought of Divine Justice and hell.

While still busy preaching two sermons a day at St. Simplician, Don Bosco on December 2, the Monday of the first week in Advent, began preaching a three-day retreat to the several hundred boys that Father Seraphim had gathered at the St. Aloysius Oratory.

It was only natural that Don Bosco, who had so won the hearts of his own boys in Valdocco, should become equally beloved by the youngsters of Milan. We ourselves heard Father Seraphim testify to this years later.

We still have Don Bosco's own notes of these sermons to the boys. His opening talk was a parable. A mother sends her two sons on a journey and gives each of them a companion. She gives them instructions on how to safely reach a distant city and bring to their waiting father a treasure that she entrusts to them. After various adventures the two boys meet an evil person who tries to induce them to make light of their mother's instructions. One boy adheres to her advice and succeeds; the other disregards it. Don Bosco then drew a parallel. We are the two sons; the mother is the Church; our companions, our Guardian Angels; the journey, our life here on earth; the distant city, heaven; the father awaiting us, God; the evil person, the devil; the great treasure, our soul. From this fundamental theme he developed his discussion about the end of man, the salvation of one's soul, scandal, death and the uncertainty of its hour, confession, and paradise.

At the closing of the retreat he gave them substantially the same parting advice he had given the boys at Giaveno: [4] make the Exercise for a Happy Death every month.

Meanwhile, several pastors, encouraged by the fact that his sermons at St. Simplician had not only caused no trouble but even had done great spiritual good, now invited him to preach in their churches. Don Bosco willingly obliged and preached at Santa Maria Nuova, at St. Charles, at St. Aloysius, and at St. Eustorgius. Some days he preached in only one church, at other times even in five different churches on the same day. Father Louis Rocca [5] heard this from his relatives and passed the information on to us.

While he was preaching a triduum in St. Rocco's church, the

[4] *See* p. 82. [Editor]
[5] A distinguished Salesian. [Editor]

Barnabites (some of whom he had known at Moncalieri [6]) invited him to preach a spiritual retreat at Monza. Monza was linked to Milan by the only railway line in Lombardy. Don Bosco would leave Milan at 10:30 in the morning, preach at Monza, and by 1 P.M. he was back in Milan.

A vast number of people came to make their confession to him. One day, as he was on his way to his crowded confessional, a young man caught hold of his cassock and, pulling him into a pew in the middle of the church (which was rather dark at the hour because the drapes were drawn over the windows), said, "Please hear my confession here!" Don Bosco obliged. At the end of his confession the young man rose from his knees and said, "You sound exactly like a priest I used to go to when I was in Turin years ago."

"What if I were that same priest?" Don Bosco asked.

"You are Don Bosco!" exclaimed the young man, staring at him.

"Indeed I am!" he answered. The young man was so moved at this unexpected meeting that he broke into tears.

Don Bosco's mission, far from arousing the animosity of anyone, won him the goodwill of many Austrian soldiers and officers. He made good use of what little German he had learned in 1846 [7] to suggest some spiritual thought to them. By now other priests, encouraged by his example, had resumed preaching, for which the archbishop later expressed his gratitude to Don Bosco.

After eighteen days in Milan, Don Bosco returned to Turin by way of Magenta and Novara. As usual, while en route he heard the confession of the coachman, and, during a stopover, that of a stableboy. As was also his custom, he delighted the innkeepers with his impromptu sermons and invitations to think seriously about the state of their souls. Michael Rua and Angelo Savio were waiting for him at the Barriera di Milano depot.

After his return to Turin, his first thought was to thank the Blessed Virgin for all the graces She had bestowed on the Oratory. This was a traditional practice, a family custom, so to speak, dating back to 1842.

[6] A small town in the hills overlooking Turin. It is now within the metropolitan area. [Editor]

[7] At that time there were several Germans serving in the Piedmontese army, and their families resided in Turin. Don Bosco began studying German to provide for their spiritual needs. *See* Vol. II, pp. 216f. [Editor]

Ever since then it was his custom to give a talk to his spiritual sons on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Originally the talk was given to the boys, then to the catechists, later on to his young clerics, and finally to the Salesians, as his congregation developed and each group gradually acquired more importance. If at times he was prevented from doing so on that feast day, unfailingly he would get around to it before the year was over.

However, during this year [1850], something spectacular had happened in Italy that served to fan even more in his boys the flames of love for their heavenly Mother. There was in the church of St. Clare in Rimini a picture of the Virgin under the title of "Queen Mother of Mercy." Three pious women had been kneeling before it in prayer at dusk on May 11, when to their great wonder they saw the image move its eyes, at times raising them toward heaven; a slight change of color was also noticeable on the face of the Virgin. The news spread like wildfire, and crowds soon flocked to the altar. This striking phenomenon continued for nearly eight months before thousands and thousands of witnesses. The whole city began to lead a truly Christian life and to receive the sacraments frequently. Countless favors were obtained. The findings of a rigorous diocesan investigation were approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, which also authorized a special Mass and Office. The Pope donated a golden crown, and in November of that same year the church, beautifully restored in the form of a Latin cross, was solemnly rededicated. This new glory of the Blessed Mother and the sweet joys of the Christmas festivities brought the year to a close.

CHAPTER 18

Love of Penance

DON BOSCO'S virtues were as impressive as his undertakings. He patterned his life on that of our Divine Savior, crucifying his passions and natural inclinations. This was also the program of self-denial he held up to his pupils, constantly pointing out to them that he who wishes to rejoice with Jesus Christ in heaven must first learn to suffer with Him on earth. He frequently counseled his boys to practice temperance in eating, drinking, and sleeping lest they become favorite targets of the devil. He always saw to it that the food was adequate and wholesome, especially for growing boys, but he banned all that was merely superfluous. He would not tolerate complaints about the cook or about the food which he himself ate; yet, if anyone required special food for his health, Don Bosco gladly provided it. He exhorted all to avoid gluttony or eating hastily, reminding them of the maxim, *Prima digestio fit in ore* [Digestion starts in your mouth]. Wine [1] was served to the clerics [2] in great moderation, for he believed water to be a far better and healthier drink. He often stressed temperance in drinking, frequently quoting the scriptural warning, "In wine is debauchery." [Cf. Ephes. 5, 18] He was constantly on the lookout for those who savored the taste of wine or drank heady wine undiluted on those rare times it was served (usually on a solemn feast day or when there were distinguished guests). These were the things he stressed. He also strongly exhorted his boys never to nap in bed in the afternoon; [3]

[1] The common beverage at meals in Italy and other countries. [Editor]

[2] Thus were called those who had donned the clerical habit and were studying for the priesthood. [Editor]

[3] A scriptural quotation from the Vulgate *ab incursu et demonio meridiano* (Ps. 90, 6) has been omitted because it is no longer apropos in the new Confraternity version. [Editor]

he allowed them a brief rest during the summer months in the study hall or classroom by letting them lean their arms and head on the desks for some thirty or forty-five minutes.

Don Bosco used to say, "A boy who is moderate in eating, drinking, and sleeping will be upright, diligent, generous, and thoroughly good, but one who overeats or oversleeps will gradually acquire every vice. He will become careless, lazy, and restless; everything will go ill with him. Gluttony has been the ruin of many a boy. Youth and wine are highly flammable. Wine and chastity can never go together."

His words were all the more persuasive because he practiced what he preached. However, he was so careful to conceal his heroic spirit of penance that it was not readily noticeable even to the very many outsiders who had known him for years but were not close to him. This, of course, is another tribute to his virtue.

Even those who were constantly at his side realized his heroic selflessness only after long, careful observation, for he was always jovial and cheerful. From the start of his work with youth to the end of his life his co-workers were in a position to notice his every action. Day and night, inside and outside the Oratory, they were ever present and, at times, importune. They numbered into the thousands. From many of them we learned what we are about to narrate. Our main contributors are the following: Joseph Buzzetti from 1841, Ascanio Savio from 1848, Michael Rua from 1852, John Cagliero, Francis Cerruti, John Bonetti, and Joachim Berto, who was his personal private secretary and personal confidant from 1864 to 1888.

From the very beginning of the Oratory there were critics of Don Bosco who were quick to interpret certain actions of his in an unfavorable light; countless times, however, after an objective analysis, they had to admit their error. We are indebted to Joseph Brosio for the following incident which occurred in 1850.

Among the older day boys at the Oratory there were many overly fond of criticism. They found fault with the most trivial things and gossiped about them not only among themselves but also with outsiders. Because of a certain ailment of his, Don Bosco, contrary to practice, ate soup at supper on fast days. Now one Holy Thursday, after performing the cere-

mony of the Washing of the Feet, Don Bosco invited the thirteen boys representing the Apostles to supper. That year I represented St. Paul. We boys were served a large meatless dish. As usual, Mamma Margaret brought Don Bosco his bowl of meatless soup. Immediately one of the boys nudged his companion and said within my hearing, "Look! Don Bosco is eating soup tonight and it's a fast day!" I wanted Don Bosco to give this zealot a good lesson, so I said aloud to Mamma Margaret, "Mamma! You've made a mistake. It's a fast day and you've given Don Bosco soup. Don't you know it's not allowed?" Everybody at the table smiled. Don Bosco's mother and her sister [4] tried to explain that the soup was seasoned only with salt and was hardly appetizing. Don Bosco said nothing. Since I wanted him to speak up, I pretended I was not convinced and kept it up. Don Bosco must have guessed what I had in mind. He pointed out that there could be reasons for being dispensed from the law. For example, he had a weak stomach and, moreover, had heard confessions for many hours. He spoke so pathetically about the whole thing that the boy who had blundered into this criticism could not hold back his tears. After that I never heard anyone criticize what was done at the Oratory.

We shall now cite episodes and testimonies on Don Bosco's spirit of mortification. They span a number of years.

Our first witness is Ascanio Savio, the first student to don the clerical habit at the Oratory. He states:

I never saw Don Bosco perform any unusual act of penance. But, in my opinion, in his ordinary day-to-day life as a priest he appeared to be extraordinary. I cannot say whether he wore a hair shirt, scourged himself, or practiced prolonged fasts and other self-denials, but he surely mortified himself so diligently and constantly in every detail of life, yet with such ease and delight, as to match the most austere monk or most rigid penitent. His ailments, his round-the-clock labors, his worries, setbacks, and persecutions were crosses borne patiently every day, indeed every hour. I am firmly convinced that he spent whole nights in praying, writing books, studying, attending to his correspondence, and planning his works in prayerful consultation with God.

[4] In 1824 when John Bosco was only nine, his aunt Marianne Occhiena, housekeeper of Father Joseph Lacqua, chaplain at Capriglio, prevailed upon the chaplain to give free lessons to her young nephew. (*See* Vol. I, p. 75.) When Father Lacqua died at a ripe old age, she went to Valdocco to help care for Don Bosco's youngsters. She remained there until her death in 1857. [Editor]

Father Michael Rua declared:

Don Bosco once confided to me that up to the age of fifty he had never slept more than five hours a night, and that once a week he would spend the entire night at his desk. Until 1866, I always saw a light in his room well after midnight. From 1866 to 1871 he began permitting himself six hours of sleep, but continued a night's vigil each week. In summer he usually rose at three in the morning and retired at 11:30 at night. His secretary, Father [Joachim] Berto, whose room adjoined Don Bosco's, can attest to this. After his illness at Varazze in 1872, he reluctantly faced up to the fact that henceforth he had to sleep seven hours nightly and give up his weekly vigil. But this did not prevent him from going back to his old schedule occasionally.

John Bisio [5] has told us the following: "From 1864 to 1871 it was my chore to tidy his room and I often found his bed untouched. When I chided him for not having gone to bed, his excuse was that he was behind in his work."

Even in the harshest winters he always rose with the others, at 5 or 5:30 at the first sound of the house bell. His bed was quite plain and, almost to the end of his life, stood in the same room where he received visitors. In the weakness of his last years he refused assistance even though he found it hard to dress himself. As the boys filed into church he was already in his confessional. He heard confessions every day, before and during the community Mass, as long as his strength permitted. It was only in the last years of his life that he prolonged his nightly rest to please his spiritual sons.

If dawn found him still at his desk he would interrupt his work to go for his boys' confessions and then return to his desk after Mass. Unless other more urgent duties intervened, he promptly got down to the routine work awaiting him with the utmost concentration, sacrificing everything for his boys. "During the winter months," Bisio recalled, "he used to start work without first warming himself. It was beyond me how he managed to hold a pen in his hand and write in an ice-cold room. But I never heard him complain either of the cold or of the heat, nor for that matter of anything else."

For many years his breakfast consisted of a small cup of coffee to which he would add a few drops of milk when he did not feel

[5] A pupil and later a lifetime Salesian cooperator. [Editor]

well. The coffee was not genuine either; it was mixed with chicory and the brew was hardly a treat. On rare occasions he dunked a piece of dry bread, but so little as certainly not to be a breach of even a fast day. Later, he gave this up too. He scrupulously observed the abstinence prescribed by the Church and fasted every Saturday. Later, in writing a rule for his Salesians, he transferred the fast to Fridays.

At noon he would usually be still giving audiences (his greatest penance, as we shall see) and would consequently arrive very late in the dining room. On his way he was often buttonholed by people who wanted to speak to him; at times some would indiscreetly detain him at length. Don Bosco would listen with admirable patience and calm and then do his best to satisfy them. If his secretary somewhat nervously tried to remonstrate with more importunate visitors, Don Bosco would ask him not to mind but to let everyone see him. He would grieve if they had to leave unsatisfied.

When he finally got to the dining room, if his usual table companions had already left, he would eat surrounded by the boys, who would crowd and press about him, deafening him with their chatter, raising dust, and jarring nerves. But he did not mind. In fact he loved it, so much did he have the welfare of his boys at heart.

Bishop John Cagliero, one of the group, has given us this description.

> Don Bosco's meals were always very frugal, if not downright meager. As a boy I was present at his meals in 1852 and 1853. He ate the same soup and bread served to us; the main dish which Mamma Margaret prepared for him generally consisted of vegetables, sometimes mixed with tiny pieces of meat or an egg; sometimes it was only pumpkin with a little seasoning. The same dish, warmed up, would be served again at supper and often for several days in a row; if it happened to be an apple tart, it might last even as far into the week as Thursday.

Such is the witness of Bishop Cagliero. Don Bosco never fussed over the meals his mother served him. He had made his own the maxim of St. Francis de Sales, "Request nothing, refuse nothing," as well as St. Paul's advice, "Eat whatever is set before you." [1 Cor. 10, 27]

Later on, however, for the sake of those living with him, he added

fruit or cheese to the fare. In 1855, when several priests took up residence at the Oratory, an additional dish was served at dinner, usually some cooked vegetables or salad. If polenta with gravy or some other condiment was served in place of soup, it was also the main dish. Moreover, Don Bosco would ask the cook to avoid serving spicy foods, seemingly out of consideration for morality.

Don Bosco generally preferred potatoes, turnips, and vegetables, provided they were well-cooked, because they were easier for him to digest, even if tasteless. One of his favorite maxims was, "Man should eat to live, not live to eat." Now and then his young clerics tried to have something more suitable for his health served to him, but he would always have the prefect [6] tell the cook not to do so. He seemed to be totally indifferent to the quality or seasoning of foods; the tastier dishes were the ones he least partook of. He was never heard to complain of food. Occasionally someone would pour himself some soup from the same tureen out of which Don Bosco had served himself, only to push it aside in disgust after the first mouthful while Don Bosco ate without a sign of repugnance. Sometimes he was served eggs or other food which was beginning to go bad, but he ate it without seeming to notice. It was his policy never to say, "I like this," or "I don't like that." But when the soup happened to be tastier than usual, because of the broth or seasoning, he was often seen to pour water into it with the excuse that it was too hot. Even mere bread gave him a chance to practice self-denial and likewise promote thrift. He formed a kind of club, called "The Bread Left-Overs Club," whose members would use up left-overs before helping themselves to fresh bread. Don Bosco led them by his example.

He ate so frugally that we were amazed how he could stand his arduous tasks. He hardly ate enough to keep himself alive. One day [years later], when we asked him why he had kept such a meager diet, he humbly replied, "With all my work, especially mental work, I would never have lasted this long had I done otherwise." He followed this regimen until the end of his life. Often he deprived himself of even this little. Joseph Buzzetti, who took note of even his most insignificant actions, told us that sometimes, when a guest

[6] The superior entrusted with the administration of temporal affairs. [Editor]

showed up unexpectedly and all portions had already been served, Don Bosco would deftly and unassumingly give his dish to the guest as if he had previously decided to pass it up.

In drink, too, Don Bosco was a model of temperance. What little wine he took for reasons of health, as St. Paul says, was so diluted with water that it could hardly be called wine any longer. Up to 1858 and even later, his wine cellar was partly stocked with samples and left-overs from the market which City Hall sent almost weekly to the Oratory; red and white, sweet and dry, were mixed together; sometimes even good wine was mixed with sour. Don Bosco drank the mixture. And yet he came from a region renowned for its excellent wines. Often he forgot to drink, taken up by quite different thoughts, and his table companions would have to pour wine into his glass. If the wine was good, he then would instantly reach for water to dilute it and "make it even better," as he would say. With a smile he would add, "I've renounced the world and the devil, but not the p*u*mps." [7] He drank only one glass at each meal.

Bishop John Bertagna who knew him intimately had this to say: "Don Bosco was a rare model of temperance; he never indulged his taste. Indeed I would think that he could have had more regard for himself and others in this respect."

Don Bosco longed for the ideal he had conceived. Around 1860 he had to improve the fare for the sake of those living with him. Then he ate what was set before him without any fuss, but he was often heard to exclaim: "I had hoped that everyone in my house would be satisfied with just bread and soup and maybe a dish of vegetables. I see that I was unrealistic. My ideal was to found a congregation which, at my death, would be a model of frugality. Now I am convinced that it was simply not feasible. Countless reasons gradually forced me to adopt the fare of other religious orders: soup, two courses, and dessert. Even the Holy See would have withheld approval if I had imposed too austere a fare. Yet even now I still think that one could live as I did in the early days of the Oratory."

Incredible as it may seem, during the first decade of the Oratory, according to Father John Turchi, there were people in Turin who said that Don Bosco only talked of being poor and in truth kept a

[7] The pun Don Bosco intended is perfect in the original Italian since the word *pompe* means both "pomps" and "pumps." [Editor]

rather lavish table. Some even went so far as to say—not without some malice—that "Don Bosco keeps his boys on a lean diet but takes good care of himself." A few decided to find out for themselves. Father Stellardi was a guest one day at the home of Count Agliano. At dinner the conversation eventually turned to the subject of Don Bosco. The priest remarked that Don Bosco's meals befitted people who had lots of money. Some guests agreed, but others did not; while some maintained that Don Bosco's fare was frugal, others countered that it was lavish. To end the discussion, Father Stellardi offered to call on Don Bosco unannounced at mealtime. With some pretext or other he one day appeared at the Oratory shortly before noon. After a brief talk with Don Bosco, he asked if he might stay for lunch since he could not get back to Superga on time. "You're welcome!" replied Don Bosco, "but first let me tell my mother you are doing us this honor, because at the moment we are in no way prepared to do you justice, nor can we match your table."

"Please, don't. I'll be quite happy with what's on the table."

Don Bosco tried to insist, but Father Stellardi prevailed, and both went to the dining room. Don Bosco turned to his mother with the words, "Look, Father Stellardi is our guest today."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner? I could have prepared something better," Margaret complained.

"This is the way he wants it," replied Don Bosco, smiling.

"Right!" said Father Stellardi. "What's good enough for Don Bosco is good enough for me."

"Very well then," Mamma Margaret replied, and she started to serve them. The soup was a mixture of rice, chestnuts, and corn flour. Don Bosco ate with relish, but the guest, after sampling one spoonful, unobtrusively pushed it aside, saying, "I think I'll just have the main dish."

It was codfish seasoned with cheap olive oil. Don Bosco went on eating, but as soon as Father Stellardi got a whiff of the oil, he made a wry face and left his food untouched. The young clerics at the same table could hardly keep from giggling, and later told us about it. The second course was a dish of boiled cardoons seasoned with salt; for dessert there was a slice of fresh cheese. The guest could not bring himself to eat a thing. As soon as he left the Oratory he

went straight to Count Agliano, saying, "For heaven's sake, give me something to eat. I'm starved!" Then he told them of his disastrous experience, to everyone's amusement. Count Agliano, who knew Don Bosco, had been laughing all the while, for he had foreseen the disillusionment of this priest who was something of a gourmet. Thus Father Stellardi became convinced (and spread the news far and wide) that Don Bosco's table was far from lavish.

One day another prominent priest, Father Caesar Ronzini, a canon of the cathedral, came to the Oratory. He too suspected there might be some truth in what people said of Don Bosco's table, although he did not think it likely. Don Bosco invited him to stay for lunch. The canon demurred at first, but finally accepted. It was the usual modest, frugal fare: boiled beef and cabbage. Don Bosco, however, had served some hors d'oeuvres in honor of his guest. The canon appreciated the gesture, and upon taking his leave said, "I had heard that you kept a good table, but now I know that things are quite different." Then, with tears in his eyes, he added, "Don Bosco, I'm glad, very glad!"

Years later, Don Bosco permitted a little more meat to be served at supper also for the sake of some who were rather sickly. Moreover, those who gave all their energy to study and to the hardships of the priestly ministry, as well as those who came from well-to-do families to join Don Bosco, needed more meat. Experience dictated the change. Don Bosco was aware that several priests and laymen who had come to live with him at the Oratory, after trying it out for several months, had finally given up because they could not adapt to such an austere life and had applied to another religious order. However, the same soup and bread served to the boys continued to be served also to Don Bosco and the other superiors.

Nevertheless, on occasion we heard him deplore the need of serving meat at two meals, because, as he said, it could foment concupiscence. At the same time he unwittingly revealed his spirit of penance by saying that he had always refrained from eating meat because he feared the rebellion of concupiscence. Then, with an expression of wonderment on his face, he added, "Perhaps others are not as sensitive as I and don't have to take the same precautions!"

In reality Don Bosco generally abstained from meat. He even seemed to have a distaste for it and tried to avoid it by alleging that

he could not chew properly. But he shied from drawing attention to himself and occasionally accepted meat if it was offered to him. On being asked his preference, his stock reply was: "The smallest piece!" But even then he always left some on his plate. He never seasoned, even with salt, the little meat he did eat. It was only in the last years of his life that, under his doctor's insistent orders, he ate meat more often than he had previously done.

After lunch he would sometimes doze off for a few minutes at table, worn out from insomnia or nights spent in writing or wrestling with diabolic vexations, as he once confided to Bishop Cagliero and to his intimates. But even during such a brief nap he sat upright in his armless chair, his head bowed on his chest. Those present would then tiptoe out of the dining room so as not to awaken him. But not even once did he go to his room to lie down at this hour, not even in his last years. The afternoon was the most burdensome part of his day, for he usually went to town to visit his benefactors, attend to business, and seek support for his many undertakings. Drowsy for lack of sleep, he would ask some boy who knew Turin well to accompany him. He would tell him, "Take me to this or that street, but look out for me because I may easily doze off and stumble." Then leaning on the boy's arm, he would walk half asleep, as though the motion of walking and the semblance of sleep could banish the fatigue of a sleepless night.

Once, after a few sleepless nights, he went out alone and was surprised to find himself in the tiny Consolata Square, hardly knowing where he was and where he wanted to go. A shoemaker, who had his shop nearby, came up to him and solicitously asked him if anything was wrong.

"No," Don Bosco replied, "but I am very sleepy."

"Then come to my house; you can nap there and later go about your business." Don Bosco accepted the offer, entered the shoemaker's tiny shop, sat at a little table, and slept from half past two to five. Upon awakening he chided the shoemaker for not waking him up. "Dear Father," the good man replied, "you looked so worn-out and you were sleeping so soundly up against that wall that I felt pity for you, thinking of all the hard work you must have been doing."

Sometimes he would suddenly feel faint with fatigue. He would

then go into a store and ask the owner for permission to rest there awhile. If the shopkeeper knew Don Bosco, he would unhesitatingly offer him a chair. If he was a stranger, Don Bosco would frankly tell him he was not there to buy anything and would ask, "Would you kindly let me rest awhile on a chair?" Invariably he was invited to make himself comfortable and he would doze instantly. Meanwhile, customers came and went, rather surprised at seeing a priest sleeping on the premises. After a few minutes he would feel refreshed and take his leave after thanking the storekeeper. Invariably he was also asked, "Excuse me, but what is your name, Father?"

"I am Don Bosco!"

"Why didn't you tell me? May I offer you a cup of coffee or a drink?" Such incidents became a favorite topic of conversation among Turin's shopkeepers.

Outside of meals, Don Bosco never took any nourishment, except during the last years of his life when, on his doctor's orders, he drank a little vermouth before meals to aid his digestion. The vermouth was a gift of Father Carpano's family. He would never purchase it or ask for it when they forgot to give it to him. At this time he took a cup of camomile tea when it was offered to him during his long hours in the confessional. During the day, though worn-out by long audiences and very thirsty because of an oral inflammation, he never asked even for water; if at times his secretary Father [Joachim] Berto brought him water out of pity and begged him to drink at least to please him, Don Bosco would take only a sip or two with the excuse that more would make him perspire. John Bisio told us that he never saw him take refreshment. Once on a torridly hot day, when John brought him a glass of iced lemonade, Don Bosco refused it graciously, saying, "No, drink it yourself!" He never kept wine, liqueurs, or cordials in his room. Donations he would send to the pantry or to the infirmary, or else he would set them aside as gifts for his benefactors. Now and then he exhorted his young pupils, clerics, and priests not to keep such beverages inasmuch as they were potentially harmful. He never tired of repeating such exhortations, and he would punish transgressors. When his hosts pressed him to take a glass of wine, he declined it under the pretext that it gave him a headache or with some such excuse. He wanted all afternoon snacks of wine, fruits, or other foods abolished at the Oratory on the grounds that *venter pinguis non gignit mentem*

tenuem [8] [a full stomach does not produce a keen mind]. He himself never took a snack either at the Oratory or elsewhere when invited, whether he was alone or with his boys. If he was alone, which was seldom the case, he limited himself to useful conversation with his hosts; if he was with his boys, he was quite happy to see them treated to refreshments at the host's pleasure. However, he himself tasted nothing, alleging that he had to look after them. At most, yielding to persistent requests, he would take a few drops of wine, diluted with water, so as not to appear unappreciative. "In all the years I lived with him," Father [Michael] Rua recalls, "I remember having seen him only once eating between meals; it was a bunch of grapes at vintage time. He did so mainly to please his boys, whom he had taken on an outing to the countryside for the express purpose of enjoying the vintage."

He never talked about food or drink; by word and example he discouraged his boys from indulging in such talk. He relished equally his frugal meals at the Oratory and the banquets which he at times was obliged to attend. It was obvious that he considered eating a mere necessity. Not even a semblance of self-indulgence could be seen in him. While eating he also avoided immoderate haste. His table companions of many years can testify that during meals he seemed lost in thought, hardly aware of what food was being served. Sometimes, even if asked a moment after leaving the table, he did not know whether he had eaten the main dish and could not tell what it had been.

Don Bosco controlled his sense of taste to such a point that he had almost deadened it. One evening, at the close of a spiritual retreat in a village parish, he finished hearing confessions somewhat later than usual. The pastor and the rest of the household had already retired. Feeling hungry, Don Bosco went into the kitchen. By the light of a little lamp he searched to see if they had left him a bowl of soup, and he spotted a small pot on the stove over the hot cinders. He took it, found a spoon, and ate what he thought was some kind of gruel of fine wheat flour. Next morning the housekeeper was quite peeved at not finding the starch which she had prepared for ironing. Suspicious, the pastor asked Don Bosco about it and was flabbergasted to discover what had happened. He often

[8] Possibly a variation of Erasmus' *Venter obesus non gignit mentem subtilem.* [Editor]

mentioned this incident later to his friends, citing it as an example of Don Bosco's remarkable spirit of mortification.

Far from ever indulging his taste, Don Bosco, like the saints, seemed to feel a certain repugnance to have to sit down to a meal. Often he acted as though humiliated. "How demeaning is our need for food," he would say. Frequently he repeated, "There are two things I would like to do without: sleeping and eating."

Often he had to be reminded of his mealtime; several times he did not know whether he had lunched or not. This occurred particularly if he went to town in the morning; then he would return at about two in the afternoon and go straight to his desk. Margaret, believing he had already lunched, would clear the table and let the fire go out. Toward four o'clock, he would feel rather weak and dizzy; his blurred vision would cause him to wonder what had happened. He would pace his room and try to shake off his giddiness, but feeling still dizzier, he would call his mother.

"Do you need something?" Margaret would ask from the doorway.

"I feel weak; my head's spinning."

"Where did you lunch today?"

"What a question! Right here! Don't you remember?"

"You certainly did not eat here! I'm sure of that!"

"Then where did I have lunch?"

"You didn't, obviously! Since you weren't home at noon I kept the soup hot for you until two o'clock. Then I thought you'd lunched elsewhere."

"No wonder I feel so weak!" Don Bosco would reply. Laughing, Mamma Margaret would then light the fire and get him something.

Father Reviglio, while a pastor in Turin, visited the Oratory one day just as Don Bosco was dining alone at about five in the afternoon, after many hours at his desk. He was eating some poorly prepared beans out of a tin bowl. At this sight the priest felt a pang at his heart.

At supper he ate even less than at noon, practicing what he recommended to his boys—namely, keeping a light stomach in the evening.[9] Often, especially on Saturdays, on the eve of important

[9] In several European countries the main meal is at noon. The evening meal is taken around eight o'clock. [Editor]

feast days, and on the occasion of the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, he was necessarily late for supper. As long as his mother was alive, his food was kept warm, and on some rare occasion the fare would be slightly better than usual. "Once," Father Ascanio Savio remembers, "Margaret, noticing her son's utter exhaustion, beat the yoke of an egg into the soup she had made for him. But when he saw that I was also very tired, he insisted on sharing it with me." After his mother died, the cook who took over was not that solicitous. Once he saved Don Bosco some soup cooked four hours previously. Don Bosco ate it uncomplainingly even though it had turned into an oversalted paste. The main dish, consisting of fried vegetables or boiled chards, was not only unappetizing but inedible. It had been overcooked and a crust had formed on the bottom of the pan. We still recall that, showing himself quite satisfied, he began breaking the crust, scraping and eating it. Meanwhile he continued to converse about interesting matters with some of his young clerics or priests who had stayed up to keep him company, without hinting in the least to the arduous work he had been doing, although it was quite visible in his exhausted appearance. They would have liked to see him take something more appetizing, but Don Bosco refused preferential treatment. At his order the cook had already gone to bed and the fire in the kitchen had died out.

If a priest or cleric offered to get him something better suited to his weak stomach he invariably answered, "The soup which the boys ate and this dish will be enough for me," or "If this dish was good enough for the others, it's good enough for me." He adamantly refused anything else, despite his long hours in the confessional and the fact that next day a late Mass and sermon would keep him from eating anything until eleven or noon.

The last to retire to his room at night, he would first walk through the dormitories, giving some instructions for the smooth running of the house, or a talk to his young clerics. When he was finally alone, he absorbed himself in thoughts of God that left him lost in amazement. He himself told us:

> During the years 1850-52, on Saturdays, after my usual work and hearing confessions, I would tell amusing stories to the boys who had served as waiters at supper, or to the young clerics after night prayers. Then,

at about eleven, I would go up to my room. Walking along the balcony I would stop and gaze at the boundless expanse of the firmament. I would seek out the Great Bear as a point of reference and then gaze at the moon, the planets, and the stars. While admiring their beauty and immensity, their number, and the unbelievable distance of each from the earth, I would become lost in thought. I would start thinking of the nebulas and beyond, reflecting that even the last particle of a nebula, as well as each of its millions of stars, could afford a view in all directions as magnificent as the one we can have here on earth on a clear evening. I would feel giddy. The universe seemed such an immense, divine achievement overwhelming me and I had to withdraw quickly to my room. . . .

(*The boys had been listening with bated breath, wondering what Don Bosco would say next. After a brief pause, he continued,* "and dive into bed." *The boys laughed at this anticlimax while Don Bosco concluded:*)

Only in the darkness of the tiny recess under the blankets did I seem not so puny and contemptible.

Don Bosco was so impressed by the wonders and expanses of the heavens that he loved to talk of them with his friends. He enjoyed dwelling on the fantastic distance of the stars nearest to or farthest from the earth, yet still visible, and on their immense size. He took pleasure in calculating the tens of millions of years we would need to reach certain stars even traveling at the speed of light. "The human mind is lost and cannot grasp even faintly the immensity of the universe. How overwhelming the omnipotence of God!"

It was with such sublime thoughts that he would retire to his room. However, he would still delay his night's rest until overcome by exhaustion. Often he would fall on the bed fully dressed and not awaken until morning. Often, too, he was tormented by insomnia and spent his few sleeping hours in praying or in mulling over projects and devising ways and means to carry them out.

In his room he conducted himself just as in public. Several times his secretary, who slept in an adjacent room, hearing cries and fearing that Don Bosco might be ill, dashed into his room. He always found him asleep, lying flat on the bed, his head slightly raised and his hands clasped on his breast, looking so composed as to resemble a saint's body kept in a crystal case for the veneration of the faithful. We ourselves, along with many others, can testify to this.

CHAPTER 19

Love of Penance (Continued)

DON BOSCO'S bearing always reflected great modesty and mortification. In kneeling, his body did not sag; when seated, he never crossed his legs or settled comfortably against the back of his chair or sofa; if he was not writing, his hands were clasped against his chest, fingers interlaced. Except when seriously ill, he would not seek a more comfortable position. When he sat down his demeanor was so dignified as to evoke respect. Countless times, day or night, people broke in on him unexpectedly; he was even spied upon through a crack in the door when he was working alone or meditating; at all times one had to admire his unsurpassed modesty.

The same held true when he was standing or walking. He never leaned on anyone's arm, even when he was very old, unless his weakness put him in danger of falling. In that case he would hold on to someone for support, but only for a few seconds. Only once, after refusing assistance from his companion who had noticed him painfully dragging his feet, did he change his mind and lean on the proffered arm so as not to fall. But as long as he was able, he clasped his hands behind his back and maintained his balance by himself.

His behavior was inspired by the virtue of temperance, as is proven by his frequent exhortations to his boys never to neglect the chance of practicing little mortifications such as modest posture in praying, sitting, studying or walking, as well as by his firm lifelong resolve never to indulge his senses.

When hearing boys' confessions, he sat on a plain, uncomfortable chair without resting his back or arms, shielding his and the penitent's face with a white handkerchief. In winter he spent long hours in this position in an ice-cold spot behind the main altar or in the sacristy, while in the summer he was nearly suffocated by the crush

of so many boys crowding around him. Since he heard the confessions of a vast number of day boys, in addition to the young boarders of the Oratory, it is no wonder that he had also to put up with lice. But he endured all patiently.

When his priestly ministry brought him to seaside towns, the mosquitoes stung his face and hands. Those making their confession would shoo them with their handkerchiefs, but Don Bosco gave the pests free rein. Later, at supper time, looking at his hands covered with bites, he would jokingly remark to the superiors of the house, "How the mosquitoes love me!" One morning he came out of his room with his face so swollen and bleeding that everybody felt sorry for him, but he was as cheerful as always.

He endured discomforts of weather without complaint and exhorted his sons to accept them from the hand of God as an occasion for merit. He suffered intensely from cold feet, yet never used a warming pad as a footstool.

Everyone noted his self-control in speech. He always spoke in a moderate, calm tone of voice, with slow, gentle gravity, avoiding superfluous words. He abhorred worldly conversation, aggressive manners, and resentful or heated expressions. He spoke little, but each word was meaningful and fruitful, instructive and edifying. If at times he spoke in a lighter vein to hearten others, he did so sparingly and always seasoned his conversation with some spiritual thought. He was cautious in his speech, being careful never to use caustic or ironic expressions or jokes unbecoming a priest. He could not stand breaches of charity, and one of his most insistent admonitions was to avoid rude words or manners. He did not countenance backbiting; deftly and unobtrusively he would steer the conversation to other matters. When necessary he would talk at great length; otherwise he would refrain, especially since he needed every precious minute to keep up with his many occupations.

Don Bosco was extremely forbearing toward those who opposed him or treated him unjustly out of ill will or misunderstanding. In these instances, the harsher and more insolent his opponent, the gentler and meeker Don Bosco became. Bishop Cagliero recalls the following incident. "On one occasion a man began arguing with him angrily and rudely on the stairs. Don Bosco's affable replies and courteous manner completely won him over. He calmed down and

apologized for his conduct in the presence of us boys." If occasionally his opponent was not amenable to reason, Don Bosco kept silent.

He displayed a similar forbearance on receiving insulting letters. Usually he did not answer them; occasionally he replied in polite terms. How often he repaid insults with kindness!

To those who could not calmly answer a letter, his advice was, "Don't write anything offensive; *scripta manent.*" He frequently exhorted his co-workers, "I beg you most earnestly to avoid harsh, cutting remarks; treat each other as good brothers."

On one occasion a priest who was about to publish a book on education came to him for advice. "One thing I would stress," Don Bosco told him; "do not offend charity." His writings, which were always smooth and lucid with no trace of bitterness, bear witness to his self-control.

Don Bosco restrained his natural curiosity to see and know things which did not directly concern him. Although he had an exquisite appreciation of art, he never yielded to the temptation to visit monuments, palaces, art galleries, and museums. Wherever he might be, he generally kept his eyes lowered so that he did not notice people except when they greeted him. It was a sacrifice for him to deny himself the reading of books which aroused his interest in science, literature, and history. Yet, in order to have more time for the works of charity entrusted to him by Divine Providence, he nearly always abstained from such reading unless it was necessary. He rarely read or had others read the newspapers to him; this he did only when they contained news of some glorious or sorrowful Church event, or of some matter that directly concerned his institutes. Now and then, however, especially in times of great political ferment, he would ask some of his co-workers to brief him on the principal news of the day. This he did in order to be able to give advice and to carry on a meaningful conversation with people with whom his work brought him into contact. It was obvious, however, that he had no itch for news. He would not allow into the house any newspaper which was not sincerely Catholic, and he constantly urged his pupils to curb idle curiosity and avoid books or newspapers of no particular advantage to them.

Due to poor blood circulation caused by his arduous, unremitting labor, Don Bosco had weak eyes and suffered from migraine headaches. He could have alleviated this condition with snuff, but this he never did until his doctor advised it. He had a tiny snuffbox made of pressboard given to him by some friends, but he either forgot to take a pinch of tobacco or did so very seldom. More often than not, he would merely sniff at the tobacco. In company or when traveling, he would offer a pinch to those around him, if he thought it opportune, hoping to start a conversation that might give him an opening for a good word, especially if they seemed to need it. Thus, at times his snuffbox became bait to fish souls. On very rare occasions he would offer a pinch to some of his boys, saying, "Take some; it will drive all bad thoughts from your mind." Actually Don Bosco made so little use of snuff that Father [Mark] Pechenino, his provider, refilled the box only once a year. If someone offered him a pinch of snuff, Don Bosco would jokingly dip his little finger into the box and then sniff his thumb. He advised his boys never to take snuff except under doctor's orders. He absolutely forbade smoking. In fact, he made abstention from smoking a condition for admission to the Oratory and to the religious congregation he founded.

Don Bosco also refrained from smelling flowers. If a boy offered him some, he would accept them and show his appreciation. Then, smilingly, he would lift them to his nose, but instead of inhaling their fragrance he would breathe upon the flowers, exclaiming, "Oh, what a lovely scent!" He did the same if the donor was a benefactor; then, without delay, he would have the flowers placed on Our Lady's altar.

Don Bosco loved cleanliness, but he never used scented soap; he also exhorted his clerics, priests, and co-workers not to use scented lotions. To him they were worthless articles of vanity.

He did not go bathing, even at the height of the summer, except a few times under doctor's orders. He denied himself the simple pleasure of a stroll, even though a daily walk had been recommended to him for his health. Faithful to the resolutions made at his ordination,[1] he left the house only to visit the sick or to seek assistance for his boys. Sometimes he went out to find some secret nook where he could work undisturbed on his correspondence and

[1] *See* Vol. I, p. 385. [Editor]

on the books he was writing—something which was hardly possible at the Oratory because of the great numbers of people who wanted to see him. Whenever he went out, he took one of his co-workers or boys along, engaging him in useful and instructive conversation as they walked.

Even when traveling, his mind did not rest. He would proofread galleys, read letters, jot down memos for replies, and pray or meditate.

"One day," Father [Michael] Rua recalls, "I had to accompany him by train from Trofarello to Villastellone.[2] As we neared the station, we heard the train whistle signifying its departure. Undisturbed, Don Bosco took a big notebook from his pocket and started walking to Villastellone; pencil in hand, he did not raise his eyes from the pages until we got there. Then he said to me, 'This was really a blessing in disguise. Had we gone by train, I might not have been able to proofread this booklet. Now it's done and today I can send it to the printer.' This was his customary practice when traveling. When his failing eyesight made it impossible, more often than not he would begin an edifying conversation."

One would think that picnicking with the boys or hiking with them through the Castelnuovo hills during the early years of the Oratory must have been a source of great pleasure. It certainly was for the boys, but not for him. He had to think of everything and everyone; all the preoccupations, burdens, and responsibilities were his. But such outings became true apostolic missions both for the boys and the people of the villages they visited.

He denied himself all kinds of amusement, and never attended mere public festivities, stage plays, military parades, illuminations, or solemn receptions for royalty, even though he was very often invited, indeed begged, to be present. Intent on mortifying his sight, he never watched fireworks staged for the boys' entertainment. If he was outdoors he would not look at them; if indoors, he stayed there. If the boys called out to him to join them and enjoy the spectacle, he would excuse himself, saying that the glare from the sputtering fireworks was bad for his eyes. We recall an evening when we staged a general illumination of the Oratory. Don Bosco remained stand-

[2] Two small towns near Turin about four miles apart. [Editor]

ing for more than an hour near the window so that he would be seen by the boys, but always facing away from the more attractive part of the illumination. Sometimes he would attend stage plays given by the boys, but only to encourage and please them, to induce them to study, and to prove to them that piety and fun can go hand in hand. He also attended to entertain and honor his guests, but never for his own enjoyment. He was generous with praise and applause, but we noticed that his gaze never focused on the stage or the actors. Whenever his presence was not required, he preferred to stay in the privacy of his little room.

Don Bosco fully controlled his passions and emotions, his likes and dislikes, his feelings of anger and aversion. He subordinated them to right reason and to the precepts of the Faith, and directed them to the greater glory of God. This heroic mode of life had become so spontaneous and natural to him that it would have been difficult for him to act otherwise. His intimates, therefore, could not help but feel the highest admiration for him.

In regard to his occupations, he was never seen to waste even a single moment. In reply to those who asked him how he stood up under such a workload, he would say, "Thanks to God, hard work is for me more of a delight and relaxation than a burden." We remember that in 1885 he remained in his room for several weeks to answer a stack of important letters. He was asked, "How can you stand it? Don't you feel bored and in need of fresh air?"

"Not at all!" he replied; "this is what I like best!"

This too was his stock answer whenever people sympathized with his endless hours in the confessional or his arduous work of preaching, organizing lotteries, writing books, and many other activities.

"He found the best joy in suffering," Father [John] Bonetti wrote. "It showed in his face. He never shirked a task, no matter how uninviting or fatiguing it might be. Evidently it would have been more painful for him to refuse."

Bishop Cagliero wrote:

All my confreres and I can truthfully state from conviction that Don Bosco led such a life of penance and self-denial that it is matched only by those who have attained the highest perfection and sanctity. He kept his mortifications carefully hidden from others and concealed his fasts

and penances so as to make his virtues appear as those of an ordinary pious priest. He did not want to frighten us with his penances; he preferred to instill in us courage and hope to be able to imitate him. Knowing his frail health and concealed indispositions, we were greatly impressed by his detachment from all earthly things, his bitter poverty, especially during the first twenty-five years of the Oratory, his frugal fare, his renunciation of all amusements, recreation, entertainment, and any form of relaxation; above all we were impressed by his constant mental and physical work. All this self-denial came to him so easily and spontaneously that we are convinced Don Bosco possessed the virtue of temperance to a heroic degree.

We concur with Bishop Cagliero's appraisal and have reason to believe that Don Bosco also practiced extraordinary penances. This came to our attention one day when he told us that in order to obtain a very special, badly needed favor from the Lord he had had to resort to proportionate measures. What these measures were he refused to divulge despite our questioning.

We cannot refrain from mentioning that although he kept the most rigid control over his every movement, he would at times lift his shoulders as though something around his waist was causing him pain or discomfort. Since he had a very sensitive skin, we are inclined to think that he probably wore a small hair shirt which he could have fashioned quite easily so that it would be hardly noticeable. This was our conjecture at that time and we had no reason to change it in the following thirty years. Once Charles Gastini,[3] while making his bed, found, between the sheet and the mattress, some pieces of iron that Don Bosco had forgotten to remove in his hurry to get to church. Gastini did not give the matter much thought at the time. He put those scraps of metal on the bedside table and let it go at that. The following day and all the rest of the time that he made Don Bosco's bed, he never saw them again, nor did Don Bosco ever say a word about them. Only many years later did Gastini, upon reflection, surmise their purpose. "On another occasion," relates Bishop Cagliero, "some pebbles and scraps of wood were found in his bed." Thus Don Bosco found another way to tor-

[3] One of the pioneers of the Oratory. He entered it at the age of eleven in 1848 at Don Bosco's invitation. *See* Vol. III, pp. 243ff. [Editor]

ment his already exhausted body at night and to make even his brief rest painful.

So as not to give himself away, Don Bosco took the precaution of very often making his own bed and cleaning his own room. When Joseph Brosio surprised him at this chore one day, Don Bosco used the occasion to draw a useful moral. However, Brosio noticed that Don Bosco locked his room only when he was cleaning it.

It seems, nevertheless, that Don Bosco reserved his greater austerities for his occasional visits to distinguished benefactors. The vastness of a mansion and the distance between his room and the family's quarters gave him greater privacy. Ever tranquil and jovial, he would occasionally accept an invitation to stay at the mansion of a noble matron. Late one night, probably in 1879, a member of the family, passing through the hall which led to Don Bosco's room, heard a dull, rhythmical noise as if strokes were being administered. He suspected what it might be, but made no mention of it to anyone. He determined to watch and noticed that this happened every time Don Bosco stayed at the house. He was convinced that Don Bosco, imitating St. Vincent de Paul, used a scourge to obtain graces from God. Many years later, when he confided his suspicions to several other people who had been hosts to Don Bosco, he learned that they too had made the same observation and were likewise convinced that Don Bosco practiced self-flagellation. Their discretion and courtesy prevented any mention of this to Don Bosco. He himself jealously guarded these penances, for he was humble; moreover, he did not wish his example to be followed by the members of his future congregation.

He never recommended such practices to his penitents; to them he represented goodness and compassion. The above-mentioned person, who used to go to confession to Don Bosco, once asked his permission to practice some corporal penance such as found in the lives of certain saints. Since he was of a very frail constitution, Don Bosco refused his request, and when the penitent insisted on some way to emulate the sufferings of Our Lord, he replied, "Oh, that is easy! Just patiently endure cold, heat, sickness, troubles, people, happenings, and so forth. There are always plenty of ways to practice mortification!"

He also forbade his boys to practice undue austerities, remarking

that the devil himself often suggested such extraordinary penances to achieve his own purpose. If any boy asked permission to fast for a length of time, to sleep on the bare ground, or to practice other physical mortifications, Don Bosco used to commute such a request into mortification of the eyes, of the tongue, and of the will, or into the performance of works of mercy. At most, he would allow his boys to forego the mid-afternoon snack or a part of breakfast. He used to tell them over and over again, "My dear children, I don't ask you to fast or scourge yourselves. I exhort you to work, work, work!"

When we realize that his health was chronically poor and that he endured with saintly fortitude various physical ailments which constantly tormented him throughout his life, Don Bosco's incessant, enterprising, methodical practice of penance appears not only heroic but superhuman. Ever since the time that he began working for boys, he sometimes spat blood,[4] and this continued at intervals. For this reason his doctors had insisted on a daily walk as an absolute need. In 1843 he began to suffer from an inflammation of the eyes caused by long vigils and round-the-clock reading, writing, and proofreading. This ailment grew progressively worse until his right eye became practically useless.

In 1846 his legs were affected by a slight swelling which increased considerably in 1853, causing him intense pain that spread as far as his feet. This ailment so worsened as the years went by that toward the end of his life he could scarcely walk and had to wear elastic stockings. Eventually he was no longer able to take off his shoes and stockings, and someone had to do it for him. Those who performed this service for him with filial piety were amazed to see how his flesh swelled over the edge of the shoe and wondered how he could stand up for so many hours at a time. Don Bosco used to call this painful trouble "my daily cross."

At the same time he was frequently afflicted by extremely violent headaches, so much so that he felt his very skull was being stretched, as he once described it to Father Rua. Father [Joachim] Berto noticed that his head actually seemed enlarged. He also suffered atrocious toothaches, lasting sometimes for weeks, and persistent

[4] *See* Vol. II, p. 360. [Editor]

insomnia. Finally, palpitation of the heart hampered his breathing; one of his ribs even seems to have receded under the constant pounding of the heart.

During the last fifteen years of his life new ailments were added to the old. Now and then he had attacks of miliary fever and frequent skin rashes. A fleshy growth about the size of a nut had formed on his sacrum, causing him great pain whenever he sat down or rested in bed. He never spoke of this affliction to anyone, nor did he attempt to have this growth removed surgically because of his Christian sense of modesty. His intimates noticed his discomfort in sitting down. When they inquired about it, he limited hmself to saying, "I prefer standing up or walking. I get tired sitting down." Nevertheless he continued to use a simple, wooden chair. Then, in the last five years of his life his enfeebled spine forced him to bend under the weight of his many afflictions.

Despite all these ailments—enough to force a man to openly avow his infirmity and refrain from all work—Don Bosco never slowed down in undertaking and completing his astounding activities. Indeed, his courage constantly matched his problems and ailments. His slogan was, "Don Bosco does what he can!" And he was able to do so much that his zealous undertakings spread throughout the world.

He endured all, without ever complaining of his tribulations or displaying the slightest sign of impatience. On the contrary, his constant cheerfulness gave the impression that he was in good health. Habitually jovial and smiling, he instilled into those who came to him courage, cheerfulness, and comfort with his delightful, edifying conversations.

Although Don Bosco considered life to be a gift from God and desired only to work for His greater glory, he joyfully looked forward to death, which would open the gates of heaven to him. For this reason he never prayed for his own recovery but left it to others to perform this charitable act. The doctors who regularly gave their services to the Oratory, especially Dr. Gribaudo, a schoolmate of his, on discovering that he was very run-down and on the verge of collapse, urged him to take better care of himself. Rarely did he heed their advice or obey their instructions. He used to object, "I'm all right. I don't need all this fuss!" He liked to discuss medicine

with them, so that later they remarked that every time they came to see Don Bosco they had to submit to an examination.

When stricken by some common illness he did not send for a doctor unless forced to do so. He would then follow his orders but seemed wholly indifferent to the outcome. Yet, even in such cases, against the advice of his doctors he would bravely answer the call of charity if some task at hand demanded extra effort or a journey. He would have gladly given his life if the welfare of the Church and the souls of the faithful so required.

In this chapter we have recorded the testimony of several of our confreres, anticipating by some years their appearance on the scene of our narrative. We thought this necessary to acquaint our readers with Don Bosco's spirit of penance. This should be kept in mind at all times as we unfold his life.

CHAPTER 20

Defending the Faith

KING Charles Albert, as we have previously mentioned,[1] had granted religious freedom to the Protestants, apparently with the sole intention of permitting them to practice their faith openly without prejudice to the Catholic Church, but such was not their interpretation. As soon as the decree was promulgated, together with that of the freedom of the press, they opened an active campaign of proselytizing and promoting religious strife by spreading their errors, especially through polemical books and newspapers such as *La Buona Novella, La Luce Evangelica,* and *Il Rogantino Piemontese.* These were followed by a flood of booklets promulgating the Protestant interpretation of the Bible. These found their way into family circles and passed from hand to hand, perverting minds, corrupting hearts, and undermining beliefs with their poisonous errors. Concurrently, unscrupulous Waldensians approached the poor and those in debt with offers of financial aid if they would join their sect. Unfortunately, some could not resist this temptation.

The newspaper *L'Opinione* supported this heretical propaganda; its anticlerical staff included Bianchi-Giovini, author of the lurid and slanderous *Storia dei Papi* [History of the Popes] and other infamous works.

We must bear in mind that while the Waldensians were well prepared for this aggressive campaign, the Catholics, unfortunately, were not. Consequently, they could not block it or weaken its disastrous effects. Until then Catholics had placed their trust in protective civil laws, particularly the first article of the Constitution, which declared: "The Roman Catholic and Apostolic Faith is the sole religion of the State." Now, like soldiers, they were rudely awakened

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 190f. [Editor]

by trumpet blasts calling them to action. Stumbling into the field of battle, they found themselves woefully unprepared to face a well-armed foe. They needed good newspapers with wide circulation, but had hardly any; they needed low-priced popular booklets, but had only scholarly works. Not only the young but all the faithful were the target of the enemies of the Church; consequently, they were in great danger.

Don Bosco faced this situation with ardent zeal and charity. Anxious to protect his beloved boys from the rampant errors abroad, he came to their rescue and in the process saved thousands, indeed millions of people from spiritual danger. He drew up and published outlines of Catholic doctrine; he printed leaflets of religious and moral maxims adapted to the times and spread them abundantly among young people and adults, especially on retreats, missions, novenas, triduums, and solemn feast days. Furthermore, in 1851 he prepared a second edition of *The Companion of Youth.*[2] Its frontispiece carried a picture of St. Aloysius with the legend: "Come, O children, offer your innocence to the Divine Heart and I shall protect you." Don Bosco appended six chapters in the form of dialogue, entitled *The Catholic Religion: Some Basic Points.* In it he expounded the thesis that there is but one true Faith, that the Waldensian and other Protestant teachings were not of Divine origin, and that their churches could not claim to be the true Church of Jesus Christ. Further, he pointed out that the Protestants were cut off from the source of true life, Our Divine Savior, and that they themselves admitted that Catholics could be saved and did belong to the true Church. He also outlined what Jews, Mohammedans, and Protestants should do to save their souls. In subsequent editions of *The Companion of Youth,* he expanded these sound arguments into ten chapters, with an added explanation of the dogma of papal infallibility. He made these chapters a permanent part of the book for the faithful to have at hand at all times. Later, he firmly rejected a proposal to publish them in a separate booklet, convinced that nobody would read them if they were not part of the book. "They must be a vade mecum," he declared.

Even in its shorter form as published in 1851, this little treatise

[2] A prayerbook for boys compiled and published by Don Bosco in 1847. *See* Vol. III, pp. 7-18. [Editor]

must have directed a strong counterblow to Protestant proselytizers. It reached thousands of young people, their main targets, and enjoyed the same success as Don Bosco's *Bible History* [3] and *Church History*.[4] At its conclusion Don Bosco had written:

> All past persecutors of the Church are now no more, but the Church still lives on. The same fate awaits modern persecutors; they too will pass on, but the Church of Jesus Christ will always remain, for God has pledged His word to protect her and be with her forever until the end of time.

While preparing this second edition, Don Bosco had a very gratifying experience. One evening, on his way home from the printer's, he passed through Porta Palazzo. In the porticoes on the left he stopped to browse at a bookstall. The bookseller was prompted to remark that those books were not exactly what Don Bosco might be looking for since they were Protestant publications. "I can see they are not for me," Don Bosco replied, "but on your deathbed will you be happy to have sold them?" He bid the bookseller "good night" and went on his way. Curious as to the identity of the priest the bookseller inquired of the bystanders and was told that it was Don Bosco. On the following day he called on him. As a result of their conversation, he handed over all his Protestant books to Don Bosco and reformed his life.

Don Bosco was certain that the Waldensians were making headway in various villages. His information came from all kinds of people who, inexplicably but providentially, felt attracted to him. Some candidly told him of the activities in Waldensian circles as well as their plans and mounting success. There were those who counseled Don Bosco not to give too much importance to these reports, but he kept on the alert, gathered information, and passed it on to the chancery. One of the officials displayed annoyance at the importance that Don Bosco seemed to give such statements, but he continued to do his duty, even at the cost of embarrassment.

Among other towns, the Waldensians had unobtrusively penetrated into Cirié [5] and were proselytizing. On hearing of this, Don

[3] *See* Vol. II, pp. 307-12. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. II, pp. 257-61; Vol. III, pp. 215-222. [Editor]

[5] The town was some fourteen miles from Turin; at this time its population was about 3,600 people. [Editor]

Bosco again informed the chancery. "Do you mean to say that you know more than we do?" replied the aforementioned official. "There are two pastors in Cirié and they are not blind. Do you really believe we don't know what goes on? Does light come only from Valdocco?" Don Bosco said nothing. Shortly thereafter things took such a bad turn in Cirié that a mission was immediately called to counteract Waldensian influence and refute its errors. Several other parishes were also duly warned, thanks primarily to Don Bosco's vigilance.

In the midst of these new concerns, Don Bosco learned that the Waldensians intended to build a temple in Turin. His source of information was a man named Wolff, a repentant fallen-away Catholic who, through a pecularity of the human heart, felt he had to reveal all the plans of his coreligionists to Don Bosco. The Waldensians had requested municipal permission for a building site near the city park. Since the sect numbered hardly more than two hundred in Turin, the authorities denied the request even though it was supported by the Attorney General at the Court of Appeals. The Waldensians did not give up. On the strength of the royal decrees of December 17, 1850 and January 17, 1851 which recognized their right to build a church of their own, they purchased a piece of land along Viale del Re, not far from the St. Aloysius Oratory. The building department approved their plans for a church and adjacent buildings, but the municipal authorities, anxious to uphold their responsibility to the Catholics, stalled for time. However, when the Minister of the Interior, a man named Galvagno, made it clear that royal decrees were not to be ignored, opposition to sparing the city such an affront ceased. As the news spread, the Turinese and all the Catholics in Piedmont were grieved and prayed to God to spare their capital from such a scandal. The bishops, acting collectively and officially in the name of the Church, the Constitution, and the honor of the House of Savoy, sent a joint letter of protest to the king, citing the penal and civil codes of the realm. But their protests fell on deaf ears. Construction of the Waldensian church began immediately. Aid and comfort had been given to those waging a bitterly fierce war against the Catholic Church.

As soon as Don Bosco learned of these developments, not content with what he had already done to offset the danger, he wrote and published a pamphlet entitled *Warnings to Catholics*. We record here its Foreword.

Catholics, open your eyes! Countless snares are being laid to lure you from the one, true, holy religion which can be found only in the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

Our lawful shepherds, the bishops, appointed by God to protect us from error and to teach us truth, have already repeatedly alerted us to this danger.

The infallible voice of the Vicar of Jesus Christ has also warned us. There are evil people who would like to tear your Faith from your hearts. Such people deceive themselves and others; do not believe them!

United in heart and soul, rally around your shepherds who have always taught you the truth.

Jesus said to St. Peter: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, for I shall be with her shepherds forever and ever." [Cf. Matt. 16, 18]

To Peter and to his successors, and to no one else did He say this. Whoever tells you anything contrary to this is deceiving you. Do not believe him!

Be firmly convinced of these great truths: where St. Peter's successor is, there is the true Church. The only true Faith is the Catholic Faith. One cannot be a Catholic unless he is united to the Pope.

Our pastors, especially our bishops, unite us to the Pope, and he unites us with God.

Read the following warnings carefully. If you will carefully imprint them into your heart, they will protect you from error.

What is briefly expounded here will soon be explained at greater length in a book.

May Our Merciful Lord imbue all Catholics with such courage and steadfastness that they will be faithful to the religion in which they were fortunate to be born and raised: a steadfastness and courage that will make us ready for any sacrifice, even death itself, sooner than betray in word or deed our Faith, the sole true Faith. Without it there is no salvation.

This proclamation, addressed no longer only to young people but to the Piedmontese in general and to the Turinese in particular, was followed by the little treatise, *The Catholic Religion: Some Basic Points,* which had been published shortly before in the second edition of *The Companion of Youth.* It was a stopgap measure until the publication of the new book Don Bosco was preparing on the same subject. The new book, to be entitled *The Well-Instructed*

Catholic, was to alert Catholics to the danger of heretical deviations, teach them the more essential doctrines, expose the errors of the Waldensians, check their evil influence, and thus solidly confirm Catholics in their faith.

Warnings to Catholics enjoyed a huge success. Two hundred thousand copies were circulated far and wide in just two years. It delighted the faithful, but drove the Waldensians to fury. As the Philistines of old, they had complacently thought that the road lay clear before them to devastate the fields of the Lord, but a new Samson had arisen in defense of the people of God to unmask their intrigues, break their ranks, and rout their armies.

This book and many others that followed from Don Bosco's pen showed everyone that the press yielded the most powerful weapon for defeating the enemies of the Church. This was the path to be pursued in defense of beleaguered Christian society.

In those years every aspect of Catholicism seemed dormant. It was Don Bosco's clarion call that awakened the faithful of Turin to action. Indefatigable in circulating his latest publication, he sent one hundred and fifty copies to Father [Felix] Scesa, novice master at Stresa, with a letter dated March 3, 1851. He also wrote about it to his [former seminary] professor, Father [John Baptist] Appendini at Villastellone.

Dearest Father:

I am sending you one hundred copies of *Warnings to Catholics.* Let me warn you that if you try to distribute them, you will arouse the anger of the *Gazzetta del Popolo,*[6] and maybe of others. This booklet, tiny as it is, is a nuisance to them. They would just love to get their hands on as many copies as they can and burn them.

Nevertheless, if you will help circulate good books (an excellent work of mercy) I guarantee you will be protected from their lightning bolts.

Your account stands as follows:

Books already shipped:	Lire	1.95
100 copies of *Warnings to Catholics:*		5.00
Total:	Lire	6.95

[6] An anticlerical newspaper founded in 1848. [Editor]

I hope to come and see you and will collect then. Love me in the Lord and let me know if I can help you in anything. I shall be delighted if I can be of any service. With filial affection I remain,

Your most grateful pupil,

Fr. John Bosco
Leader of the Little Rascals

Unfortunately, the Waldensians had friends among the legislators who never passed up an opportunity to propose bills and launch new accusations against the Church. In March Parliament witnessed a heated debate on the teaching of theology at the university. The course was charged with antiquated and demoralizing errors. Loud requests were made for improvement, especially by promoting biblical studies as the Protestants were doing. It was proposed that the government appoint professors in the schools operated by the bishops, that the theology department at the university be freed from episcopal jurisdiction, and that oratories and confraternities in the universities and other educational institutions be abolished, leaving students completely free to be atheists or believers. Count Camillo Cavour, who had not yet declared himself an anticlerical, spoke somewhat in favor of episcopal control. Thus, at this time the only effect of these furious outbursts was a letter from the Minister of Public Education to the bishops in which he attempted to impose certain conditions on the teaching of theology. The bishops protested vigorously.

The anticlericals were peeved because all the professors in the department of theology at the University of Turin, except the professor of canon law, [Johann Nepomuk] Nuytz, were orthodox. Nuytz, an obscure lay theologian whose knowledge of history left much to be desired, had adopted the ideas of Febronius and van Espen and was a Jansenist. He had been on the faculty for several years and had purposely been given that post to pervert his young ecclesiastical students. He championed very grave errors on the rights of the Church and the State, the sacrament of marriage, and canonical penalties. Some of his treatises had been condemned by a papal brief [on August 22, 1851] but the press and the government supported him. The bishops of the realm appealed to the king

to end such a scandal, and their protest was partially successful. Lectures on canon law were suspended and shortly thereafter Nuytz was replaced by Filiberto Pateri, who was no less a royalist and opponent of the prerogatives of the Church, although somewhat less outspoken. Nuytz died in 1876, refusing to recant, without receiving the Last Sacraments.

Meanwhile, in that year [1851] the Minister of Public Education tried to attract clerical students to the university by urging the chancery to inform them that in the matter of benefices the government would continue to give preference to those priests who had obtained university diplomas. The bishops, however, refused to allow seminarians to take courses in canon law at the university.

This was not all. Error was to be given not only freedom but other benefits too. On March 16, 1851, a royal decree reduced the equestrian order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus, founded by papal authority and endowed with church property and revenue, to lay status and abolished the religious profession demanded of its members and beneficiaries. As a result, honors and revenues could now also be conferred upon Jews and non-Catholics. We have dwelt in detail on these matters so that the reader may better appreciate the struggle in which Don Bosco was engaged.

Meantime, one of Don Bosco's most ardent wishes was being fulfilled. On February 2, Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin (which was celebrated that year at the Oratory jointly with the external solemnity of St. Francis de Sales), Joseph Buzzetti, Felix Reviglio, James Bellìa, and Charles Gastini donned the clerical habit.[7] The ceremony was performed by Father Joseph Ortalda, a canon of the cathedral, who on this joyful occasion chose for his Gospel text: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many." [Luke 2, 34] He told the new clerics what their mission would be if they remained faithful to the grace they had received.

Overjoyed, Don Bosco was not content with the church ceremony alone but also gave a special dinner to which he invited Canon Ortalda, Father Nicco, Canon [Louis] Nasi, and Canon [August]

[7] *See* Chapter 14. [Editor]

Berta. It was a dinner never to be forgotten. The cooks proved their skill, for Don Bosco was never niggardly with his friends. None of the guests, however, were able to eat a meat course or sip the after-dinner coffee because of a strange mishap in the kitchen. While Mamma Margaret was busy setting the table, her sister Marianne (who after the death of Father Joseph Lacqua had come to the Oratory) had inadvertently cooked the meat in the same pot Mamma Margaret had used to prepare the coffee. How this mishap was not discovered in time we cannot explain. As late as 1901 Canon Berta still recalled the inexplicable weird taste of the meat and the coffee that none of the guests were able to swallow although they politely refrained from any outward display of disgust. We then explained the mystery to him to his great amusement. He, in turn, told us admiringly how Don Bosco had eaten his small portion of coffee-flavored meat and sipped the greasy coffee as if nothing were wrong with either.

The very next day after donning the cassock, the four new clerics started their philosophy courses under Father [Lawrence] Farina and Father [Joseph] Mottura, with Canon Berta as their mentor. After a few months Don Bosco had each of them petition the king for a subsidy, and it was granted.[8]

Thus Don Bosco could at last entertain the hope that the new clerics would remain with him, but in spite of all his efforts it did not turn out that way. As we shall see later, two of them discontinued their studies, and the other two, for reasons beyond their control, had to leave the Oratory to join the diocesan clergy. They were exemplary priests. [Felix] Reviglio, however, immediately became Don Bosco's assistant at the Oratory for both day boys and boarders until 1857. The other three also were of great assistance to him in teaching catechism to day boys and boarders, in supervising them in church and in the playground, and in teaching vocal music.

Mamma Margaret was thrilled to see so many vocations flourish about Don Bosco. Although retiring, she was endowed with deep common sense and she knew what was proper and what was not.

[8] In this edition we have transferred to Appendix 5 one of the four replies received. [Editor]

From the moment Don Bosco had his first clerics and priests sit at table with him, she refrained from joining them. Don Bosco wished her to be present on certain occasions, but she always had some excuse. For example, when he sometimes invited some of the better boys to his table, he insisted that she also join them on the pretext that her presence in their midst would prevent loud talk, sloppiness, or other bad table manners. He was particularly insistent on those occasions when there were strangers as guests. Mamma Margaret obliged, even if unwillingly, for awhile, but then was seen no more. "It is no place for me," she told Don Bosco. "It just doesn't seem right for a woman to be there."

Mamma Margaret had a serene disposition, to be sure, but we must not imagine that her life at Valdocco was all roses. She loved order and thrift and would not countenance waste of things that had cost work and money. Yet who could prevent very lively youngsters from thoughtlessly and frequently causing considerable damage that was bound to distress her?

After one of many such instances, one day in 1851 Mamma Margaret went to Don Bosco and said, "Listen, Don Bosco. You can see it's impossible for me to keep things in order in the house. Your boys are up to some new mischief every day. They throw all my clean linen on the ground when it's supposed to be drying in the sun. They trample my vegetables in the garden. They take no care of their clothes and tear them into tatters beyond mending. They keep losing handkerchiefs, ties, and socks. They misplace shirts and underwear and can never find them. They take pots and pans from the kitchen to play with, and I lose half a day getting them back. To put it bluntly, they are driving me crazy. I was much happier when I sat weaving in the stable without all this bother and anxiety. I want to go back to Becchi and live out my last few days in peace."

Don Bosco gazed at her for a moment. Deeply moved, he silently pointed to the crucifix hanging on the wall. Margaret looked and her eyes filled with tears. "You're right!" she exclaimed. "Quite right!" Without further ado she went back to her chores.

From that moment, she never uttered another word of complaint. Indeed, after that nothing seemed to upset her. One day a boy was having a lot of fun frightening the chickens and chasing them

through the open meadows. Marianne, Margaret's sister, yelling at him for all she was worth to leave them alone, was desperately trying to drive them back to the chicken coop. Margaret came out to see what the shouting was all about and calmly told her sister, "Oh, don't get so excited. What can you expect? Don't you see they just can't stay still?"

Of course, some of the Oratory boys were thoughtless. However, all were very deeply attached to Don Bosco and retained their affection for him even after they returned to their families and pursued their careers and callings. Among the many proofs of this affection which we could adduce, we have chosen two letters from one of his pupils, Anthony Comba.

The first, addressed to Don Bosco, is postmarked Rumilly, Savoy, February 16, 1851.

I can't tell you how happy I am to receive one of your longed-for letters. How often I recall our dear, happy Oratory! How many times do I return in thought in one guise or another. Don't think that I could ever be so ungrateful as to forget the Oratory so soon. I shall always remember it. Really, the happy days I spent there are indelibly impressed upon my memory.

I am very glad to hear of my companions' success in donning the clerical habit. With God's help I hope to do the same in the near future. My school subjects take much work, but that suits me fine. I've managed to rank second in the class. We have a very fine superior who lived in Rome a long time; he speaks beautiful Italian and teaches it to us on Fridays. Sometimes I call on him and converse in this language.[9] We're very good friends and I've chosen him as my confessor. The other teachers are very good too. We boarders are fifty-seven. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays after lunch we all go out for a walk. I have no more to tell you, except to ask that you remember me most cordially to your mother, to your brother Joseph, to Father Grassino, to Savio, Bellìa, Buzzetti, Gastini, Reviglio, Angeleri, Piumatis, Aellisio, Tomatis, Canale, Arnaud, etc., etc. And don't forget Father Viola, Father Borel, and Father Carpano, etc., etc. I'd be very happy to get a letter from my friend Bellìa; please tell him to give me news of Turin and to send me a copy of the

[9] At this time in Piedmont the local dialect rather than Italian was commonly used in conversation. [Editor]

song *È consumato il calice* with the first bar of the music. I think Buzzetti has a printed copy. When you write [save your money], don't put stamps on the envelope.

This warm affection was not short-lived. Much later he wrote again.

Montauroux, September 11, 1882

My dear friend and schoolmate Father Rua,

Let me first sincerely thank you and Father Lago [10] for your affectionate letter of August 15 last. It pleased us no end. Many, many thanks.

My whole family has recited the prayers you prescribed. Thanks to Our Eucharistic Lord, to the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians, and to the powerful prayers of our ever beloved Father, Don Bosco, and to those offered by all of you, dearest friends and brothers, we were delighted to see my dear wife able to attend Mass on the beautiful feast day of Our Lady's Nativity. Once, when I was in Savoy, Don Bosco wrote to me, "Live in the holy fear of God, love me always in the Lord, and know that if I can ever be of help to you in anything, you will always find a most affectionate friend in me. Father John Bosco." I have always loved our good Don Bosco, I have never forgotten the Oratory or my dear companions there, and I still fondly recall the little songs of those happy days long ago.[11]

Good-bye Father Rua, good-bye my dear companions and friends. Good-bye.

Ever affectionately yours,
Anthony Comba

We shall now resume the thread of our narrative. In February Don Bosco obtained another spiritual favor from the Holy Father. Well aware of the value of indulgences, he fully realized that a plenary indulgence meant the total remission of temporal penalty. "Treasure indulgences," he often told his boys. It was in this spirit that he petitioned the Pope as follows:

[10] Angelo Lago, a druggist with his own store in a town in Piedmont, having been influenced by Don Bosco, became a Salesian, studied for the priesthood, and was ordained at the age of forty-three. He died a saintly death on March 14, 1914. [Editor]

[11] Two songs that were part of the letter have been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Most Holy Father:

The Reverend John Bosco and his fellow priests who labor in the oratories for young workers in the city of Turin humbly request a plenary indulgence on the last Sunday of each month for all the boys attending the aforesaid oratories provided they have received the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist.

For which grace, etc. . . .

[The request was granted.] [12]

[12] In this edition we have omitted the papal rescript. [Editor]

CHAPTER 21

Purchase of the Pinardi Property

THE Oratory up to this time was still on leased premises. Renting the entire Pinardi house [1] had been a very wise move on Don Bosco's part from a moral standpoint, even though it was expensive, but it did not guarantee the Oratory's future. The former tenants were still resentful and loudly protested their eviction, shouting to whoever would listen: "For years people used to come to this place for a little fun in their leisure hours. Isn't it a shame that it should have fallen into the hands of an intolerant priest?"

Meanwhile an individual who was eager to return to this old haunt and restore it as a den of iniquity and a money-making enterprise offered Mr. [Francis] Pinardi almost double the rent Don Bosco was paying. But Mr. Pinardi, an honest man, had no intention of breaking his word. Besides, happy at seeing his house serve a philanthropic purpose, he had often offered Don Bosco the option to buy it. However, either because he overestimated its value or because he needed the money, he was asking the exorbitant sum of eighty thousand lire. Whenever he mentioned this figure, Don Bosco would invariably reply that it was far beyond his means.

"Make me an offer then, and we'll see!" Pinardi would insist.

"How could I, after such an exorbitant request?"

"Can we make it sixty thousand?"

"Forgive me, but I can't make an offer."

"Well, I'll practically give it away—fifty thousand!"

"Let's have no hard feelings, but please forget it," replied Don Bosco.

At this time a young engineer, [Anthony] Spezia, was living near

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 364f. [Editor]

the Oratory. Don Bosco ran into him one morning and, struck by his clean-cut look, stopped to exchange a few words with him and find out what his job was. "I've just received my diploma as an architect," replied the young man, "and now I'm looking for work."

Don Bosco invited him to take a look at the Pinardi house and to quote a fair price for the building, its adjacent shed, and the surrounding lot. The young architect begged to be excused, pleading inexperience, but in the end he gave in. His quotation, rather high, ran between twenty-five and thirty thousand lire. When they parted, Don Bosco said: "I'll be needing you again; wait and see." Mr. Spezia recalled these words when [years later] Don Bosco commissioned him to draw up plans for the church of Mary Help of Christians.

It did not look as though the Pinardi house could be purchased at that time. There was not even the shadow of a possibility that Don Bosco could put together such a huge sum; furthermore, neither he nor his mother had any resources left after having disposed of all of their property on behalf of the boys. Indeed, in those days they sometimes could not even afford to buy bread.

But at the beginning of 1851 God showed that He was the master of all hearts and that He had destined that site for our Oratory. It was a Sunday afternoon. The boys were in the chapel listening to Father Borel's sermon while Don Bosco stood at the playground gates to hurry the late comers. Suddenly a violent quarrel broke out in the nearby tavern. In the scuffle an army officer received a blow on the head and fell to the floor bleeding profusely. At that very moment Mr. Pinardi showed up, fuming with indignation. He had often been summoned by the police to give evidence on similar bloody brawls, and he just could not stand the nuisance and the risk of incurring the vengeance of the persons involved any longer. Looking very worried, he went up to Don Bosco and declared: "I'm just fed up! I've decided to put an end to all this. I've had enough of brawls and more brawls."

"I would like to buy this house," Don Bosco said, "but you don't want to sell. As long as you keep it, the troubles will be yours."

"I don't want to sell?" exclaimed Mr. Pinardi. Then, in a tone that was half-serious, half-joking, he continued, "I have some news for you. *You* are going to buy my house!"

"Easy," Don Bosco replied. "I'll buy it, if the price is right!"

"Of course."

"Well, let's hear it."

"Eighty thousand."

"I can't make any counteroffers."

"Just try."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because what you ask is exorbitant, and I don't want to offend you."

"Make me an offer anyway."

"Would you really let me have it for what it's worth?"

"I give you my word."

"Let's first shake hands and then I'll make my offer."

"How much then?"

"A few months ago," Don Bosco added, "I had it appraised by someone who is both your friend and mine. He told me that, as it stands, the property is not worth more than twenty-six or twenty-eight thousand lire. I'll make it thirty for a quick deal."

"Would you also throw in a five-hundred lire brooch for my wife?"

"Yes, I'll make her that present."

"Will you pay cash?"

"I will pay cash."

"When shall we draw up the deed?"

"Whenever you like."

"Within two weeks, in one cash payment."

"As you say."

"And a fine of one hundred thousand lire for the one who goes back on his word."

"Amen," Don Bosco said. "And to top it off, if it's all right with you, I'll even give a dinner and you can invite your friends."

"Even nine or ten?"

"Even nine or ten." Thus in a matter of minutes the deal was closed.

Don Bosco was very anxious to buy the house before Mr. Pinardi might change his mind and sell to a higher bidder. But where was he to find thirty thousand lire, and in so short a time?

He immediately dispatched a letter to Father Rosmini at Stresa.

Turin, January 7, 1851

Very Reverend Father,

I duly wish to inform you that while the plan for the new building we talked about was being drawn up, something better showed up.

For personal reasons, the proprietor of the house in which I am now living has decided to sell. As a result of our discussions we could close the deal on this property with 28,500 lire. The house has twenty rooms; the plot of land, entirely enclosed by a wall, measures 27,162 square feet.

May I point out that selling at our leisure what we have already bought for the new building will bring in no less than thirty thousand lire. Thus we would merely be exchanging one site for another of equal value and layout. The two sites are adjacent and both are about the same distance from downtown.

If you could now loan the sum we have already discussed, you would be doing something very advantageous to the Oratory. This property could be paid for in full, and your money would be invested in a mortgage-free building and plot. We could remodel the building and in doing so turn part of it into the hospice we talked about.

Father Puecher, Father Scesa, and Father Pauli [2] are already fully acquainted with the place, which is actually the site of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for both day boys and boarders. A word from you and I shall close this deal.

Hoping that you will go along with me in this enterprise, which I am sure will be for the greater glory of God, I wish you every blessing from God. I am honored to be,

Your most obedient servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Father [Charles] Gilardi promptly replied on behalf of Father Rosmini.

Stresa, January 10, 1851

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco,

In reply to your letter of January 7, my very reverend superior, Father Antonio Rosmini, sends you his warmest regards and instructs me to inform you that if the site and building you now occupy in Valdocco is on sale and truly free of mortgage or any other lien, he would most gladly

[2] Rosminian priests. [Editor]

loan you twenty thousand lire at the terms already stipulated. You may therefore count on this sum which will be paid to you partly in cash and partly in government bonds. Give the word, and we shall draw up a contract.

I am glad of this opportunity to wish you and your charitable enterprises every blessing from the Lord for the New Year just begun and for many others. Please remember me to your good mother and believe me to be always,

Your devoted servant,

Fr. Charles Gilardi

Twenty thousand lire, however, was not thirty thousand. Don Bosco still had to find the balance. God, who never abandons His servants in need, completed the work He had started. One Sunday evening Father Joseph Cafasso came to the Oratory. It was rather unusual for him to come on Sundays since he was always busy in St. Francis of Assisi Church. He went up to Don Bosco and told him, "I have some news for you which will surely not displease you. A good lady, Countess Casazza-Riccardi, has asked me to bring you ten thousand lire to be spent as you see fit for the glory of God."

"Thanks be to God," answered Don Bosco. "This is precisely the sum I needed." Then he told him how he had just closed the deal to purchase the Pinardi house and was now wracking his brains to find the remainder of the stipulated sum. The two priests could not but see in this the hand of God. Mr. Pinardi in turn was utterly amazed when, on January 14, barely one week after the oral agreement, Don Bosco went up to him and said, "The money is ready; draw up the contract." They agreed on an informal down payment of two thousand lire the following day while the contract was being drawn. They also had the dinner as Don Bosco had promised.

Meanwhile Don Bosco lost no time in getting the contract ready. He also hastened to inform Father Gilardi.

Turin, January 15, 1851

Dear Reverend Father:

After receiving your welcome letter on behalf of your superior, Reverend Father Rosmini, I fully investigated the matter of Mr. Pinardi's house and found that it is truly free of all mortgages and other liens. I have therefore drawn up the contract of purchase.

In drawing up this instrument there will be no other mortgage placed on the estate save the twenty thousand lire loaned by my benefactor, Father Rosmini. All that remains is for him to delegate someone to verify that the estate is truly free of all liens and sign the agreement.

Please convey my sincerest thanks to your reverend superior for all that he is doing for us. I hope that this act of charity for the greater glory of God may draw abundant blessings for him and his institute.

Almost daily I spend a little time with our dear Costantino and Nicolino.[3] Love me in the Lord, and believe me to be with all my heart in Jesus Christ,

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Excuse the hurry. My little rascals are making considerable noise.

Father Charles Gilardi, procurator general of the Rosminian Fathers, finally came to Turin with the twenty thousand lire. "God Himself sent this money," exclaimed Don Bosco. And he said this with such feeling that Father Gilardi was moved.

The notary's deed reads as follows:

On February 19, 1851, through the notary Turvano, Francis Pinardi sells the land and buildings adjoining the property of the Filippi brothers to the north and east, the Via Giardiniera on the south, and the property of Mrs. Mary Bellezza on the west to the Reverend Fathers John Bosco, John Borel, Robert Murialdo, and Joseph Cafasso, for the sum of 28,500 lire: [4] twenty thousand to be paid by the Reverend Charles Gilardi, representing Father Anthony Rosmini, and the balance by private deed.

Another thirty-five hundred lire were still needed for incidentals. Commendatore Joseph Cotta, in whose bank the deed was drawn up, donated the sum. This gentleman was a principal benefactor and supporter of the Oratory throughout his life.

As we can see, on this occasion Don Bosco received another proof that Divine Providence favored his work. This imbued him with a renewed trust and an even firmer conviction that God would not abandon him in the future. We believe that this trust and conviction, never failing in the course of nearly fifty years, account in

[3] Two Rosminian clerics who were studying in Turin. [Editor]

[4] We cannot explain this variance. Don Bosco's previous offer stood at 30,000 lire. *See* p. 169. [Editor]

the main for Don Bosco's untiring activity. He may have seemed somewhat overventuresome at times, but in the light of his successful enterprises we must rightfully view him as the man of Providence.

He performed this role with the generous cooperation of many good Christians. Among these was Father Rosmini, who provided the greater part of the means necessary for giving the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales a home of its own. Upon granting the loan at four percent interest, he had stipulated that the interest was to be paid upon request, but he never pressed for payment of interest or amortization. Nevertheless, Don Bosco faithfully met his obligations, settling accounts every year with Father Gilardi, the Rosminian procurator. Father Rosmini remained Don Bosco's friend throughout his life, and so did the priests of his institute. Don Bosco, also out of gratitude, reciprocated their affection, as we have been able to see from his letters. We shall quote one of them here because it sheds light on sermons that Don Bosco delivered during this period. The letter is addressed to another Rosminian who had been transferred to St. Michael's Abbey and Shrine.

January 18, 1851

Dear Father Fradelizio,

I admit my negligence; what with many occupations and trips here and there, and the additional fact that I am a rascal, I have not replied to your very kind letters. Hence I plead guilty without further excuses and beg your gracious pardon.

I am sending you the books you requested plus a few other small items which I think will please the boys who have found a father in you. I also enclose a statement of expenses on several errands for you in Turin.

I was very sorry to have missed you when you came to Turin; but now that you are much closer than when you were at Stresa, I hope to see you here at the headquarters of my little rascals soon. I consider your transfer a providential act. I am sure it will benefit the population of the area. Your generous heart can and desires to do good, and the people will respond.

Give my regards to Father Caesar and to the others I know there. Love me in the Lord. If there is anything I can do for you, I promise not to be as neglectful as I have been until now.

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 22

The Man of Divine Providence

THE purchase and sale of Father Moretta's house [1] and the acquisition of the Pinardi property and the field which we shall refer to as the field of Mary, Help of Christians, were for Don Bosco initial steps in facing a new challenge to which the Lord had summoned him.

Contrary to what some shortsighted people believed, Don Bosco was not working for self-aggrandizement. In a materialistic and money-oriented century in which economics, machines, and powerful trusts were all that counted, and amid speculators and bankers, self-centered people uninterested in or scornful of Divine Providence and preoccupied only with accumulating wealth, their symbol of power, God raised an extraordinary man—a man without means, a nobody in the eyes of the world, a financial nonentity unschooled in business methods. And yet this man would make his undertakings grow to vast proportions; he would handle huge sums provided by charity and spend them for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Detached as he was from earthly possessions, Don Bosco valued money only as a means to an end. Here we should pause and reflect on Don Bosco's life as a whole. He was fully aware of the dignity of his office as steward of Divine Providence, and like a faithful servant he began to put to work the talents which his Master had allotted to him. He took as his rule the maxim of St. Ignatius Loyola: "Work as though the outcome of any undertaking depended entirely upon your efforts, and at the same time distrust yourself as though everything depended entirely on the Lord." This is the reason why in

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 324, 327f. [Editor]

countless different ways he appealed to the Christian charity of the faithful, unmindful of difficulties and sufferings until he had reached his goal. He never failed because God rewarded his virtue. When he was without funds, the bank to which he had recourse was that of Divine Providence. To make himself eligible for its assistance, he lived in true evangelical poverty and demanded the same of his pupils. But before launching any project, he always meditated on it at great length, asked prayers of his boys and other devout souls, and to his very last day constantly sought advice from prudent priests, from his immediate ecclesiastical superiors, and from the Pope himself in order to make sure that he was truly carrying out the will of God. All of this has been attested to by Father Rua and others who lived with Don Bosco.

His voluntary poverty, his spirit of prayer, and his sincere humility qualified him for his mission. To this must be added his unswerving confidence in God, as can be gathered from Bishop Cagliero and Father Rua in the following statement:

> Don Bosco used to say, as we often heard him, "God is my Master. He it is who inspires and sustains my undertakings; I am but His instrument. God is bound to avoid cutting a sorry figure. Besides, the Blessed Virgin is my protectress and my treasurer."

When means were lacking or other difficulties arose, Don Bosco looked even more cheerful than usual and told more jokes. If he appeared to be in a lighter mood it meant that he really had troubles. Realizing this to be so, we would do a little probing and learn of new and serious difficulties that had arisen. Undaunted, he found courage in St. Paul's words, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." [Phil. 4, 13] He was convinced that after putting him to the test, God would help him as He had done before.

No one ever detected the least sign of vexation or boredom in him. His round-the-clock worries, day after day, seemed not to bother him at all; it was as if they were somebody else's problems. He never gave himself airs; his demeanor was always humble as if he were a nobody who had never done anything worth mentioning.

Yet it was not easy to handle all the money which Divine Providence sent to him, because he necessarily had to depend also on the help of others. He cautiously prepared his plans, carefully selected

his assistants, meticulously looked for ways to keep operating costs as low as possible, and minutely examined contracts (without giving the appearance of distrust). Once he had chosen an assistant of proven honesty, he trusted him implicitly, following the example of the high priest Joiada in the days of King Joas during the restoration of the Temple: "And they reckoned not with the men that received the money to distribute it to the workmen; but they bestowed it faithfully." [4 Kings 12, 15]

Openhearted and incapable of guile, Don Bosco believed others to be as honest as himself. Unfamiliar with devious business practices, he was often deceived by false estimates and had to spend much more than originally planned. Occasionally, especially in the beginning, his suppliers defrauded him in various ways; now and then, in straitened circumstances, he was obliged to do business with unscrupulous people and undersell or overpay. There were frauds and thefts because Don Bosco could not keep an eye on everything. This should not cause surprise. Did not Jesus entrust to Judas the purse containing alms?

As his schools multiplied, Don Bosco sought assistants among the members of his own congregation and at last found men of proven honesty. Some of them, however, lacked the necessary business experience; thus the schools they directed were often without financial means and Don Bosco could not always support them. More than once the debts of the Oratory rose perilously, and there was no money. Still, even when bankruptcy seemed inevitable, Don Bosco always managed to meet his obligations; his creditors never lost a penny. He continued to open new schools and provide shelter and training and all the necessities for an increasing number of boys. In France, Austria, and England, Don Bosco's name was sufficient guarantee for the suppliers of his houses. Mere verbal agreement or his signature sufficed to qualify him for loans. In [South] America some banks first granted substantial loans to the local Salesian houses and then mailed the blank promissory notes to Don Bosco for his signature!

This continuous, evident miracle went on for almost half a century. It is obvious that in a materialistic age God had chosen Don Bosco as tangible proof of what Divine Providence could do for a

man who, not relying on human resources, put unlimited trust in God.

As our narrative proceeds we must also bear in mind this aspect of Don Bosco's mission. As early as 1851, for example, in talks with Father Cafasso, Father Borel, and Father Giacomelli, Don Bosco repeatedly mentioned his intention to commence work within a short time on a new, vast Oratory. One day early that year, as his boys crowded around him, he talked to them about the large building that would soon rise in Valdocco, vividly describing the porticoes enclosing the spacious playground, the solemn liturgical services in a large church echoing to the strains of majestic music, and the people flocking to it. It was as if all these things were actually taking place before their eyes.

In March [1851] Don Bosco decided to start the construction of a new chapel that would be more decorous and more adequate to the increasing number of boys. As has already been narrated,[2] the old chapel had been enlarged by the addition of several small rooms, but it was still too small and inconvenient. Being two steps below the ground level, it was often flooded and damp in winter or whenever it rained. In summer, the low roof and poor ventilation made the heat unbearable. Hardly a Sunday passed that some boy did not faint. Thus it was not only desirable but imperative that a new church be built in the interests of piety, the minimum of comfort, and health.

But what means could Don Bosco count on, just after having paid a large sum for the Pinardi building? We shall report here what Joseph Brosio wrote to Father John Bonetti.

I came to see Don Bosco one weekday and found him in the playground reading a letter and looking very pensive. I asked him what was the matter. He showed me the letter. It was from a supplier who was threatening to sue him unless he immediately paid about two thousand lire on an overdue account. I hung my head, thinking how terrible it would be if Don Bosco had to appear in court and be condemned for insolvency. I heaved a sigh. But he remarked quite serenely, "Come, come, Brosio. Don't take it so hard. Do you really think Divine Providence is

[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 416f. [Editor]

going to abandon me? Let us pray together, and you'll see what the Blessed Virgin can do for the Oratory!" I followed him into the chapel. As we came out, a gentleman came up to Don Bosco and handed him the money he so urgently needed. This money, however, was only a stopgap, for there were many other bills still unpaid, and daily expenses had to be met.

If the chapel was far too small for so many boys, the living quarters of the boarders posed the same problem. What could Don Bosco do? Where could he find the money for so many needs? When I expressed these worries to him, Don Bosco answered smilingly, "I intend to hold a lottery in the near future, but I don't know where or with what. Do you have any suggestions?"

"Well," I replied, "you know many rich people. Ask them to donate prizes. I'll do the same with several shopkeepers I know. We'll have a fine lottery; you'll see!" We agreed to do just that. However, he did not disclose to me how he would go about soliciting gifts. The drive for the church eventually took care of the living quarters and the boys' support also. Thus the drive actually fulfilled a triple goal. He made this a practice in the future: he specified a main goal, but he planned it in such a way as to secure also the means for two other equally important objectives. He always succeeded.

At about this time Don Bosco remarked one evening to his mother, "I think we should build a beautiful church in honor of St. Francis de Sales."

"Where will you get the money?" Margaret asked. "We have already spent all we had on food and clothing for these poor boys. Before taking on the building of a church, think it over carefully and ask God to enlighten you."

"That's precisely what we're going to do. Now, if you had any money, would you give it to me?"

"Of course I would!"

"Well then," Don Bosco concluded, "God, who is much more generous and goodhearted than you are, has money all over the world. And I hope He will give me some when and where it will be needed for His greater glory."

Full of confidence in God, Don Bosco one day sent for the architect, a man named [Frederick] Blanchier. He took him to the site he had chosen for the church and asked him to draw a plan. At

about the same time he also asked a contractor, Mr. Frederick Bocca, if he would undertake the construction.

"Gladly," Mr. Bocca answered.

"But I must warn you," added Don Bosco, "that perhaps at times money may be slow in coming."

"In that case we'll slow down the job."

"Not at all. I want the job to proceed quickly. The church should be ready within a year."

"Well then, we'll speed it up," the contractor rejoined obligingly.

"Good! Then get started," Don Bosco concluded. "Some money is ready; Divine Providence will send the rest."

While he was making these arrangements, Lent was approaching. On the last two days of the carnival season,[3] the day boys and the boarders of the Oratory made the Exercise for a Happy Death. "I remember," Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi wrote, "how Don Bosco every year at the close of the carnival season would exhort us to receive Holy Communion and make a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament to atone for the sins committed during that season. He was moved to tears and so moved us too whenever he spoke of the outrages committed against Our Lord, especially at carnival time. He exhorted us further to carry out our practices of piety most devoutly and gain a plenary indulgence, saying, 'Let us make this carnival a joyous one also for the poor souls in Purgatory by hastening their entrance into paradise.' He also urged us not to forget our benefactors. Consequently we boys felt no desire to go to town to have fun, even though there were plenty of amusements and the streets were full of people in fancy costumes. It never occurred to us to ask permission to go out. But Don Bosco always saw to it that we had plenty of fun with games and a stage play."

By March 11 all the Lenten catechism classes were ready. Father Peter Ponte, director of the St. Aloysius Oratory, was assisted by a young priest, Father Felix Rossi. Father Leonard Murialdo helped every Sunday, teaching catechism at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia; his cousin, Father Robert Murialdo, later on became its director. To assist these and other zealous priests, Don Bosco sent not only his clerics but also his own boys from Valdocco.

[3] The carnival season began on the feast of the Epiphany and reached its peak on the last three days before Ash Wednesday. [Editor]

He chose the more reliable and intelligent among them for this task, which they fulfilled every Sunday throughout the year. In 1851 he also sent several of them to teach catechism in the parish church of SS. Simon and Jude, out of deference to the pastor within whose jurisdiction the Valdocco Oratory was located. Except for a few brief interruptions, Don Bosco provided this service for many years.

Don Bosco himself stayed at Valdocco but closely supervised the catechetical instruction in all the oratories. Nicholas Cristino gives the following account:

I was one of the first to attend the St. Aloysius Oratory, which I frequented for several years. Don Bosco used to come many times, either during Lent or in the course of the year, and was sometimes accompanied by prominent people of Turin who helped him. He was always received with great enthusiasm. He would preside at the catechism classes and at the church services, preaching and arousing the zeal of his co-workers. I often admired Don Bosco's sway over all the boys. Occasionally some hot-tempered boys would start a fight. Don Bosco would come up to them and calmly say, "Cut it out. Cut it out." At the same time he would gently take hold of them by the ears, and immediately peace would be restored.

Now and then he would reward the more diligent boys by taking them out for dinner either to Father Vola's villa in Santa Margherita or to the good pastor at Sassi [in the outskirts of Turin across the Po River]. Mingling with the boys, he studied their inclinations, spirit of piety, and conduct, searching for some sign of a priestly vocation. He thought that I, among others, might turn out well in this vocation, and he had Father Peter Ponte teach me Latin. I did not succeed because my elder brother did not have the patience to wait and see if, as I progressed in my studies, my vocation would become clearer. I had to discontinue my classes and learn a trade. But of the many others whom Don Bosco helped, some became priests and others followed other honorable professions. Everyone loved him; many were grateful to him and often visited him in Valdocco. As for me, ever since he died I visit his tomb in Valsalice every week.

Don Bosco showed the same solicitude for the Guardian Angel Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia.

Since Easter was approaching (in 1851 it fell on April 20), priests were busy hearing confessions. As in previous years, the

Capuchin Fathers of the Monte dei Cappuccini and the Oblates of Our Lady of Consolation were tireless in hearing the boys' confessions at—respectively—the St. Aloysius and the St. Francis de Sales oratories. The boys who were to make their First Holy Communion had also learned a special hymn which Don Bosco had taught them and which he incorporated that same year into *The Companion of Youth.*

All diocesan and religious priests were doing their best in the city and in the provinces, ministering to the spiritual needs of the population. At the same time they were forming upright and loyal citizens and bestowing many other moral and material benefits on the people. The anticlericals, however, were not interested in what was really good for the people; on the contrary, they were opposed to the people's good, and their greatest wish was to rob religion of all influence over their lives.

Toward the end of March in Parliament (which now seemed a stronghold of Protestantism), amid a torrent of anticlerical insults and abuse, a bill was introduced for reforming the monastic orders. It would have declared solemn vows before the age of twenty-one illicit and invalid. It also would have made it mandatory for novices (men or women) to live away from the monastery or convent for at least six consecutive months during the two years preceding their religious profession. Superiors who accepted a religious profession in violation of this law would be liable to banishment, while the would-be religious would lose his or her civil rights. As matters turned out, the bill did not come to the floor for a vote.

Plans for suppressing ecclesiastical benefices and religious orders had not yet been fully worked out, but in a preliminary move heavy taxes were levied on them. Although churches were exempted, the properties of pastors and beneficiaries were hard hit by the new legislation. On April 15 [1851], King Victor Emmanuel II abrogated tithes in Sardinia, and on May 23 he sanctioned the law of mortmain, declaring it applicable to all provinces, municipalities, and charitable institutes. But while the latter were taxed only one half of one percent, religious institutions had to pay four percent.

Toward the end of May [1851], Don Bosco began work on the new church. After demolishing part of the inner wall separating the two playgrounds, workers began excavating for the foundations,

which were laid at the beginning of the summer. Occasionally the workmen would use blasphemous language. Don Bosco called them together one day and begged them to refrain from such utterances. As a reward he promised to treat them to a drink or two at the end of the week. The workers agreed and loyally kept their word. For more than a year thereafter Mamma Margaret brought them a small cask of wine every week. This system worked wonders! It promoted respect for God, it made friends for Don Bosco, and it quenched the thirst of hardworking men.

CHAPTER 23

Raising Funds for a Church

IN preparation for his new church Don Bosco started a fund-raising program. One of his first appeals was addressed to Father Rosmini.

Turin, May 28, 1851

Reverend and dear Father:

Your brief stay in Turin afforded me no opportunity to show you the plans of our new church and the proposed alterations to our residence. I therefore thought it advisable to get together some ten people experienced in such matters and discuss with them the best way to carry out these two projects.

We carefully studied the plans and their execution. For reasons of hygiene and economy we decided to start with the church. Since we depend entirely on the contributions of the faithful in order to meet our expenses, I take the liberty of asking your generous assistance. The architect [Frederick Blanchier] has estimated the cost at thirty thousand lire. We already have half that sum in donated material, money, and labor, but we still need fifteen thousand lire. Please bear in mind that even the smallest amount will be gratefully accepted. I would be most happy to list you among the contributors to the construction of this church dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, the first church ever built in Piedmont for poor and abandoned boys.

As regards the alterations in the residence, we decided to add one story and thus double the present accommodations. The funds for this project will come from the sale of a parcel of land [1] (some is already sold), the prospects for which are promising.

I am sure you will continue to lend us a generous hand. I wish to thank you with all my heart for everything you have done for us, and I pray the Lord to grant you success in your endeavors for His greater glory.

[1] *See* p. 170. [Editor]

Please remember me in your fervent prayers. With deep gratitude and veneration, I remain,

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Father Gilardi replied promptly:

Stresa, June 1, 1851

Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

Our revered superior, Father Rosmini, was delighted to receive your letter of May 28 and to see that God is blessing your untiring efforts by sending you the necessary means for building a church and enlarging the building for the scope your inspired charity has destined. He too would gladly contribute a large donation if his present circumstances and the heavy expenses incurred during the last few years (still weighing upon him) did not make it impossible. Nevertheless, if it is agreeable to you, he will gladly donate a number of his books to you. The proceeds from their sale would help to defray the building costs. Please let me know. If this meets with your approval, I shall send them. . . .

Fr. [Charles] Gilardi

Gratefully, Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, June 4, 1851

Reverend and dear Father:

Through you I thank your revered superior, Father Rosmini, for his contribution to our new church whose construction has just started.

Beggars are not choosers, and therefore any donation is gratefully received. I trust the books may be easily converted into cash. Please let me know how you plan to send them so that I may be ready to receive them. It would also be very helpful if you would let me know their list price.

I was very sorry to hear the news of Father Charles Rusca; I trust that his sickness will not be "unto death." [John 11, 4] At any rate I have already prayed and shall continue to pray that God's most holy will be done.

Thanking you with all my heart, I remain,

Your most obedient servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Meanwhile, as was his practice whenever he was about to start anything of great importance, Don Bosco decided to pay a visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Oropa to invoke with all his heart Her motherly assistance. For this information we are indebted to James Bellìa who gave us the following account.

At my request he came to Pettinengo to close the May devotions. It was the first time that such a solemn ceremony had been held in our village. In his sermon Don Bosco, taking his cue from a bouquet of lilies, roses, violets, and other flowers, invited his hearers to practice the virtues these flowers symbolized as a means of pleasing Our Blessed Mother. He stayed with us for a week, edifying us and hearing several confessions in our own house.

He then went to Biella. On requesting permission to say Mass in St. Philip's Church, he realized he had forgotten his celebret. When asked whether he knew anyone there who could vouch for him, he gave the name of Father Goggia whom he knew only by reputation. At that very moment Father Goggia was entering the sacristy. As soon as the two priests saw each other they embraced (a thing which Don Bosco did only on very rare occasions) and called each other by name, although they had never before met. I was amazed, since no one had even uttered Don Bosco's name. With the others present I was privileged to witness the meeting of two holy men.

From Biella Don Bosco went to Oropa where he celebrated Mass. The rector invited him to return and stay for a period of three months as a guest. He suggested that this would give Don Bosco time to write books; his only obligation would be to say Mass for the pilgrims. The prospect of a few weeks of peace and prayer before the Sacred Image, time permitting, appealed to Don Bosco, and he gladly and gratefully accepted. However, by the time he finally returned to Oropa, there had been a change in the administration and he could not stay [as originally agreed].

Thus is the witness of James Bellìa. Upon his return from Oropa Don Bosco quickly went ahead with the plans for the future church and submitted them to the municipal authorities for approval. Then he began to solicit a great number of potential contributors, pointing out to them how a church was badly needed in the Valdocco district. He also enclosed a blank on which they could list their donation.[2]

[2] A footnote describing this blank has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

He continued this letter-writing campaign for several months. Among the replies were those from the bishops of Piedmont, whom he had earnestly asked to promote subscriptions in their own dioceses. All were very sympathetic to his plans but regretted their inability to contribute financially since they too were meeting similar difficulties: churches under construction or repair, decline in contributions, charitable institutions to support in poor dioceses, etc. . . . Nevertheless, while assuring him that in due course they would meet his expectations, some did send a token offering for the time being and others volunteered to fulfill Mass obligations for him and donate the stipend.

Particularly noteworthy is the deference that marked their replies. Bishop [Louis Fantini] of Fossano wrote: "Continue your work with all possible speed, for Divine Providence will not abandon you. May our friendship be ever enduring." Bishop [Constantius Fea] of Alba wrote: "God will not fail you in the noble task you have undertaken. I shall invoke His blessing on you." Bishop [John Anthony Odone] of Susa replied: "Father Gey has forwarded me your esteemed letter in which you acquaint me with your plans for a church. You will thus add to your many undertakings (inspired by the Lord) on behalf of poor and abandoned youth." Bishop [John Anthony Gianotti] of Saluzzo commented: "I cannot do as much as I would like to. At any rate, here is a proof of my esteem for your holy and zealous undertaking." Bishop [Pio Vincent Forzani] of Vigevano wrote: "Ever engaged as you are in good works, you will store up yet a new reward and blessing in heaven with the church you have planned to build for the faithful residing in the area between Borgo Dora and Martinetto."

The following letter from Bishop John Thomas [Ghilardi] of Mondovì seems to embody the sentiments expressed by the other bishops.

Mondovì, August 12, 1867

Very Reverend Father:

Whenever I hear of you or your zealous undertakings on behalf of young people, I always thank the Lord for having inspired you with such zeal for the welfare of souls in these troubled, perverse times. You can well imagine how gladly I would help you ensure the success of your

new undertaking. Unfortunately, I myself have assumed so many obligations and incurred so many expenses that for the moment I can contribute nothing but my moral support. Just to mention one item, I have four churches under construction, two of them parish churches. I definitely have to contribute all I can to these projects because they were begun at my behest and with the promise of my assistance. I will not speak of the endless number of poor people for whom I must occasionally provide food, lodging, and clothing. Lack of money is a general problem, but in my case it is felt even more because I am frequently unable to meet even the most pressing needs. For these reasons I cannot do anything at the moment for your new church. But I shall bear your need in mind and I hope to satisfy it, if not now, at the first propitious moment. Further, I shall recommend your cause to devout, charitable persons from whom I can expect a contribution. What I can do now and gladly do is extend my most cordial congratulations for the great good you are doing and ask the good Lord to bless you even more and make your holy enterprises prosper. Please remember me in your prayers. With the greatest esteem and regard, I remain

Yours devotedly,

✠ John Thomas, *Bishop*

Meanwhile, on June 24, while the boys of Valdocco were celebrating Don Bosco's name day, the municipal building commission approved the plans for the new church of St. Francis de Sales. On June 30, Deputy Mayor Bursarelli officially notified Don Bosco of the approval.

The [external] feast of St. Aloysius always followed that of St. John the Baptist. In preparation for the feast the excavations of the new church had been covered by wooden planks and a large stand had been set up for guests in front of the old chapel. The stand and the playground were adorned with carpets and draperies, while two rows of banner-topped flagstaffs, draped in gaily-colored cloth, extended from the door of the chapel to the front gate, marking out the path of the procession.

The bishop of Fossano had been invited to perform this solemn ceremony, but other engagements forced him to decline. He sent his apologies to Don Bosco;[3] Bishop [Lawrence William Renaldi]

[3] A footnote giving the bishop's reply has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

of Pinerolo took his place. *L'Armonia,* in its issue of July 4, 1851, gave the following account of the celebrations:

The feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga was celebrated most devoutly and solemnly in the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin on Sunday, June 29. Throughout the morning very many went to confession and Communion; then, after a moving exhortation, Bishop Renaldi of Pinerolo administered the sacrament of Confirmation to about four hundred boys and adults. At this solemn gathering of staunch Christian youths, there naturally was no lack of youthful voices for responses, recitations, and songs; the setting was modest, to be sure, but the performance was superb. A floating balloon, rockets, and fireworks brought the festivities to a close. Happiness, joy, and serenity shone on the faces of all the youngsters who were most reluctant to see the day come to a close. It was a family celebration for more than fifteen hundred boys who hung upon every word of their loving father while cheering him frequently and reverently with one heart and soul. All that was lacking at this magnificent and solemn feast was a large church; two-thirds of the boys had to follow the church services from outside because the present chapel was just too small. However, it seems that Divine Providence is doing something about a better and larger church.

We recall that the cleric [Felix] Reviglio, at Don Bosco's suggestion, had set up on the balcony three barrels of water, each of a different color, with a small tube leading to an underground connection to portable fountains. Toward evening three jets of colored water suddenly shot up into the air to the great amazement and delight of the boys. It didn't take much to make them happy.

Shortly after this celebration Don Bosco went to St. Ignatius' Shrine above Lanzo [4] for a spiritual retreat. Father [Lawrence] Gastaldi gave the instructions and Father Molina the meditations. Joseph Brosio's account follows:

It is hard to adequately describe Don Bosco's solicitude for us. He was always afraid that his sons might be lacking something or other, or that they might not be satisfied with what he was doing for them.[5] I knew Don Bosco for about forty-six years and he was never niggardly with his boys in any way. His only desire was to see them happy; he always sought

[4] *See* Vol. II, p. 96 and *passim.* [Editor]

[5] A footnote reporting a letter by Don Bosco revealing his fatherly solicitude for every boy has been transferred to Appendix 6. [Editor]

new ways to satisfy their longings or wishes, whenever it was feasible and proper. I could tell many stories in this connection.

He also constantly exhorted us day boys to make a spiritual retreat every year if possible or at least to spend one day in putting our souls in a state of grace such as we would like to be in at the moment of our death.

Since I very much wanted to go to St. Ignatius' Shrine for a spiritual retreat, Don Bosco took me along and made me his companion at meals, recreation, and walks. We were together nearly all the time. At table he was always worried that I might not have enough food or drink and he always saw to it that I had a substantial helping. Sometimes in the evening he would say, "Today you also ate too little. You're young; eat more or you will feel the effects later on."

After the retreat, we went down to Lanzo to visit the little town and the surrounding area. As we were standing on a lovely hill overlooking the valley below, Don Bosco became absorbed in thought for a while. I was watching him and was rather surprised at this sudden change. After a long silence he seized my hand and exclaimed: "How wonderful it would be to have another oratory here! What a fine location for a boarding school!" Fourteen years later, Don Bosco's boarding school did indeed stand on that site.

When we reached Turin he said, "Listen, dear Brosio, if you study, you could get a diploma and become a teacher. . . . Remember that you are like a son to me and that as long as Don Bosco has a crust of bread, he will always share it with you." He often repeated those words to me.

I could see that he was determined to open both day and resident schools. One day, therefore, I said to him, "Very well, Don Bosco, I'll study to be a teacher." I did study but soon I wearied of the effort and went back to my business, without, however, diminishing even slightly my close friendship with him.

I was also anxious to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Oropa. Unable to accompany me, Don Bosco gave me a note for the rector, who welcomed me in the same way as he would a distinguished visitor. I was assigned a room in the priests' quarters with a domestic to wait on me. There were very many indeed, besides me, who on various occasions experienced Don Bosco's fatherly solicitude.

CHAPTER 24

Cornerstone Blessing

THROUGHOUT June and July Don Bosco had tirelessly continued to seek funds for the construction of his church. Some were of the opinion that he was beginning to overdo it and becoming importune. However, it should be remembered that he was not asking for himself; he was always in need and in debt, and furthermore it took a heroic spirit of self-denial to accomplish everything he did.

He was so badly in need of money that on June 18 [1850] he had to sell a lot to Mr. John Baptist Coriasso for 2,500 lire. Located near the Moretta house,[1] the lot measured about 4,000 square feet and bordered on the field he had seen in his dreams.[2] On that site, now the main entrance to the Oratory, Mr. Coriasso built a small house and carpentry shop. After concluding this sale, Don Bosco sent his friends informal appeals with return subscription blanks. The following appeal, which was sent to St. Michael's Abbey, is presented here as a sample:

July 4, 1851

Dear Father Fradelizio:

Much as I would love to fly to the top of Mount Pirchiriano, I cannot for lack of time. My main headache right now is the church I am building. Of course, you should feel bound (but not under penalty of mortal sin) to have a hand in it. How? Neither with bricks, which are too heavy, nor with money, since the mint is located here in Turin, but with some lumber for the roof of my church. Please try to enlist also the pastor of St. Ambrose Church.[3] I ask all of you to join forces and help me to cover this building.

[1] *See* Vol. II, p. 270; Vol. III, pp. 323, 327. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 232f, 268, 318. [Editor]
[3] It was located at the foot of the mountain. [Editor]

This letter is not particularly well written, but please consider it as you would one written by one of my little rascals. You may even give me a good dressing-down, just as long as you send some lumber.

Please convey my warmest regards to Father Puecher, Father Gagliardi, Father Costantino, and Father Flecchia.[4] Wishing you every good thing from the Lord, and begging you to remember me in your prayers, I remain,

Your most grateful servant and friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Cleric Nicolini's examination went very well. He has another exam on Monday.

Don Bosco did not overlook some very wealthy people who were not in the habit of contributing to charity. Some did not even bother to reply, but Don Bosco did not give up and he would write again, even if with little hope of success. He put his trust in God, remarking, "Let's do everything we can and the Lord in His goodness will do the rest." After a lapse of time, he would try again in some other way.

Shortly after the middle of June he sent a petition to King Victor Emmanuel II. After gratefully acknowledging his goodwill toward the Oratory boys, he gave him an account of the new church under construction and invited him to lay the cornerstone. If this were not possible, he begged him to follow in his father's footsteps by continuing his royal benevolence toward the Oratory. Shortly thereafter Don Bosco received the following letter from the king's secretary:

Turin, July 5, 1851

Very Reverend Father:

Your appeal to His Majesty was duly forwarded to His Excellency Duke Pasqua, administrator of the royal palace. He has informed us, in a note dated June 25 last, that your request was presented to the king for his consideration and that His Majesty was very pleased to know that you and your fellow workers have gathered boys in the Valdocco Oratory to give them a sound religious and moral education.

Because of his many engagements His Majesty will be unable to be

[4] Rosminian priests. [Editor]

present at the laying of the cornerstone of the new church. He wishes, however, to further this pious undertaking. As a proof of his favorable interest he wishes to make it known that at a later date he will give his contribution.

While I am pleased to inform you of His Majesty's kindly sentiments toward your praiseworthy institute and its lofty purpose, I also wish to add my own personal tribute of praise for your zeal in promoting and directing this wonderful undertaking. With the most profound esteem, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

For the Minister

Deandreis, *First Secretary*

Meanwhile, work was progressing steadily and the foundations had reached street level. Don Bosco and his fellow priests signed a petition to the archbishop for permission to bless the cornerstone. On July 18, Canon Celestine Fissore, on behalf of the exiled Archbishop Fransoni, authorized Don Bosco or any other priest delegated by him to bless it according to the *Roman Ritual.* The date was set for July 20. The more than six hundred Oratory boys, like so many trumpets, heralded the event to such an extent that on the evening of that day a vast crowd, such as had never before been seen there, gathered at the site.

Archbishop Fransoni, who was deeply fond of Don Bosco and his oratories, would certainly have performed the ceremony himself, but this dauntless prelate was in exile at Lyons. Canon [Anthony] Moreno, royal almoner, represented the archbishop and blessed the cornerstone; Commendatore Joseph Cotta, a friend of the poor and an outstanding benefactor of Don Bosco, set it in place. A copy of the minutes of the proceedings was placed inside the cornerstone with various coins, medals, and other mementos. Then Mayor J. Bellone poured the first mortar over it.

The dedication address was delivered by the renowned Father [Andrew] Barrera of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Deeply stirred at the sight of the vast crowd and the large number of priests and members of the Turin aristocracy crowding around him, he stepped up to a mound of earth and delivered a magnificent address.

Ladies and gentlemen, the cornerstone which has just been blessed and laid in the foundations of this church has a twofold significance. It is like the grain of a mustard seed destined to grow into a mystical tree in which many boys, like the birds of the air, will find refuge; it symbolizes also that these oratories, founded on the Christian Faith and charity, will be unshakable rocks against which the enemies of the Church and the spirits of darkness will hurl themselves in vain.

The eloquent priest then went on to elaborate on these ideas with such eloquence that all listened with rapt attention. But the real highlights of his speech were a simile and a prayer. He compared the times to a hurricane threatening cities and villages with ruin and devastation.

As the danger gets closer, all living beings are swept away by fear and trembling and anxious insecurity. People bolt themselves into their homes; wild animals flee to their lairs. Birds fly to their nests; they are fortunate if they rest on hardy, sturdy trees. The times we live in are perilous, especially for inexperienced youth. Before us stands a tree whose roots will sink deep into the ground and whose trunk will not bend before the raging winds. Under this tree, within the walls of this sacred building, thousands of boys will find shelter and protection against the evil sown today by godless men and venal scribblers; they will find refuge and protection from poisonous, immoral theories and from the fiery onslaught of ardent, youthful passions which are further aroused by the bad example and scandalous conduct rampant in every class of society. I can already see flocks of boys rising in flight everywhere like frightened doves, hastening here to find not only shelter and protection but food for their temporal and eternal life. My listeners, with your material and moral support may this tree quickly grow to gigantic heights and spread its branches over the entire city. May it gather under its shade the many poor boys who, to the disgrace of our Faith, roam our streets on Sundays, falling into trouble, dishonoring their families, and undermining the very foundations of civil society. Today, ladies and gentlemen, no other task is more beneficial to Church and country; the future of families and nations lies in their young people; with them they will stand or fall.

In conclusion the orator addressed a prayer to Our Lord that moved many of his listeners to tears.

O God, Our Savior and Our Lord, You are symbolized in this cornerstone. Take this undertaking under Your omnipotent arm. Bless it, if

cursed; defend it, if attacked; love it as the pupil of Your eye, if hated. It fully deserves Your benevolence, for its purpose is to gather, instruct, and educate children, who were the joy of Your heart during Your mortal life. They are and always will be the object of Your most loving attentions as the little lambs of Your flock, the choicest flowers in the garden of Your Church. May this undertaking forever prosper under Your protection. May its seed, carried by the winds of Your grace, scatter far and wide. May the very foundations of the world collapse before it fades away from the face of the earth!

The prayer made a powerful impact on the crowd. Today [forty-four years later] its thoughts sound prophetic, for their fulfillment is still marvelously going on.

After Father Moreno signed the document of the cornerstone blessing, there followed a musico-literary program which was truly delightful. James Bellìa read a speech, several pupils recited brief poems, and six of the smaller day boys put on a skit, written by Don Bosco, to accompany the presentation of a bouquet of flowers to the mayor.[5]

Everyone was charmed by the self-assurance and candor of these underprivileged children of the working class. The program ended with military drills by a group of gymnasts who, under the command of Joseph Brosio, "the bersagliere," [6] had maintained order during the ceremony.

At nightfall all the visitors and day boys left. Don Bosco remained alone with his boarders. In their eyes the building of the church was the greatest project that Don Bosco would ever carry out in his lifetime. When Felix Reviglio expressed his wonder at the new church, Don Bosco replied matter-of-factly, "Oh, this is nothing. There will be other buildings here and yonder and over there." Then he went on to describe what now is a reality. The boys listened intently and eagerly anticipated the day when his predictions would come true, although at that time the probability of their fulfillment was pretty slim.

The church under construction was a source of great enthusiasm

[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[6] An infantryman belonging to a special swift corps in the Sardinian and Piedmontese army. [Editor]

for the day boys too. Quite often they brought their Jewish friends along. Don Bosco had always shown great kindness toward Jews during his high school days at Chieri [7] and, as we know, he had been mainly responsible for the conversions of [his two friends] Abraham [8] and Jonah.[9] He cordially welcomed the newcomers. One day he entrusted one of these boys to Ascanio Savio for instruction, and the boy was later baptized. Many others would also have become Christians if it had not been for parental opposition. Since their emancipation they attended public schools and unavoidably were exposed to religious instruction, which in turn must have aroused their interest in Christianity. Their parents, however, constantly warned them to shun Christians as enemies whom they were in duty bound to hate; if a Jewish boy showed any inclination toward Catholicism, his family would instantly remove him from the school.

Toward the end of his life Don Bosco gave us more information on this matter.[10] He told us:

I knew many of these boys who were very eager to embrace our Faith. When their families realized that their children were serious, they began telling them they were ungrateful, that they were apostates, a disgrace to their families. They even threatened to disinherit them and drive them from home if they did not change their mind. I know of some who were imprisoned in their rooms for a long time to prevent them from becoming Christians. Such things should not surprise us. Modern Judaism is no longer the holy law it once was, proclaimed by the prophets and confirmed by miracles. It has the Bible, but it has greater respect for the Talmud which inspires hatred of Christians and blasphemes God by indirectly denying His existence.

During my life I have often talked with adult Jews and discussed religion with them. Their ideas of the Messiah were pathetic. They treated this all-important truth with such cynicism that I became indignant. I remember asking one person whether he believed in the Messiah, and he replied, "Money is my Messiah." Another, in reply to the same question,

[7] *See* Vol. I, p. 231. [Editor]
[8] *See* Vol. III, pp. 180ff. [Editor]
[9] *See* Vol. I, pp. 240ff. [Editor]
[10] The reader should not forget that the sentiments expressed here reflect the spirit of those days. [Editor]

said, "A good dinner is the real Messiah to me." What can one say to such people? Most of them are ignorant of their religion, have no interest at all in the Messiah, and shun instruction.

I remember that the rabbis always avoided this topic. Some of them knew about Jesus Christ, but they adhered to Judaism out of material considerations. Recently a Jew received instruction in our Faith and appeared very eager for Baptism, but only on condition that several of his debts be paid. Another assured me that he would have become a Catholic if it would not have meant being disinherited. A third man, a very learned rabbi, was ready to be converted if I would guarantee him a livelihood. Nevertheless, I also found good people among them, honest in their business dealings and generous to charity, as well as a few who truly lived in conformity with God's precepts and appeared to be waiting for the Messiah in good faith.

Don Bosco had several Jewish friends, two of whom will figure in our narrative later on. For the moment, the following story will suffice. One day, when we were in town with him, a very distinguished-looking gentleman came up to him respectfully and spoke in a way that made us assume he was a Catholic. When the stranger left, Don Bosco said: "Do you see that gentleman? He always talks to me at length whenever we meet. Guess what! He is a rabbi! He knows the truth but he will not become a Catholic because he is afraid of the poverty he may have to face if he were to lose the substantial living he receives from the synagogue. I have begged him over and over again to put his faith in Divine Providence, but he lacks the courage to do so."

Don Bosco was full of compassion for Jews. He prayed for them and asked others to do likewise because they were once God's chosen people and were destined to come into the true Church before the end of time. Throughout his life he labored for their eternal salvation. He treated them all with great charity and even sheltered them when necessary. As we have seen, both young and old enjoyed his solicitude and we shall say more about this fact later on.

Some Jewish boys were accepted at the Oratory and received instruction and Baptism. For example, on July 17, 1851, Bishop Louis Calabiana of Casale recommended a young Jewish boy to Don Bosco's care. Deangelis by name, but better known as "John of the Pharisees," he had been sent to Turin in the hope that he

could be accepted and instructed at the hospice for catechumens. This arrangement also aimed at protecting him from the persecution of his fellow Jews of Casale who were doing everything possible to hinder his conversion. Contemplating the possibility that the hospice might not be able to accept the boy, the bishop begged Don Bosco to take him into the Oratory under his fatherly protection, for a short time at least, and he promised to pay for the boy's upkeep.

Don Bosco, as usual, gladly accepted him and was happy to introduce him to Jonah of Chieri who had remained his good friend and who often came to visit him at the Oratory.

CHAPTER 25

Fostering Vocations

AT the beginning of October, Don Bosco went with several of his pupils to Becchi for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. John Cagliero, a young boy and the acknowledged leader in all games, was anxiously awaiting Don Bosco's arrival. Once when a bishop had come to Castelnuovo to administer Confirmation, the boy, impressed by the prelate's robes, made himself a paper miter and cope, fashioned a crozier out of a reed, and then allowed himself to be lifted from the rungs of a ladder onto his companions' shoulders. As they carried him around, he imparted his blessing with serious mien to the applauding throng of his friends.

Father [Anthony] Cinzano, the pastor, was fond of this good-natured but very lively boy, and he allowed him to come and go freely at the rectory. He also entrusted small chores to him, especially after Don Bosco had promised to take him to live and study at the Oratory. It was in the rectory that John Cagliero's love and enthusiasm for Don Bosco were born. He himself gave us this account:

I was always hearing praises being showered on Don Bosco. My fellow villagers, and especially my mother, relatives, and friends, kept telling me that they had sensed something extraordinary in Don Bosco, even as a young boy, that set him above his companions; they regarded his modest, gentle behavior as a reflection of his rare virtues. I had met several of his schoolmates both from the high school and from the seminary in Chieri, among them Mr. [Secundus] Matta of Morialdo, Father [Charles] Allora, and Mr. Musso, a lawyer. They also spoke of Don Bosco with such veneration and admiration for his goodness and virtue that it was obvious they regarded him as a model of Christian perfection. Father Allora later told me and others that when Don Bosco was at Chieri his

schoolmates considered him to be a saint. Whenever Father Cinzano talked to me about him he used to say, "I always felt that there was something special in Don Bosco; his piety, his cheerfulness, his reserve, his obedience, and his humility were outstanding. In short, he was extraordinary in everything." When speaking of Don Bosco's perseverance in his undertakings, Father Cinzano would remark in a light vein, "Don Bosco, like all saints, was always individualistic and headstrong."

As soon as Cagliero heard that Don Bosco had arrived at Becchi, he hurried there [1] to greet him. Don Bosco's grave, composed, and modest mien were to the boy clear proofs of the many virtues attributed to him. Before he left, Cagliero had asked a friend of his, sixteen-year-old John Turchi, to accompany him on the trip to meet Don Bosco. John Turchi, now a literature professor, gave us this report:

Cagliero told me so many good things about Don Bosco that I decided to accompany him to Becchi. I was very impressed at the sight of this priest who seemed so conscious of the sacredness of his ministry and yet was so affable—a real novelty for me. Right from the start I was impressed, and that impression was unforgettable. I was charmed by the affectionate way he spoke to me and to all the other boys. After questioning me about my studies and the career I planned to follow, he concluded his conversation with me by saying, "I know your father, and we are good friends. Please tell him to visit me tomorrow!" My father did so, and that was how it was arranged that I was to go to the Oratory in mid-October.

While there I learned from my schoolmates that Don Bosco had done things that were quite extraordinary. (I must add that this reputation of his grew ever more widespread.) I watched him conduct evening classes and met some of the other teachers, such as Father Chiaves and Mr. Geninatti.

By now the walls of the new church of St. Francis de Sales were at window level, and with my companions I helped form a human chain to pass the bricks all the way up. On Sundays and holy days many boys from town came to the church services. After church we had a lot of fun playing and performing military drills, using old rifles without barrels—a gift of the arsenal.

But what impressed me most about the Oratory was the fervent piety

[1] Becchi was about three miles from Castelnuovo. [Editor]

that reigned there. This quite surprised me. I must admit that it was not until then that I began to understand the real meaning of going to confession. We frequented the sacraments not only on Sundays but also on weekdays. Don Bosco urged us to choose some day during the week for Communion in such a way that there would be some of us receiving Communion every day. Most of us made our confessions to him, although on Sundays other priests were also available. Many boys had such a delicate conscience that every day, while Don Bosco vested for Mass, there was always someone who would confide to him some doubt and seek his assurance before receiving Communion. Then and afterward there were always a substantial number of boys whose piety was so genuine and inspiring that they set the tone for the rest of the boys and spurred them to greater fervor.

Don Bosco showed great interest in our catechism classes. His talks about church history were informal, clear, and interesting. Before concluding, he would pause to ask some of his listeners to comment on what he had said or to draw some practical conclusion. In his little talk after night prayers his recommendations were so appropriate that on my way to the dormitory I would be tingling with joy. He formed our characters and inspired us to do good; we followed his instructions joyfully. Everything he did was accomplished with gentleness; his orders sounded more like requests, and we would have made any sacrifice to please him. Throughout the ten years I spent at the Oratory before my ordination, things continuously got better and better. I have seen many boarding schools, but I have never found one where such piety reigned as at the Oratory. Don Bosco's benevolence toward me never ceased.

Thus reads the witness of Father John Turchi. On November 1, 1851, Don Bosco accepted another boy whose father had died only a few days before. His name was John Cagliero; he was to leave an undying memory in the annals of the Oratory.

That year on All Saints' Day Don Bosco was expected in Castelnuovo to give the sermon commemorating the faithful departed. A few hours before the services, Cagliero was already in the sacristy, anxious to earn the right to escort the preacher to the pulpit. He donned his cassock and surplice and then waited patiently while his friends went out to meet Don Bosco. When Don Bosco arrived, he did lead him to the pulpit.

On that occasion Don Bosco delivered a truly unforgettable sermon. He told the congregation that on his way to the church he had

passed by the cemetery and had heard mournful voices calling him by name. He approached, and from among the monuments he saw souls rising from their graves, lamenting that they had been forgotten by their loved ones. A husband, a wife, a son, a friend were giving him messages for their dear ones in the village, begging them to try to deliver them from their awful torments. Don Bosco described the pitiful scene, the sorrowful lamentations, and the recollections of the past with such vividness, candor, and sincerity that the congregation wept. That day they were very generous and contributed 150 lire—a relatively large sum—for requiem Masses. To those who marveled at the fact that his sermons loosened the purse strings of his listeners, Don Bosco would reply: "In order to induce people to be generous in almsgiving, one must make them understand that this is in their own best interests, spiritual *and* material. They must be made to realize that having protectors in heaven is also good business for their farming. These protectors help ward off punishments, misfortunes, storms, sicknesses, plant diseases, droughts, etc. . . . This is the secret for inducing people to give generously; other approaches will yield little or nothing."

After he was back in the sacristy, Don Bosco turned to his altar boy and with a kind smile said to him, "I think you want to tell me something very important, don't you?"

"Yes," replied the boy, blushing fiercely. "I want to tell you something that I've been thinking about for a long time. I want to come to Turin with you to study to become a priest."

"Very well, you shall come along with me," Don Bosco said. "The pastor has already spoken to me about you. Tell your mother to come to the rectory with you this evening and we'll settle the matter."

As the church bells slowly and mournfully invited the faithful to pray sorrowfully for the dead, John Cagliero and his mother knocked at the rectory.

"My good Teresa," Don Bosco greeted her jokingly, "you've come just in time. I was expecting you. Let's talk business. Is it true that you want to sell me your son?"

"Sell him? Good heavens, no!" she exclaimed. "But I'm willing to give him to you, if it's all right with you."

"That's even better!" replied Don Bosco. "Bundle up his things

then. Tomorrow I'll take him with me, and I will be a father to him."

The next morning at dawn John Cagliero was already in the sacristy ready to serve Don Bosco's Mass.

It was obvious from the very beginning that he was a boy full of life. Don Bosco's trip from Castelnuovo to Turin [about 15 miles] was usually made on foot. When it was time to go, Don Bosco turned to him and said, "Well, shall we go?"

"Yes, let's go."

"What about your mother?"

"She's glad that I am with you."

So they set out. At times Cagliero walked at Don Bosco's side; at other times he ran ahead or lingered behind to pluck fruit from the hedges; then he would race to overtake him or jump over ditches and run through the fields. From time to time Don Bosco would question him, and the boy's replies revealed an admirable candor. They covered the present, past, and future. He talked about the things he had done at home and confided his most intimate secrets. He was so candid that Don Bosco declared he had come to know him so thoroughly within the space of a few hours that if it had been a sacramental confession he would only have had to give him absolution.

John Cagliero reminisced about that trip as follows:

Don Bosco talked to me about nothing else but God and the Blessed Virgin. He asked me if I frequented the sacraments and if I was devoted to the Blessed Virgin; he also inquired about other spiritual matters. Every now and then, laughing, he would urge me to be a good boy.

Finally we reached Turin. I shall always fondly remember the moment I arrived at the Oratory on the evening of November 2 [1851]. Don Bosco introduced me to his mother, saying, "Mamma, here is a small boy from Castelnuovo. He wants to become really good and go to school."

Mamma Margaret replied, "You're always bringing in boys when you know very well that we have no more room."

"Oh, you'll find a little corner for him," replied Don Bosco, smiling.

"In your own room, perhaps," she replied.

"That won't be necessary," continued Don Bosco. "He's so small he can sleep in the grissini [2] basket. We could hoist it to a beam just like a

[2] Slender breadsticks about three feet long. [Editor]

birdcage." Laughing at the remark, Mamma Margaret left the room to find a place for me. That night another boy and I slept at the foot of Don Bosco's bed.

The next morning I saw how poor this dwelling was. Don Bosco's room was quite small with a low ceiling, and our dormitories on the main floor were narrow and paved with cobblestones. Straw mattresses, sheets, and blankets were the only furnishings. The kitchen was miserably equipped. For china and silverware we had only a few tin bowls and spoons. Forks, knives, and napkins made their appearance only many years later when some benefactor provided them for us. Our dining room was a shed; Don Bosco's was in a little room near the well. It also doubled as a classroom and recreation hall. All this helped to keep us in the poor and humble station into which we had been born.

Don Bosco's example was an education in itself. He actually enjoyed waiting on us, tidying up our dormitory, mending and cleaning our clothes, and performing other services for our benefit. He shared our life and made us feel that this was not just a boarding school but truly a family cared for by a tender, loving father whose only concern was our spiritual and material well-being.

He loved to be just one of us. Because of this, occasionally some of us would forget the respect due to him. At such times it would be one of the older boys rather than Don Bosco who would reprimand us, saying: "Behave yourselves! Don't you see you're showing disrespect to Don Bosco? Don't take advantage of his goodness! We should be good to him too!"

Outsiders, drawn by Don Bosco's fame, often came to visit him. Imagine their surprise when they found him sitting on a wooden horse or on the ground, half-hidden by a crowd of boys. There he was, regaling them with amusing, instructive anecdotes or playing "hot hands" [3] or a game of dexterity that consisted in alternately striking first the palms of his own hands and then those of the other player, left palm against right, right against left, with increasing speed.

For him the salvation of souls was the only thing that really mattered. If he noticed that some boy had slipped spiritually, he would take pains to approach him and whisper a good word; then he would assign someone to keep an eye on him so as to lead him back to the path of virtue and strengthen him spiritually. He was convinced that God would help him educate numberless boys in Christian principles.

[3] A game in which one player with his back turned and one hand behind his back, palm open and outward, would be struck on the hand by another player. If he guessed who it was that hit him, the latter would take his place. [Editor]

I recall how, when I was still a newcomer at the Oratory, he would often tell us with an air of saintly simplicity that he had asked the Lord to reserve ten thousand places in heaven for his boys. He assured us that his request had been granted on condition that we did not offend God. "My children," he would say, "jump, run, play, and make all the noise you want, but avoid sin like the plague and you will surely gain heaven."

As the number of boys kept increasing, we used to ask him if ten thousand places would be enough. He then told us that he had raised his request on behalf of the many other boys who would be coming later and who would gain their eternal salvation with God's help and the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

His words were all the more effective inasmuch as his prophetic spirit manifested itself in countless circumstances. At the Oratory we were all convinced that Don Bosco had knowledge of occult things.

Those were the words of Bishop Cagliero. Let us now resume our narrative. After All Souls' Day Cagliero began to study Latin under Professor Bonzanino, together with [John] Turchi, Angelo Savio, and others. At the same time Michael Rua, at Don Bosco's request, was accepted by Father Matthew Picco, a professor of rhetoric and the humanities, at his private school in a flat near the parish church of St. Augustine. Young Rua, who still did not board at the Oratory, became an outstanding student.

Don Bosco himself continued to tutor his pupils in their classical studies. He was truly gifted in suggesting ways and means for getting the most out of their study of Latin. "Do you really want to learn Latin?" Don Bosco would ask them, and Michael Rua in particular. "Do this: translate a paragraph from a classic author into Italian. Then, without looking at the original text, put your translation back into Latin, and then compare. Do this every day for a month. You'll be surprised how you'll begin to depend less and less on your dictionary."

While looking after the academic education of his students, Don Bosco was not neglecting that of his young apprentices who were learning their trade in various Turin workshops. He not only continued to visit them at work to see if there was any moral danger or to check on their progress, but he also took the trouble to enter into formal contracts with their employers and see to it that they were

kept. We think it worthwhile to reproduce one of these contracts; not only will it give us an idea of the conditions that prevailed in those times, but it will also allow us to dispense with future explanations.

WORK CONTRACT

Turin, November 1851

This private agreement, drawn up at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales between Mr. Charles Aimino and Joseph Bordone, a pupil at the aforementioned Oratory for whom Mr. Victor Ritner stands guarantee, may be canceled at the request of one of the contracting parties. It has been agreed as follows:

1. Mr. Charles Aimino shall accept as apprentice glassblower Joseph Bordone of Biella, to whom he will teach his trade during the following three years, ending December 1, 1854. In addition, Mr. Aimino obligates himself to give to the said Bordone all the requisite instruction and information regarding this craft during his apprenticeship, together with suitable advice concerning his proper conduct, and, if necessary, to correct him verbally and by no other means. He also obligates himself to employ his apprentice only in tasks connected with his craft, and he shall avoid taxing the boy beyond his physical capabilities.

2. In order that the apprentice may attend church services, catechism classes, and other activities of the aforementioned Oratory, the employer shall not require the apprentice to report to work on Sundays or holy days. If illness (or some other legitimate reason) should force the apprentice to absent himself from work for more than fifteen days per year, the employer shall be entitled to the same number of extra workdays at the end of the term of apprenticeship.

3. The employer obligates himself to pay the apprentice, during the aforementioned period, one lire a day during the first year, one and a half lire during the second year, and two lire a day during the third year. Wages are to be paid weekly. (The apprentice is entitled to the customary two-week vacation every year.)

4. The employer agrees to give a written, truthful report on the conduct of his apprentice at the end of each month on an appropriate form that will be supplied to him.

5. Joseph Bordone obligates himself to serve his employer throughout the period of his apprenticeship assiduously and attentively; he promises to be promptly obedient, respectful, and docile toward him and to behave

in a manner befitting a good apprentice. Mr. Victor Ritner, goldsmith, here present, vouches for him and obligates himself to redress any damage caused through the apprentice's fault.

6. In the event that the apprentice should be expelled from the Oratory through his fault (thus ending all relationship with the director of the aforementioned Oratory), all relations between the director of the Oratory and the employer shall also cease forthwith; if, however, the reason for the apprentice's expulsion from the Oratory is of no particular concern to the employer, this contract shall still be binding on both employer and employee under the sole guarantee given above.

7. The director of the Oratory promises his assistance in regard to the good conduct of the apprentice. He will also promptly consider any complaint by the employer against the apprentice lodging at the Oratory under his care.

Both the employer and the above-mentioned apprentice promise to carry out their respective obligations under penalty of indemnity.

Charles Aimino
Joseph Bordone
Father John Baptist Vola
Victor Ritner, *Guarantor*
Father John Bosco,
Director of the Oratory

The first work contracts were drawn up on plain paper, but the following year this was done as required by law, as may be seen from the agreement drawn up between Mr. Joseph Bertolino, master carpenter, residing in Turin, and the apprentice Joseph Odasso of Mondovì, under the auspices of the Rev. John Bosco and the guarantee of the boy's father, Vincent Odasso, born in Garessio but residing in Turin. Two originals were requested for this agreement, in which the employer specifically pledged himself "to give the apprentice opportune and salutary advice concerning his moral and civil conduct as a good father would give to his son; to correct him kindly when necessary but only by word and never by any physical ill-treatment."

It was clearly stipulated that in case of damage by the apprentice the guarantor was under obligation only if it was culpable damage, "that is to say, caused by malicious intent and not purely by accident or as the result of lack of skill in his craft." It was also stipu-

lated that Don Bosco's responsibility for the boy's conduct would cease from the moment the boy no longer resided at the Oratory. The agreement, dated February 8, 1852, had the following signatures: Joseph Bertolino, Joseph Odasso, Vincent Odasso, and Rev. John Bosco.

Each of these agreements differed in some respects; duration of the contract and wages varied according to the age and ability of the boy and the complexity of the trade he was to learn. But in reading them we may gauge the difficulties and problems which frequently cropped up to add to Don Bosco's burdens; these were undoubtedly a nuisance and source of worry to him, but never to such an extent as to ruffle his composure. Often the employers were too exacting and the boys rather careless, but his love for his fellowmen found a solution for everything. Whether they were drafted or simply accepted by him, these agreements clearly reveal his solicitude for all those entrusted to his care.

CHAPTER 26

Special Charisms

ALTHOUGH the St. Aloysius Sodality flourished in the oratories at Porta Nuova and Borgo Vanchiglia, it achieved its best results at Valdocco where everything centered on Don Bosco. (As a point of interest, the indulgences granted to those attending the three oratories were also to apply to all future oratories.) Don Bosco loved the St. Aloysius Sodality; it was the apple of his eye, and every year he would give a dinner to all the day boys who were members. Occasionally he held sodality meetings in the chapel and had a secretary record the minutes. The outstanding day boys and all the boarders were members, the latter by the express wish of Don Bosco. They were very eager to sign up and have the privilege of wearing the medal of St. Aloysius.

Distinguished Turinese noblemen became honorary members of the sodality and proudly took part in the festivities, honoring the saint by joining the procession and wearing their membership medal on their lapels. The sodality officers, with the assistance of the "prior," [1] had to plan the celebration of the feasts of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Aloysius. At the preparatory novenas the boys sang the hymn *Iste confessor* or *Infensus hostis;* then there followed a prayer or a short reading from the life of the saint being honored or from some doctrinal book. On the Sunday before the feast, at morning and afternoon church services, the boys were exhorted to approach the sacraments and frequently reminded of the plenary indulgence they could gain on those days. All these practices were later incorporated into the regulations of the festive oratories. The

[1] A lay officer elected for one year. He was responsible for the external solemnity of feasts and the maintenance of discipline. *See* Vol. III, p. 459. [Editor]

Mutual Aid Society, an extension of the St. Aloysius Sodality,[2] also flourished, and its officers and prominent members were Don Bosco's dinner guests annually.

Don Bosco often gathered the most loyal and zealous sodality members in his room to brief them on the festive oratory and the hospice. He also showed them how they could assist him through their brotherly supervision of the boys. In accordance with his aims he held up the example of St. Aloysius and urged them to imitate him with the following exhortations:

Remember that St. Aloysius spent several hours a day before the Blessed Sacrament.

He loved most those who were unkind to him.

As a layman, he volunteered to teach catechism to the uneducated, to help them reform their lives, and to act as a peacemaker among them.

While teaching the poor of Rome, he used to bring them to a priest so that they could make their confession and regain God's grace.

If we cannot teach catechism to poor boys, let us guide them to others who can. In this way many souls can be saved from the path of perdition and led to salvation. In return, St. Aloysius will obtain many graces from God for us.

Needless to say, Don Bosco's words were particularly effective because of his personal holiness and the general belief that he possessed special powers. St. Paul tells us, "He who cleaves to the Lord is one spirit with Him." (1 Cor. 6, 17) Therefore, we have no reason to doubt that such a person could be privy to some of God's secrets and occasionally tap His omnipotence. As regards Don Bosco, it is an incontestable fact that God rewarded him for his virtue with charisms which not only helped him immensely in seeking God's glory and the salvation of souls but also proved to all his heavenly mission. He was truly endowed with the gift of prophecy; he could read hearts and discern hidden and secret things. He also possessed the gifts of tears, of healing, and of miracles.

Father Ascanio Savio, who lived at the Oratory from 1848 to 1852, and his schoolmate, [Stephen] Vacchetta, assured us that even in those early days Don Bosco had disclosed that God would

[2] *See* p. 53. [Editor]

bless his plans and works and that they would see the Oratory develop and flourish in a wondrous manner.

Father John Turchi, who came to the Oratory in 1851, also asserted that Don Bosco had even then envisioned a large building with vast workshops and a printing plant of his own. This would enable him to promote God's glory by spreading religious and moral books to strengthen the faith of the young and to counteract both the error of Protestantism and licentious literature.

John Villa began attending the Oratory as a day boy in 1855. Many of his companions who had been frequenting the festive oratory for years confirmed to him the veracity of those predictions which they themselves had heard. Others added: "To encourage the members of the St. Aloysius Sodality Don Bosco would often tell them of a dream in which he had seen the remarkable development and expansion of the oratories, an implicit allusion to the religious congregation he would found. Thus he made them understand how important and widespread the St. Aloysius Sodality would become in future years. In his humility he spoke of dreams, but deep in their hearts all the boys sensed that he was making a prophecy. This belief was further strengthened by his predictions of events which they themselves saw fulfilled. Father Michael Rua gave us this report:

I attended the Oratory from 1847 to 1852. From the earliest days I remember that whenever a member of the St. Aloysius Sodality died, his death had been predicted by Don Bosco. He never disclosed the boy's name, of course, but he would say, "Within fifteen days or a month, a sodality member will be called to eternity. It may be I or it could be any one of you. Let us get ready!" A salutary fear kept the boys alert to see if this prediction would come true. At the time of such predictions some of the boys he meant were in excellent health, whereas others were perhaps sick, but the striking thing was that they did die within the time predicted. I personally heard several such announcements, and at other times was told of them by my companions, but they never failed to come true. He foretold the death of my own brother and of others as well.

Louis Rua, Michael's older brother, an exemplary young man, was an Oratory boy. He died on March 29, 1851, at the age of 19.

We are indebted to Joseph Buzzetti for the description of the following event that took place in 1850:

One evening, Don Bosco called some members of the St. Aloysius Sodality for a special meeting. At its close, as they were about to go home, Don Bosco said to them, "Count those present. One of you will be missing at our next meeting."

They all understood that "will be missing" meant that one of them would die. Some who were closer to him—among them Michael Rua's brother—privately asked Don Bosco who it was going to be. At first Don Bosco gave an evasive answer, but on being pressed, he said, "His name begins with *B*."

At this frank reply the boys looked at each other in puzzlement. Of those who had attended the meeting only two had names beginning with *B*, and, strangely enough, both boys had the same surname, "Burzio," although they were not related. The boys who had pressed Don Bosco for the name agreed to keep his revelation secret and waited to see what would happen.

Both Burzios enjoyed excellent health. The younger one was another St. Aloysius and Don Bosco esteemed him highly. One Sunday, at Don Bosco's Mass for the boys, young Burzio was absorbed in prayer; suddenly, with a painful cry, he collapsed. All thought it was just a fainting spell. However, Don Bosco was anxious to know why he had cried out, and the boy told him, "At the Elevation I saw the Host dripping blood. At the same time I heard an awesome voice saying: 'This is a symbol of what sacrileges will do to Our Lord in Piedmont.' " Burzio died before the next sodality meeting.

According to Joseph Buzzetti, similar events had also occurred during Don Bosco's chaplaincy at the Rifugio. Father Michael Rua tells us:

Don Bosco did not only predict deaths; he also foretold many recoveries, even in the most hopeless cases. I recall that [Louis] Viale, a cleric schoolmate of mine, fell gravely ill in 1853 and the doctors had given up any hope of saving him. Don Bosco visited him in the hospital and told him to pray to a saint, perhaps St. Aloysius. He assured Viale that when he would see him again in three days he would be sitting up in bed eating and would soon after leave the hospital. Don Bosco's prediction came true in every detail.

All the boys we have spoken of here belonged to the St. Aloysius Sodality. Both they and many others recalled that even at that time Don Bosco possessed the gift of reading hearts. They told of revelations made in and out of the confessional and of confidences the boys later made to each other. Don Bosco had fathomed their most intimate thoughts, as well as things they had either forgotten or failed to say in previous confessions. "The intention in the human heart is like water far below the surface," we read in the Book of Proverbs, "but the man of intelligence draws it forth." (Prov. 20, 5)

The boys were convinced that Don Bosco could see through them. Some whose conscience was troubled shunned him in the hope this ruse would hide their sinful life and spiritual misery. One of these boys, who became a distinguished professor, attested to this, as follows:

> Many, including myself, whose conscience was not at peace with God had this strange experience: they seemed to be irresistibly kept away from Don Bosco as he mingled with the boys, but at the same time they felt the need to go to confession to him as soon as possible. When they did, they were greatly surprised to hear Don Bosco tell them exactly what sins they had committed even many years before. Neverthelss, it was a great relief for them to make their confessions to him, because with his help they were able to make a clean breast of all their sins and ease their troubled minds. Others went to him with mixed feelings of trepidation and joy, only to be assured that they were in the state of grace or that the confession they were about to make would with Don Bosco's help be pleasing to God.

Regarding Don Bosco's gift of prophecy and his ability to read hearts, a learned person of distinction has suggested that there was nothing wondrous about it since Don Bosco was quite intelligent and thoroughly acquainted with whatever went on in the Oratory. He also was familiar with the traits and habits of those around him, and therefore he could quite possibly foresee developments of which others had no presentiment. His extraordinary insight would thus enable him to grasp what less experienced minds could not perceive. We concede that Don Bosco had an extraordinary power of discernment, as well as a prodigious ability for remembering names, features, events, and words. We also concede that it is quite probable

that he sometimes utilized such knowledge for the spiritual benefit of others. However, the many extraordinary happenings reported by both day boys and boarders and those events that we ourselves witnessed force us to conclude that surely there was a good deal of the supernatural involved in all this. Since Don Bosco's natural talents were entirely and heroically used for the glory of God, it would be logical for God to reward him with charisms to make his work even more fruitful. The Gospel seems to bear this out. The good servant said to his master, "Lord, thy gold piece has earned ten gold pieces," and the master replied, "Well done, good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, thou shalt have authority over ten towns. (Luke 19, 16)

Ascanio Savio has left us the following deposition:

It was the common belief at the Oratory that Don Bosco knew the sins of the boys because he could read them on their foreheads. As a test, a boy would ask him, "Don Bosco, guess my sins." In reply, he would sometimes whisper confidentially into the ear of the questioner. It was obvious that his answer was accurate because the boy would become strangely silent.

One evening, a boy from Vercelli, named Giulio, joined such a group. "Guess my sins, too," he asked persistently. Don Bosco bent over and whispered something into his ear, as he had done to the others. Immediately the boy began to cry, exclaiming, "You're the priest who preached the mission in my church. . . ." That very day the boy had arrived from a fairly distant town and Don Bosco had never met him before or heard confessions in his parish church. I am therefore convinced that Don Bosco read into his innermost being with supernatural intuition. It was so widely believed that he could read a boy's sins on his forehead that several discreetly tried to cover their foreheads when they were in his presence.

My brother, Father Angelo, told me that one morning at the Oratory, immediately after rising, Don Bosco wrote several notes to various boys, my brother among them. I asked him, "Did he reveal your faults?" His answer was affirmative and implied that they had been well-guarded faults knowable only by supernatural enlightenment.

There was no deceit in Don Bosco or fear of what people might say. His utterances were motivated by a sacred duty that became all the more impelling as the more merciful were God's designs. The

boys were convinced of this. They saw how everything he did and said was inspired by a calm, prudent, and serene zeal.

His gift of tears was another manifest proof of his closeness to God and of his tender love for Him. Sometimes Don Bosco would weep while celebrating Mass, distributing Communion, or blessing the congregation before dismissal. When he gave the "Good Night" to his boys, a conference to his co-workers, or brief and effective admonitions at the close of a spiritual retreat, he often became so deeply moved that he could not go on, thus also arousing his listeners to tears. The same happened when he spoke of sin, scandal, immodesty, lack of response to Our Lord's love, or the danger that one of his own might lose his soul. But Father John Bonetti tells us that some boys occasionally saw his face light up in the midst of his tears. Bishop Cagliero testified as follows: "When Don Bosco preached on the love of God, the damnation of the soul, the passion of Our Lord, the Holy Eucharist, a happy death, or the hope of paradise, my companions and I several times saw him shed tears of love, sorrow, and joy. He seemed completely absorbed when speaking of the Blessed Virgin, Her goodness, and Her immaculate purity."

This occurred frequently when he preached in public churches. Father [Felix] Reviglio saw him weep at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin when preaching on the Last Judgment and describing the separation of the just from the sinners. Father Francis Dalmazzo often saw him weep, especially when speaking of eternal life. Hardened sinners among his listeners would be so moved that they would seek him out after the sermon to make their confession to him.

We ourselves and thousands of others from the Oratory, as well as many who knew him in earlier days, witnessed this divine gift given to Don Bosco.

We have already mentioned his gifts of healing and of miracles, but what we have said is minor compared to what we still have to relate. The contents of this chapter are little more than a sketch of an inexhaustible subject.

CHAPTER 27

Crisis at the Oratories

VOLUME XXI of the *Geographical, Historical, Statistical, and Commercial Dictionary* by Goffredo Casalis, published in 1851, has an article entitled "Charitable Institutions," which is lavish in its praise of the three oratories founded by Don Bosco in Turin. The article concludes as follows:

Boys attending these oratories are exposed to an environment that refines them and educates their minds and hearts. Within a short time they acquire good manners, develop a liking for work, and become good Christians and upright citizens. Such impressive results should certainly induce the government to give every consideration to an undertaking which is of great benefit to the poorer class. Many zealous priests have dedicated themselves to this social work of rescuing from idleness many boys who would undoubtedly come to a sorry end without their solicitous care. Here we must also mention the praiseworthy Father [Hyacinth] Carpano, who plans to open a center for workmen recently released from hospitals and unable to return immediately to work either because of unemployment conditions or their need for time to convalesce. This project will become a reality as soon as Father Carpano manages to find the support he confidently expects to receive.

Some may object that we have devoted too much space to these institutions. This is quite opposed to the thinking of those who realize that public recognition is the sole reward these worthy people receive for their constant, tireless labors. These priests dedicate their entire lives to the welfare of the young, and it would be most unjust to deny them the praise they so eminently deserve.

Let us now resume our narrative. Father Carpano, then, had just withdrawn, regretfully, from the oratories to which he had been of such great help and which he had seen come into being and thrive.

The St. Aloysius Oratory in 1851 was still under the direction of Father Peter Ponte,[1] assisted by Father Charles Morozzo, Father Ignatius Delmonte, Attorney [Cajetan] Bellingeri, Father [Felix] Rossi, and Father Berardi. Father Ponte was an excellent priest, but, too easily influenced by others, he was soon won over by some catechists who were dissatisfied with Don Bosco's administration of the Guardian Angel Oratory at Borgo Vanchiglia [2] and the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova. They attributed his zeal to ambition and a desire to dominate. This opinion was not shared by all. Father Leonard Murialdo, for example, declared: "I never thought that such was his intention. I could not help but admire the successful development of the oratories and their good work."

This successful growth was due to unity of direction which Don Bosco wanted preserved at all costs. Unfortunately, self-love makes people partial to themselves and envious of another's success, especially if that person is their equal. The fact that others admire his performance humiliates them. [Niccolò] Tommaseo has aptly termed envy disguised under the guise of zeal as "admiration repressed by hatred and sadness."

For this reason Don Bosco's orders, though couched in respectful terms, were often not respectfully received. Steady, vicious criticism, although limited to small circles, spread from one oratory to another. Passion blinded the malcontents and fostered thoughts of rebellion. Not caring for further aggravation, Don Bosco suffered in silence, but even his silence was criticized. Nevertheless he was prepared to take action should the rebellion rise openly to the surface.

Joseph Brosio described the situation in this way to Father [John] Bonetti:

One Sunday afternoon, after church services, I did not see Don Bosco in the playground. Concerned about his unusual absence, I went through the house looking for him and at last I found him in a room. He looked very sad, almost on the verge of tears. Seeing him so depressed, I insisted that he tell me the reason. He had always trusted me, so he finally relented and told me that a boy (he revealed his name) had hurt him very deeply by his outrageous behavior. "I am not disturbed by what he said

[1] *See* Vol. III, p. 394. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 392-98. [Editor]

to me personally," he added. "What distresses me is the thought that this boy has taken a very bad turn."

I also felt hurt and immediately prepared to go after that insolent youth to demand an explanation and make him swallow his insults. But Don Bosco, noticing my anger, stopped me and said with a smile: "You want to punish him, and he certainly deserves it, but let's take our revenge together. Won't that be better?"

"Yes, we'll do it that way," I answered. At that moment I was too angry to realize that Don Bosco intended to "avenge" the wrong by forgiving the offender. In fact, he invited me to pray with him for the boy. I am sure he must have prayed for me too, because I instantly felt a change sweep over me. My anger against the boy dissolved so completely that if he had entered the room at that precise moment, I would have welcomed him as a close friend.

After our prayer was completed, I told Don Bosco of the radical change in my feelings. He replied: "Christian revenge consists in forgiving those who offend us and praying for them. Your prayer for that boy has pleased God. That's why you feel so full of joy. Always conduct yourself in this way, and your life will be a very happy one."

Thus did Don Bosco react when things did not go according to his wishes. This incident clearly indicates that even at Valdocco there were some who sided with the dissidents. As the danger of a split continued to increase, Father Robert Murialdo, Father Tasca, Father [Francis] Barone, Father [Joseph] Berizzi, Father [John] Cocchis, and Canon Saccarelli, founder of the Holy Family Institute, attempted to resolve the difficulty by calling a meeting. Father Ponte was invited to attend and state his grievances, but he declined. At this meeting Don Bosco declared himself ready to make concessions but not to abdicate that authority which was his by right.

A temporary agreement was reached when it was learned that Marchioness Barolo was looking for a personal chaplain. Don Bosco suggested to Father Cafasso that the post be offered to Father Ponte, who was anxious for such an assignment. The marchioness accepted Father Cafasso's advice, and so Don Bosco appointed Father [Felix] Rossi to the St. Aloysius Oratory. Toward mid-October, Marchioness Barolo left for Rome with Silvio Pellico and Father Ponte. The latter, in a letter to Father John Borel, presented his case and com-

plained of the allegedly intolerable burdens that he had had to endure.

Father Borel answered Father Ponte promptly and tactfully, careful not to offend his sensibilities. The reply throws some light on the controversy.

Turin, October 23, 1851

Reverend and dear Father Ponte:

Since the welfare of the oratories is very close to our heart, we are convinced that harmony between all members, regardless of their rank, is the best policy. Only thus will God be with us! Therefore, with God's help, we are determined to promote this concord by closer cooperation among ourselves and by the removal of any obstacle that may arise.

Concord is impaired when the other oratories are not allowed to use certain things provided for one oratory. Likewise, it is disturbed when, in the same oratory, a member reserves some things for his exclusive use so that no one may use them even when he is absent.

We have therefore agreed that any donation to one oratory must be regarded as given to all the oratories, and the directors are bound in conscience to inform the benefactors of this policy of ours.

We have reached this conclusion as a result of your letter and a subsequent episode of a similar nature. Since it may happen that, due to our limited supply of sacred vestments, one of the oratories may need to borrow them on special occasions, it is only right that the other oratories come to its assistance just as we already do with personnel and other things. In case one of us sees fit to lend an oratory something he has or to borrow something from others, besides being grateful, he must promptly return the borrowed goods. This has always been our practice. Such was the case, for example, with the crib kindly loaned to the St. Aloysius Oratory.

We must not think that Divine Providence will fail us because we have adopted this procedure. Indeed, we have reason to hope that it will result in even greater blessings. By mutual aid we widen the field of our charity, open new avenues for doing good to the young, share more intimately in the communion of saints, and strip ourselves of selfishness and pride. Our charity will then be more genuine inasmuch as it will be untainted by personal interests. No one has anything to lose, because each oratory, by sharing its material goods with the others, will in turn be entitled to the same benefits. Let us be ever grateful to Our Lord for the blessing of concord. In this spirit let us work on behalf of youth in every part of the city.

I am delighted to inform you that the oratories are well cared for and that our boys, docile and devout, keep coming in droves. Father [Robert] Murialdo has generously taken over our dear Father Grassino's post at Borgo Vanchiglia. Our zealous Father Rossi takes excellent care of the St. Aloysius Oratory and, up to All Saints' Day, will preach the afternoon instruction while I shall continue to give the morning sermon. Don Bosco provides the preachers at the St. Francis de Sales Oratory, and when necessary he substitutes for them.

The new church is now ready for the roof, and before winter sets in it will be covered.

I have learned that you and the marchioness [3] have safely arrived in Florence, but I am sorry to hear that Mr. Pellico [4] found the journey uncomfortable. Yesterday the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalen [5] again prayed for the safe return of their foundress and benefactress. I pray daily to the Lord that he grant her prosperity, health, and happiness. I have nothing to report regarding the convent or the Rifugio. Everything seems to be going well. This should reassure the marchioness and contribute to her peace of mind.

All the priests, including myself, are well. I am now at home and I intend to stay here as long as possible to assist these religious communities and to defer to the wishes of the marchioness who is so interested in them.

I would like to ask you a further favor. Please give me your comments on what I have told you about the oratories and our policy in running them. Let me also know what you want done with your belongings which you left behind.

Please accept my sincere best wishes. I remain,

Your devoted and faithful friend,

Fr. John Borel, *Director of the Rifugio*

Father Borel received the following reply:

Rome, November 4, 1851

Reverend and dear Father:

I was very pleased to receive your kind, heartwarming letter. I was longing to hear news of the oratories and was beginning to be worried about them. Now, thank God, I feel tranquil.

Let me now comment on your letter. I too am worried and desire con-

[3] Marchioness Barolo. [Editor]
[4] *See* p. 49. [Editor]
[5] *See* Vol. II, p. 185. [Editor]

cord among the directors of the oratories. I wholeheartedly wish all differences of opinion to be resolved so that, united in mind and will, we may with greater reason expect more abundant help from the Lord and a greater reward for our labors. I believe that this deplorable discord resulted from the fact that we have no one in particular to turn to and from a serious lack of communication among ourselves. This opinion is also shared by others. If you can do something about this, I am sure all unrest will vanish.

I cannot renege on the decision I previously revealed to you. I made this decision only after careful soul-searching and I cannot change it for any reason. If the things which I left at the St. Aloysius Oratory are in the way, I'll remove them as soon as I return to Turin or, if necessary, before. From now on (should God will that I continue working in behalf of the oratories) I shall willingly abide by the decision you mentioned—namely, that donations made to the director of one oratory shall be considered as made to all. Whenever possible, I shall so inform our benefactors.

I am very pleased to learn that the St. Aloysius Oratory is thriving, thanks to your personal efforts and those of our good Father Rossi. For my part, although physically absent, I am constantly with you in spirit and I never cease recommending this work to God. Soon, I hope, I will have an audience with the Holy Father. I shall beg his blessing for the directors and boys of our oratories.

So far our journey has gone well. The marchioness is in good health and she was very happy to receive such good news about her institutes. Mr. Pellico feels much better now. Pray for me and have the boys pray too. Give my regards to all the priests in the oratories. Hoping to receive more good news of the oratories, I remain,

Your devoted friend,

Father Peter Ponte

Don Bosco had meanwhile been heartened by an encyclical of Pius IX, dated November 21, promulgating a Holy Year. It was a foretaste of greater joy he was to savor on December 8, the first decennial of his oratory work.

The day before, a Sunday, he reminded the boys of this event in a moving talk. He would have liked to solemnize the anniversary with special pomp, but since the new church had not been completed, he contented himself with urging the boys to join him in a prayer of thanksgiving to the Immaculate Virgin for Her motherly

protection and with briefly sketching the graces She had bestowed on them during that decade. He exhorted them to express their filial gratitude to Her by receiving the sacraments on that day. The response was gratifying.

The first decade had seen the birth and infancy of the oratories; the second, which was to witness their growth into adolescence, was beginning under the auspices of the Heavenly Queen.

This first decade closed with an episode which had prophetic overtones. It is contained in a glowing tribute to Don Bosco written by Professor [Joseph] Raineri in 1898:

> One Sunday afternoon in 1851 the Oratory held a lottery drawing. There were many winners and everyone was happy. At the end, Don Bosco flung caramels in all directions from the balcony to satisfy many a sweet tooth. Naturally, this bountifulness resulted in more and louder shouts and cheers. When Don Bosco finally came down into the playground he was hoisted on their shoulders and carried in triumph with wild enthusiasm. One of the boys who was soon to don the clerical habit said to him, "Don Bosco, how wonderful it would be if you could see the whole world studded with oratories!" On hearing that remark, Don Bosco (I seem to see him even now) turned his gaze toward the horizon majestically and lovingly, and he answered, "Who knows? The day may come when Oratory boys will really be scattered all over the earth!" He was so right!

CHAPTER 28

Plans for a Lottery

FOR several months Don Bosco had untiringly devoted most of his time and effort to the construction of his new church. By August the structure was already several feet above ground-level, but money had almost run out. The thirty-five thousand lire Don Bosco had managed to raise from a few benefactors had melted away like snow under the sun, and he was now forced to renew his appeal. Bishop Peter Losana of Biella was among the first to respond. Realizing the benefits afforded by the new church to the apprentice bricklayers of his own diocese who had found work in Turin and were frequenting Don Bosco's oratories, he sent the following circular to his pastors:

Biella, September 13, 1851

Reverend and dear Father:

Several years ago Don Bosco, a pious, zealous priest of Turin, was motivated by true evangelical charity to gather on Sundays boys whom he found roaming the densely populated neighborhoods between Borgo Dora and Borgo Martinetto. In a suitable place he provided them with recreation, religious instruction, and Christian education. His efforts were so fruitful that the chapel is now no longer adequate to handle the crowds; at this time it can accommodate but a third of the more than six hundred boys in attendance. Therefore, Don Bosco has zealously undertaken the arduous task of building a more adequate church. This is the reason for his appeal to the charity of the faithful. He particularly deserves our help since over a third of the more than six hundred boys attending the Oratory are from Biella. Several of them also receive free board, lodging, and clothing, and are taught a trade. We owe Don Bosco our help not only in charity but also in the name of justice. I therefore

urge you to apprise your good parishioners of this worthy cause, particularly those of greater wealth, and to set aside a Sunday for a special collection for this purpose. Please send the proceeds to the chancery with appropriate identification.

The children of darkness are working to complete the construction of a temple for the preaching of heresy and the ruin of souls; [1] will the fortunate children of light fail to build a church where truth may be taught for their own and their brethren's salvation?

Therefore, I hope that I can soon make a substantial contribution to the work of this worthy man of God and thus publicly show the enlightened and fervent gratitude of our diocese for a project that is so holy, so beneficial, and so necessary for us in these trying times. With deepest esteem and warmest affection, I remain,

Your most devoted servant,

✠ John Peter, *Bishop*

This appeal brought in one thousand lire. It was not much, but it was followed by a donation from King Victor Emmanuel II who kept the promise he had made on July 5.[2]

Economato Generale Regio Apostolico

Turin, October 2, 1851

Reverend Father:

The Royal Secretariat of State for Ecclesiastical Affairs of Grace and Justice informed this office on September 30 that His Majesty has graciously granted you the sum of ten thousand lire to be paid in installments from this office—three thousand lire immediately, the balance in successive years as such funds become available. This subsidy is being granted specifically for the construction of a church attached to the charitable institute you have founded for poor boys in Valdocco for their religious education and for the support of the most needy ones.

You may claim this subsidy personally or through a properly identified representative.

Canon Anthony Moreno, *Royal Almoner*

A few days later Victor Emmanuel II also sent a most welcome contribution of his own.

[1] A reference to the Protestant church then under construction in Turin. [Editor]
[2] *See* p. 192. [Editor]

Sovraintendenza Generale della Lista Civile

Turin, October 10, 1851

Dear Reverend Father:

I am pleased to inform you that on October 5 I had the honor of presenting your letter to His Majesty. He graciously wishes to contribute one thousand lire toward the building of a church adjacent to your institute.

I hastèn to inform you of this new token of the king's generosity. Please let me know when you wish this subsidy to be made available to you and indicate to whom disbursement should be made. With great esteem, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

Marquis Pamparà

Still short of funds, Don Bosco did his best to trim expenses. On October 22, he wrote to the municipal authorities seeking exemption from the payment of shipping and handling fees of the building permit. The very next day the mayor replied as follows:

Turin, October 23, 1851

Reverend and dear Father:

Since regulations do not permit exemption from the established fees for the mailing of the building permit which you should have picked up before beginning the construction of the church, I have arranged for it to be shipped to you. There will be no charge to you in consideration of the nature of your work; the fee will be paid from charity funds.

Enclosed please find the permit; it must be retained by the person supervising the construction. A fine will be imposed if said document is not available for inspection at the request of authorized municipal agents.

Wishing you speedy success in your undertaking, I remain with reverence and esteem,

G. Bellone, *Mayor*

When funds continued to lag, Don Bosco sold 2,142 square feet of land formerly belonging to the seminary to Mr. John Emmanuel on November 20, 1851, for the sum of 1,573 lire, but this was only a drop in the bucket. He had to find some other way to raise money. It was then that he decided to carry out a plan he had toyed with

in his mind for a long time—namely, a big lottery with prizes provided through the generosity of the faithful. It was a difficult task, but he had already indirectly paved the way for its success. For a long time he had untiringly sought help from the civil authorities, asking with humility but also with the confidence of one working effectively for the public good. He knocked at every door, entered every office, spoke with the head of every department, and sent appeals to city and regional authorities and even to members of the Royal House. Practically every branch of the government received his numerous petitions. Often he wrote as many as ten a week, and generally he received what he requested. Many donations were only for ten, fifteen, or twenty lire, but he was always courteously received when he went to collect them.

Success did not come easily; work, vexation, and humiliation were the price he had to pay. He needed contacts, friends, and influential people to recommend him. He had to write many letters and make many calls. Each time a new cabinet minister, mayor, prefect, or departmental head was appointed, Don Bosco had to find some excuse for calling on him and winning his favor. This involved seeking further assistance from friends and benefactors, more letters, and more calls. He was not primarily concerned with subsidies, whether large or small; the important thing was that each subsidy represented official approval of his undertaking. Don Bosco anticipated possible hostility in the future, and he wanted to be able to retort, "You have been helping me so far. Are you now going to let me down in this undertaking which you once considered in keeping with the law and deserving of your protection?"

His efforts in regard to the lottery were successful. His first move was to recruit helpers. Forty-six men—craftsmen, noblemen, and priests—and eighty-six women of the middle class and nobility agreed to be sponsors. The most prominent of these were Canon [Louis] Anglesio, director of the Cottolengo Hospital, and Marchioness Mary Fassati, née De Maistre, lady-in-wating to Queen Maria Adelaide.

The executive committee was composed of the following men:

Count Caesar Arnaud of San Salvatore
Father Peter T. Baricco, deputy mayor

Cajetan Bellingeri, attorney
Frederick Blanchier, civil engineer
Frederick Bocca, contractor
Father John Borel, rector of the Rifugio
Father John Bosco, director of the Oratory
Amadeus Bossi, merchant
Chevalier Gabriel Cappello (known also as Moncalvo)
Joseph Cotta, senator
Hyacinth Cottin, alderman
Lawrence d'Agliano of Caravonica
Joseph Duprè, alderman
Joseph Gagliardi, novelty dealer
Father Robert Murialdo, court chaplain
Canon Joseph Ortalda, director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith
Victor Ritner, goldsmith
Louis Rocca, attorney, alderman
Peter Ropolo, locksmith, alderman
Michael Scanagatti

After complying with all legal requirements to establish such a committee, Don Bosco addressed a petition to the government for official approval.

Turin, December 1851

Dear Sir:

To ensure the success of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (described in greater detail in the attached memorandum), we, the undersigned, realizing the inadequacy of the present chapel for the constantly increasing number of boys attending the Oratory, have decided to build a larger church. Thanks to generous donations from a few private sources, construction has been courageously begun and brought to the point where now only the roof remains to be built. Inasmuch as a considerable sum of money is still needed to complete the church, we, the undersigned, have decided to appeal to the public at large to donate prizes for a lottery.

In conformity with the law of February 24, 1820, which was amended by the royal decree of January 10, 1833, and by the instructions of the Finance Office of August 24, 1834, we, the undersigned, request official approval for a planned lottery.

In accordance with the above-cited instructions, we, the undersigned, are enclosing a circular that briefly describes the history and purpose of this institute and the procedure to be followed in the obtaining and awarding of prizes.

All proceeds will be used exclusively to complete the new church; they shall be deposited with Senator Joseph Cotta, a member of the executive committee, who will also act as treasurer.

We, the undersigned, will gladly provide further information as required; we also pledge to conform with the aforementioned regulations of the Finance Office.

Certain that you will grant approval and that it will benefit this institute which, though modest, greatly benefits boys of the working class, we proffer our sincerest thanks in advance.

(*Signatures followed*)

The procedure for securing and awarding prizes was as follows:

1. All artifacts and handicrafts, such as embroidery, knitted wear, pictures, books, draperies, linens, etc., will be gratefully received.
2. A receipt will be issued with a description of each object and the donor's name unless anonymity is desired.
3. The number of tickets issued will be set by the value of the prizes in accordance with the law.
4. The tickets, signed by two committee members, will be sold for fifty centesimi and be detached from a counterfoil book.
5. The prizes will be on public display for a month, starting in March. Official notice of the exact date and place will be inserted in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* together with the date for the public drawing.
6. The numbers will be drawn one at a time. Should two be accidentally drawn together, they will be put back into the urn.
7. As many tickets will be drawn as there are prizes on display. The first number drawn will win the first prize and so on until all the prizes have been awarded.
8. The winning numbers will be published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale;* prizes may be claimed three days later.
9. Unclaimed prizes will be held for three months, after which date they will be considered as donated to the Oratory.

The city Finance Office granted a license on December 9, 1851. We include herein the official notification:

The City of Turin

December 17, 1851

To the Rev. John Bosco
Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales

We are forwarding a copy of the Finance Office's decree authorizing a lottery on behalf of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

Since the decree stipulates that the steering committee of the lottery must in all matters act in agreement with the mayor of Turin who is responsible for the enforcement of lottery regulations, you are asked to kindly forward to his office copies of all papers sent to the Finance Office so that the required supervision may be set up and everything may proceed in proper order.

I take this opportunity of assuring you of my esteem.

Peter T. Baricco, *Deputy Mayor*

On December 20, 1851, Don Bosco sent out the lottery appeal as approved by the Finance Office. It read as follows:

Dear Sir:

Ten years ago a modest charitable institute known as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was opened in this city in the section called Valdocco. Its sole purpose is the intellectual and moral welfare of boys who, because of parental neglect, bad companions, and poverty, are likely to get into trouble. Several people who are interested in the sound education of the young have been deeply distressed at the increasing number of boys who idly roam the streets with bad companions and earn their living by begging or petty larceny, thus burdening society and fomenting lawlessness. It also grieves them to see many of these boys wasting their meager wages on Sundays by gambling and drinking. In their desire to end this evil and its potential dire consequences, these civic-minded citizens have opened a center where such boys can easily fulfill their religious duties on Sundays and also receive catechetical instruction, counsel, and guidance to help them acquire an honest, Christian way of life. This center, named the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, was opened through the contributions of generous citizens who are always ready to lend a hand when it is a question of aiding the needy. They provided everything needed for worship, character formation, and relaxation—in brief, everything to make attendance at the Oratory pleasant and beneficial.

Boys responded enthusiastically to the invitation to come to the Ora-

tory on Sundays and holy days, even though the invitation was without fanfare. Soon the premises had to be enlarged; little by little improvements were made as suggested by an ingenious and prudent charity. Evening classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, and Italian grammar were held, at first only on Sundays, and later also on weekdays during the winter. Particular stress was laid on teaching the metric system. All this has been of great benefit to the boys employed in various arts and crafts.

For the past ten years, zealous priests and laymen have worked hard and unceasingly to imbue these boys with love for their parents, brotherly goodwill, respect for authority, gratitude toward their benefactors, and appreciation of work. Above all else, these priests and laymen have striven to instruct the boys in their Faith, to rescue them from evil ways, to inspire them with a holy fear of God, and to accustom them in their youth to the practice of religion. While there are those who laudably labor to promote the arts, advance technology, and educate the sons of the well-to-do in secondary schools and colleges, the modest Oratory of St. Francis de Sales seeks to impart a religious and civic education to those who are less favored by fortune, but who have the will and talent to be of use to themselves, their families, and their country.

Due to the steady increase in the number of boys, the room used as a chapel is now too small. Lest inadequate facilities hinder the success of this providential work, the sponsors of this appeal, trusting in the generosity of their fellow citizens, have decided to build a larger church and thus ensure the continuation of this institute.

Immediately and unhesitatingly they laid the foundations of this new church. Donations, gifts, and encouragement poured in from all sides, and in a few months construction reached the roof level.

Unfortunately, however, funds have run out; the inexhaustible charity of the general public must now be depended upon to complete this construction. For this reason, we, the undersigned sponsors, request your support and cooperation. The method we suggest has already been successfully tried by other charitable institutions and should be equally successful for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Our intention is to hold a lottery which we, the undersigned, are now organizing in order to raise sufficient funds to complete the new church. We trust that in view of the lofty purpose of our appeal you will give us your support.

Any object you would be willing to donate will be gratefully accepted. Where charity is concerned, every little bit helps; even the most humble offerings, when put together, may suffice to accomplish the task.

We rely on your generosity, convinced that the idea of contributing to the sound education of poor and neglected youngsters will certainly induce

you to lend a helping hand. May the fact that people from all walks of life have supported this undertaking and contributed to its development commend this pious institute to you. We also wish to say that the Senate, after appointing a committee to gather detailed information about the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, favorably discussed its findings and then warmly recommended a government subsidy. Finally, we wish to recall the subsidy granted unanimously by our municipal authorities for two consecutive years, the singular generosity of their Royal Majesties, and the special benevolence with which revered prelates and distinguished laymen have recommended the institute to public charity.

In conclusion, anticipating your generous response, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for your gift, and we ask God to grant you His blessings.

Yours gratefully,

The Sponsors

Their names and this postscript followed:

For your greater convenience, prizes may be delivered to: Joseph Gagliardi, hardware store, opposite the basilica; Charles Chiotti, china and earthenware shop in Via Dora Grossa, opposite Holy Martyrs Church; Pianca & Serra Shop at 6 Casa Pompa, in the parish of Our Lady of the Angels; Marietti Press, on the university porticoes.

Don Bosco sent out thousands of copies of this appeal. He also sanctified the Christmas holidays by inviting people to practice charity.

CHAPTER 29

Family Spirit

BY the beginning of 1851 the boys no longer had to eat their meals in scattered locations throughout the house and courtyard; [1] they now could sit at tables under a shed. Moreover, since they were all growing lads, they were given an extra bun for breakfast. In 1852 Don Bosco discontinued the practice of giving each boy a twenty-five centesimi allowance [2] for bread inasmuch as some of them were foolishly spending it on candy and then finding themselves hungry. He also introduced some improvements. The small earthen bowls were replaced by larger tin bowls, bread was provided from the pantry, and on Thursdays [3] and Sundays a second course was served at the main meal. Soon thereafter either the second course or fruit became a part of the daily meals. A glass of wine was also served.

Don Bosco did his best to provide his charges with adequate nourishment; the food was plain but wholesome and abundant. Bread and soup were always on hand whenever they wished some. Furthermore, bread was also distributed in midafternoon as a snack to discourage them from helping themselves from the refectory.

Don Bosco always ordered the finest bread. When his distinguished benefactor, Chevalier Joseph Cotta, suggested that he serve breadsticks, he agreed to try them for a week. However, the boys did not like them too much, particularly since the breadsticks were all crust and thus did not satisfy their hunger. Therefore, Don Bosco discontinued them.

On feast days and special occasions some special treat was added

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 248f. [Editor]
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 249. [Editor]
[3] A regular school holiday. [Editor]

at breakfast, as well as small hors d'oeuvres and a glass of a better wine at dinner. Don Bosco also gave the poorer boys whatever clothing they needed. Indeed most of the boys were better off at the Oratory than they would have been in their own homes, and it cost them nothing.

Don Bosco generally gave preference to the needier and more abandoned orphans, since they were in greater moral danger. His heart went out to them. Tearfully he would often exclaim: "I will make any sacrifice for these poor lads. I would gladly give my life to save them." He also exhorted his co-workers to be equally considerate toward them.

However, he did require a small fee from those boys whose parents were still alive, as well as from those who had inherited some means or who were looked after by benefactors. He believed that boys in such circumstances were not entitled to public charity. However, the fees paid by these boys were purely nominal and in no way covered the costs of their upkeep. Divine Providence made up the difference, and those boys unquestionably received more than their money's worth. Don Bosco often deplored the policy of certain institutions, where destitute boys were treated in a manner far above their social condition and later on had trouble adapting themselves to something less than they had become accustomed to.

At the Oratory there were also boys from rather well-to-do families. Their parents had begged Don Bosco to accept them at the Oratory and were paying a higher fee for better meals. Don Bosco had them eat with his young clerics so that they might receive good example. But this arrangement lasted only until he opened other boarding schools for such boys in 1860 and 1863.

However, the most important fact is that among the various groups living at the Oratory—students and artisans,[4] those who paid and those who did not, young clerics and boys—there reigned the warmest friendship and good feeling. As a true paterfamilias, Don Bosco was the bond uniting all their hearts. Solicitous, fair and cordial with those engaged in even the most menial tasks, appreciative and generous with praise, solicitous toward the sick and the needy, he was a born peacemaker in youngsters' petty quar-

[4] This was the name given to the boys learning a trade, to distinguish them from those taking academic courses; the latter were known as "students." [Editor]

rels. In such cases he used to say, "The wiser man must share his wisdom." He felt uneasy when the boys left the Oratory even if only for a short time, and he did his utmost to keep them with him during the summer vacation—even gratis—because he was concerned about their spiritual welfare, fearing that their wings might turn into horns.

Notwithstanding the general well-being and happiness of the boys, thanks to Don Bosco's care, some griping was unavoidable. The soup, prepared in large quantity, did not always suit everyone's taste, and there were other deficiencies beyond Don Bosco's control. Nevertheless, even those who paid fees had an incredibly deep and abiding affection for the Oratory. Former pupils do not hesitate to admit this feeling. One of them, Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio told us: "The food was nothing to rave about. When we think of how we ate and slept, we just wonder how we pulled through without harm and complaint. We were happy because we felt we were loved. We lived in a wonderful atmosphere and we were totally absorbed in it; nothing else mattered."

In this same year [1852] Don Bosco introduced the first formal regulations. Since at this time there were neither classrooms nor workshops at the Oratory, the boys were grouped by dormitories, each of which had a cleric or a boy as assistant.[5] The house rules were posted on a chart. They read as follows:

1. Every boy must obey the assistant or his substitute, who are responsible for order and discipline in the dormitory.
2. Outsiders, even relatives, are not admitted to the dormitories without express permission. Likewise, boys belonging to one dormitory may not enter another without special permission.
3. Every boy should strive to give his companions good example, especially by frequenting the sacraments at least twice a month.
4. Every boy must attend to his own personal neatness and that of his dormitory.
5. After night prayers, all must immediately retire to their dormitory and not linger in the courtyard; they must observe absolute silence so as not to disturb the night rest.

[5] This term will occur very frequently. It denotes a Salesian (usually a young brother) whose duty it is to supervise the boys in practically every activity. [Editor]

6. In the morning everyone is to dress in strict silence with the greatest modesty.

7. The buying or selling of anything is strictly forbidden; money must not be kept in one's possession. It must be deposited with the prefect, who will credit it to the depositor and draw from it when necessary.

8. It is strictly forbidden to scribble on walls, drive nails into them, or cause any other damage.

9. All should practice fraternal charity by patiently enduring one another's faults and avoiding grave offense.

10. Unseemly conduct or conversation is strictly forbidden.

11. May those observing these rules be blessed by God. Everyone should bear in mind that one who begins to live as a good Christian in his youth will continue to do so until his death. God will surely grant him a long life.

P.S. These rules are to be read to all the boys in the dormitory on the first Sunday of the month.

Father John Bosco

The original draft of the rules, in which the boys were referred to as "sons," was later modified and finally reworded as above.

In those memorable days the boys enjoyed maximum freedom, as though they were in their own homes. But little by little, as the need arose, Don Bosco gradually introduced some timely regulations. The boys recognized the need for such restrictions and readily complied with them, but they would not hesitate to express their displeasure about the conduct of their companions which had made them necessary. This is the origin of the disciplinary norms embodied in the regulations for Salesian houses.

Each dormitory had its own patron saint whose name was written over the entrance. Every year the boys of that particular dormitory would celebrate the feast of their patron by receiving the sacraments, adorning (with due permission) the picture of the saint with drapes and candles and honoring him with songs and prayers. For this act of devotion, to which the superiors were invited, they would choose an hour of the morning or evening which would least disturb the general routine of the house. A "prior," chosen from among them, would preside, and a cleric or one of the boys would deliver a sermonette in honor of the saint. Sometimes they would also kiss

the saint's relic. This too, among other things, contributed to the increase of devotion.

The dormitory was regarded as somewhat sacred. Don Bosco had prescribed that at its entrance (and later also in every study hall) there should be a small holy water font. There was also a crucifix, as well as a small altar with a statue of the Madonna. Daily during the month of May, before retiring, the boys recited short prayers before the image of the Blessed Virgin which was adorned with drapes and many lights. These decorations were curtailed in later years since too many nails were being driven into the walls to hang the drapes. Sometimes on the feast day of a patron saint the boys held a small entertainment in his honor in the dormitory and invited Don Bosco to be present. We discovered (and still possess) sonnets which were composed and recited in successive years by the students of the St. Augustine dormitory in honor of the great bishop of Hippo. The sonnets were dedicated to Don Bosco, to Father Victor Alasonatti, and to one of their "priors," John Berruto.

As for maintaining order, Don Bosco realized the need of a permanent representative of his authority. Thus in 1852, when he had to absent himself for a few days, he invited Father [John] Grassino to stay at the Oratory as he had done in previous years.[6]

While Don Bosco's disciplinary norms reflected his zeal and prudence, his solicitude for his boys was manifest in the letters he wrote to people who had recommended them.

Father Francis Puecher, a Rosminian, wrote to him one day from Stresa. After expressing the wish that God would bestow his blessings on the lottery and conveying Father Lawrence Gastaldi's greetings, he recommended a boy on behalf of Father Antonio Rosmini who also offered to pay the boy's monthly fee. Don Bosco replied on February 16, 1852:

On receiving your welcome letter, I sent for the boy C.... I was moved at the mere sight of him. He really looks starved physically and spiritually, but he seems to be a very fine youngster. I told him to return next week. I plan to keep him here for a few days on a trial basis but I

[6] *See* p. 11. [Editor]

did not tell him so. I also think he should keep going to school for a while to discover his calling. . . . In any event, I intend to keep him here, because he truly is in need.

Shortly thereafter he wrote to Father Charles Gilardi:

Young C. . . . has been exemplary in conduct and piety; he shows a bent for the priesthood and is one of the top students in third year Latin. He seems to show great promise for the future, but he is barely fourteen. We shall have to see how he gets along in his studies.

Another letter was addressed to Count Xavier Collegno:

Turin, February 21, 1852

Dear Sir:

I fully realize the grave need of the boy you have recommended to us, and I assure you that I shall do everything in my power to help.

Unfortunately, I am running into serious difficulties caused by a lack of funds and inadequate space, but give me five or six more days and I'll find a solution, either by taking him in myself or by finding a place for him with some reliable person.

My heartfelt thanks for your kind remembrance of me. I ask your prayers and am honored to remain with the deepest respect,

Your servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Meanwhile the Latin classes were progressing well. Young Cagliero showed fine aptitude and a very cheerful disposition. He was always outstanding in competitive games, a champion and leader in calisthenics and full of initiative.

At first, it seemed impossible to curb his fiery temperament. On his way to school, especially, he could not bring himself to walk along with the others. He was the despair of the cleric Rua, who was in charge of the group. As soon as they were past the Oratory gates, Cagliero would run to Milano Square to see the charlatans doing tricks. Yet, when his classmates got to Professor Bonzanino's doorstep, Cagliero, drenched in perspiration, would already be there waiting for them.

Rua invariably asked him, "Why can't you walk with us?"

"Because I like it better my way. What's wrong with going one way instead of another?"

"How about obedience?"

"Obedience? I'm never late. I am even here ahead of you. I do my homework and I always know my lessons, so why all the fuss?"

He would not change because he derived so much pleasure from watching the charlatans. Soon someone suggested to Don Bosco that perhaps such an undisciplined boy had better be sent back home, but Don Bosco, who appreciated Cagliero's genuine qualities, would not hear of it. The following year, however, Don Bosco spoke to Cagliero about the virtue of obedience. Thereafter the boy became more amenable to rules and soon was an example to all.

Don Bosco discovered that Cagliero, among many other talents, had great aptitude for music. He himself taught him the first rudiments and then entrusted him to the cleric Bellìa for further instruction. His aim was to get Cagliero to compose simple melodies for Mass. He made the young boy apply himself seriously to this task through a well-tried method which soon was to bear good fruit.

One day a minor crisis arose at the Oratory. The organist was no longer available. There was no one to take his place on the following Sunday, and the church services would obviously not be nearly as inspiring without music or singing. Cagliero sensed the predicament and he was determined that the Oratory would not suffer just because of the absence of one person. He practiced for endless hours, showing an industry surprising in one of his tender years. On the following Sunday he was at the harmonium accompanying the familiar melodies with an unerring hand.

After this success, his passion for music developed to the point that he spent all his free time at a rickety old piano, pounding away with such vigor that on one occasion poor Mamma Margaret, who was not particularly appreciative of his doubtful harmony, nearly lost her patience and, without really meaning it, picked up a broom to threaten the young musician whom she loved as a son.

Indeed Mamma Margaret was a mother to all, gentle, loving, and ever patient. Everything she did manifested her love for Don Bosco's poor boys. It often happened that during the winter months many of them had to work overtime. When she did not see them at supper and learned the reason, she would exclaim: "Poor boys!

I must remember to keep the soup hot for them!" She would then wait up for them until eleven or even later, by which time she would often be trembling from the cold. When they wearily came in, she always managed to add a little something to their supper.

Sometimes a small boy would wander into the kitchen on a Sunday afternoon after services. "What do you want, little one?" she would ask.

"A piece of bread, Mamma."

"Didn't you eat your afternoon snack?"

"Yes, but I'm still hungry!"

"Poor lad! Here, take this. But don't tell anyone, or all the others will come, and then they'll have bread scattered all over."

"Don't worry, Mamma, I won't tell a soul."

He would then run into the playground with the bread in his hand. His friends would immediately gather around him.

"Who gave it to you?"

"Mamma Margaret," he would reply with a full mouth.

Then all would dash straight for the kitchen, and she could not refuse them.

When the same boy would again ask for bread on the following Sunday, Mamma Margaret would chide him: "Last Sunday you didn't keep your word and you got me into a fine fix. So I'm not giving you any today."

"I couldn't tell them a lie, could I? They asked me, and I *had* to tell them!"

"Well, that's true too." And he would get his bread.

Obviously, good boys had winning ways with her. When students began to board at the Oratory, they would each get a bun for a snack on returning from classes. Invariably one of them would take it to Mamma Margaret. "Mamma, is this all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"I can't swallow it," he would reply, munching away.

"Why not?"

"It's so dry! It would taste better with a piece of cheese or a slice of salami."

"You little glutton! Thank God for such good bread!"

"Oh, Mamma," the smart youngster would moan pitifully, "please!"

She could never resist such a plea.

These two little episodes might seem relatively unimportant, but they have been included because a spark of love has more personal meaning for us than a blaze of glory, riches, and wonders; moreover, these episodes concern two of our companions who later filled positions of great dignity and authority.

From the above, we can also infer what Mamma Margaret did for those who were lonely or sick. Unsparingly she tried to bring back a smile to the lips of the former, and she rivaled the most loving mother in her spirit of sacrifice and assiduous attention for the latter. She herself suffered if any of them had a headache or toothache. At the first symptom of pain, the boys would come running to her, and she would care for them night and day. If she heard the slightest whimper or cry, she could not rest until they poured out their sorrow or pain to her. If any boy fell sick, she was always at his side, nursing him, keeping him company by working at his bedside, and watching over him when the others went to sleep.

The following episode is typical of her solicitude. A boy fell sick with an infectious disease and had to be isolated. Margaret at once took her place at his side and proved to be a perfect nurse. When he had to be taken to the hospital, she silently followed the stretcher down the stairs to the threshold, and when the attendants left the house she burst into tears.

She was indeed the Oratory's guardian angel.

CHAPTER 30

Proselytizing by the Waldensians

THROUGH books, periodicals, and lectures the Waldensians were expanding their proselytizing attempts. As an enticement they offered a bonus of eighty lire to anyone joining their sect. Among the boys who had frequented Don Bosco's oratories were several who had caused him great sorrow by opposing him on different issues. Attracted by this offer, they joined the Waldensians. Naturally they became estranged from their former companions, and sensing that they would now be looked upon as renegades, they began showing resentment against them.

One evening around 9 o'clock, [Charles] Tomatis was returning to the Oratory. As he passed by the Church of Our Lady of Consolation he noticed two men following him. He quickened his pace and so did they. Frightened into a run, he managed to reach the Oratory gate and slam it shut just in time. He immediately reported the incident to Don Bosco, who took the necessary precautions to protect his boys.

Joseph Brosio comments:

> These defections and betrayals sorely grieved Don Bosco. Once, in a Sunday sermon, he spoke about the Waldensians and sadly complained that some boys had allowed themselves to be led astray. He also unmasked the cunning wiles used to lure them to perdition. As was his custom on occasion, he interrupted his sermon and began to question some of the boys, that all might better understand what he had been saying. This also afforded him the opportunity to present even more clearly the proofs of certain dogmas denied by the Waldensians, especially that of the virginity of Mary. He became so impassioned as he developed his theme that his face became resplendent. I witnessed this myself.

We also witnessed a similar phenomenon on another occasion, but we shall speak of that later.

Meanwhile Don Bosco had solicitously begun to work for the conversion of the Waldensians. He persevered in this task for many years and was rewarded by a substantial number of conversions from among apostates and those who had been born in heresy.

He often received visits from those who had been deceived into renouncing their Faith. He always welcomed them most kindly. After lucidly explaining the Catholic position, he would point out how they had been duped. As a result, they would realize the mistake they had made. But at the same time he would encourage them never to despair of God's mercy. He also helped them financially as much as he could, since some of them were in dire need. He housed some young men in the Oratory to shield them from error and to instruct them more effectively. Among them were some needy Waldensian boys whom he converted. He led entire families back into the fold and also found employment for some of them. Father Rua is our source of information in this regard.

Some of the Waldensian neophytes came to the Oratory more for the sake of argument than from a desire to be converted, and Don Bosco went along with this. Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi recalls: "I myself was often present at such disputes and greatly admired the subtle arguments Don Bosco employed. Obviously he must have prepared himself for this task, but he must also have had some supernatural assistance. This was particularly evidenced by the great charity with which he invariably treated these misguided people who were not always courteous to him. Don Bosco regarded kindness as the most indispensable virtue in dealing with heretics." And indeed this is true, because when heretics sense that the opponent's aim is to prove them wrong, they immediately prepare themselves not to discover the truth but to fight it. Heated polemics shut people's hearts, whereas affability opens them. St. Francis de Sales, who was extremely gifted in disputation, won over more heretics by his gentleness of manner than by his knowledge. Weighty arguments without kindness have never converted anybody. As a matter of fact, several of these misguided people were won over by Don Bosco and restored to the Church.

The Waldensian pastors soon learned about Don Bosco's zealous

efforts to bring back to the Catholic Church those who had left it. Some of them sought him out, hoping to confute him and capitalize on that fact. But they never succeeded, not only because of the soundness of his arguments but because of his ability to prevent their jumping from one argument to another—an art at which they were past masters either because of their ignorance or because by such tactics no conclusion can ever be reached. Sometimes Don Bosco, instead of bringing out direct proofs, would ask them questions, especially when the debate was about church history, the councils, and the Fathers of the Church. Their answers revealed an appalling ignorance. Don Bosco also knew how to trip even a learned opponent into statements whose implications led to unforeseeable, unavoidable, and very embarrassing conclusions. Theirs was an unenviable experience.

During this year [1852] he was also busy spreading far and wide a new edition of his pamphlet *Warnings to Catholics*. Thousands of copies disseminated in Piedmont and particularly in Turin were very effective. But while Don Bosco was engaged in fighting heresy outside Valdocco, the enemy actually reared its ugly head within the Oratory itself.

Father Vitale Ferrero, a Franciscan at St. Thomas Monastery in Turin, whose younger brothers frequented the Oratory, became very friendly with Don Bosco. The friar had so dissembled his true nature that Don Bosco trusted him and invited him to dinner on several occasions. As a result, that particular year, 1852, he asked him to preach on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, the patron saint of the Oratory. The friar spoke to the boys in the Piedmontese dialect which he knew quite well. He described scenes from the saint's life and vividly portrayed how St. Francis, even though physically exhausted, climbed to hilltop villages in order to save souls. He also added that the saint mended his own clothes, whereas there were "others" who rode about in coaches and had tailors at their beck and call. By "others" he meant "bishops."

Then he narrated a parable about an eagle and a fox. The eagle was perched on a tree, while the fox, covered with hideous, oozing sores, moved stealthily below. The fox was trying to hide in the bushes in order to conceal his sores and infect the other animals. But the eagle watched every movement the fox made, and cried out

to the other animals, "Watch out for the fox!" To make his point clear the treacherous preacher concluded: "Children, do you know whom the eagle stands for? None other than Luther! And the fox? Yes! You know it! The Catholic Church!"

Don Bosco had been listening intently to every word with mounting distress. At this last utterance he walked to the pulpit as the friar was coming down, seized a fold of his habit, and in a loud voice, so that all the boys could hear, shouted at him, "You are unworthy to wear this habit!"

Eventually this unfortunate friar obtained permission from his superiors to leave the monastery under the pretext that he had to care for his aged father. However, as soon as he reached home dressed as a secular priest, he threw his father out of his home, discarded his clerical habit, and publicly and formally joined the Waldensians under the guidance of Amadeus Bert, their pastor. Sent to London to proselytize among the Italians who lived there, he was stabbed to death that same year by a fellow countryman.

This wretched monk had infiltrated the Oratory in collusion with the Waldensians, but he had been rash and imprudent and had prematurely flung aside his lamb's clothing. Some boys who had heard that sermon still recalled every detail of that infamous parable forty years later, so deep was the impression it had made on them. In great sorrow Don Bosco later told them how the monk had apostatized and he exhorted them to pray for him. The only result of this abortive stratagem was that it increased the boys' horror of apostasy.

Don Bosco also took advantage of a felicitous event to strengthen his boys in their character. In 1851 the Pope had proclaimed a jubilee. After a year, the indulgences could also be gained by those outside Rome. Father John Borel therefore petitioned the chancery on behalf of Don Bosco to permit the boys and the staff members of the oratories to gain the jubilee indulgence by making the prescribed visits to their chapels rather than to the other designated churches. If this was granted, Father Borel wrote, greater spiritual advantage would be derived. The vicar general, Canon Philip Ravina, gave his permission on February 2, 1852. All the prescribed visits were made processionally, and this custom was followed in the future.

Inspired by Don Bosco's sermons, the boys did their utmost to gain the indulgences. In order to impress these solemn days indelibly on their minds, Don Bosco suggested to all the boarders and also to many day boys that they jot down their resolutions and either keep them themselves or give them to him. The suggestion was followed. Many entitled their paper "My Jubilee" while others headed it with their own names. Many signed their resolutions. One of them reads: "I am John Baptist Sacco. I shall keep my promise."

The few papers that have been preserved reveal by their simplicity of expression, repetitions, and grammatical errors that the writers, whether artisans or students, were newcomers.

Here are some examples:

I must shun blasphemers.

I must avoid quarrelsome people and make an effort not to quarrel anymore.

I must promise not to blaspheme or say bad things anymore.

I must keep away from bad companions.

I promise to be diligent in my duties and more devout in church.

I must approach the sacraments more often.

I must promise to shun people who talk against the Church.

This last phrase crops up in all these papers. Obviously its substance must have been suggested and explained by Don Bosco. We must say the same about the ideas and the order in which they are expressed. They are uniform and most likely reflect the order Don Bosco followed in his sermons. We shall include here a complete sample, somewhat corrected:

THIS IS THE JUBILEE OF [PETER] ROCCHIETTI

Things To Avoid

1. Bad companions.
2. People who talk against the Catholic Church.
3. Unseemly conversations.

Persons To Imitate

1. St. Aloysius Gonzaga.
2. Those who are very devoted to God and the saints. (I will follow their good advice.)
3. Those who speak well of our Faith.

Resolutions

1. I promise not to sin anymore as long as I live.
2. I promise to avoid bad companions, bad talk, and those who have a habit of blaspheming or using the Lord's name in vain.
3. I promise not to tell lies for any reason whatsoever and not to blaspheme or say bad things. I must avoid what is evil.

All this I promise and will observe for the rest of my life.

Peter Rocchietti

This paper—and many others—had been entrusted to Don Bosco by the boys so that he could remind them if they forgot. Such trust in their good father was their protection.

Meanwhile the Waldensians, in addition to the church under construction, opened a school for small girls of well-to-do families, another for poor children of both sexes, a kindergarten, a hospital, a welfare center for the poor, and also a vocational school nearby for young Waldensian apprentices. To oppose these proselytizing activities which were lavishly supported by English benefactors, Don Bosco pitted his own beneficent activity at the cost of great sacrifice. To counterbalance their churches where heresies would be taught and dogmas denied, Don Bosco erected churches where truth would be preached and God's Holy Name glorified. To the wealth of the bible societies he could counter the modest offerings inspired by faith and charity.

Meanwhile preparations for the lottery were moving steadily ahead.

CHAPTER 31

Launching the Lottery

AT the start of the year 1852 Don Bosco devoted a great deal of time to the preparations for his lottery. On January 16, he mailed a reprint of his appeal for prizes to thousands of addresses; all had to be written by hand. It was the first time that a church building drive was conducted in this manner, and the response was eminently successful.

Joseph Brosio wrote: "Don Bosco, who always wanted me to have a hand in all his undertakings, assigned me several tasks in connection with the 1852 lottery and, later on, with the one for the St. Aloysius Oratory. He took me along on visits to wealthy people and to the sick."

Meanwhile gifts kept pouring in. Her Majesty, Queen Mary Adelaide, donated several: a red crystal goblet and lid, a red velvet pin cushion encased in a miniature bronze easy chair, another of green velvet encased in ivory, a blue-tinted clear crystal goblet, and an eight-piece coffee set for two in white porcelain with a flower pattern in relief. Her Majesty, Queen Dowager Mary Teresa, sent two bronze vases in gold and silver finish, a small writing desk of inlaid wood, and twelve other items. Her Royal Highness, the duchess of Genoa, contributed a bronze paperweight with a group of three figurines. The court and members of the Turin nobility graciously donated other gifts. Pope Pius IX and King Victor Emmanuel II manifested their desire to participate.

The flow of gifts increased Don Bosco's workload. An inventory had to be kept of the gifts and donors, the prizes had to be numbered and stored away, and "thank you" letters had to be sent to the more generous benefactors.

Where to exhibit the prizes posed an urgent problem. The Ora-

tory, poor and small, was obviously unsuitable for this purpose. With the consent of the superior of the Dominicans, Don Bosco, through the good offices of Father Peter Baricco, deputy mayor, appealed to Marquis Alfonso La Marmora for permission to use some rooms in the Dominican monastery [which had been seized by the government]. Father Baricco received the following reply:

Ministry of War

Department of Military Administration

Turin, January 16, 1852

The request of the Reverend Don Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, for permission to use three rooms in St. Dominic's Monastery, at present under military administration, for the display of lottery prizes, whose proceeds will be used for the completion of the new chapel in the aforementioned Oratory, is promptly granted in view of its philanthropic and charitable purpose. Accordingly, I have instructed the competent office of the War Ministry to make these rooms temporarily available to Don Bosco or his deputy.

This information is to be communicated to the lottery's executive board and to the Reverend John Bosco.

Alfonso La Marmora, *Secretary of State*

As prizes kept pouring in, it soon became obvious that even these three rooms would not be sufficient. Don Bosco therefore wrote to Father Gazzelli of Rossana, royal almoner, asking him to support his petition to the king for the use of a large room in one of the buildings belonging to the crown. Father Gazzelli received the following reply:

Sovraintendenza Generale della Lista Civile

Turin, February 18, 1852

Very Reverend and dear Father:

I regret to inform you that the crown buildings have no facilities for the display of lottery prizes on behalf of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco. I do not know what can be done about the petition submitted by the Reverend John Bosco and endorsed by Your Reverence. I suggest the rental of the large hall called "Trincotto" which presently houses the tennis courts near the Dramatic Society.

The lessee is willing to put this hall at Don Bosco's disposal for the whole month of March. However, the hall must be vacated by April 1 and left ready for occupancy (as in the past) by the Fine Arts Academy for their yearly exhibit.

Please convey my suggestion to Don Bosco. If you think it appropriate, I shall recommend to His Majesty that he graciously authorize the payment of such lease. The lessee has also informed me that the windows of this hall belong to the Fine Arts Academy and that he is not authorized to put them back in place. I recommend therefore that Don Bosco be told of this so that proper arrangements can be made.

Awaiting your reply before taking any further action, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

S. M. Pamparà

The king authorized a donation of two hundred lire toward the rental of the hall, but since a one-month lease was not sufficient, Don Bosco applied to the municipal authorities and they generously permitted him to use a vast hall behind St. Dominic's Church. Don Bosco informed Father Gazzelli of this development by letter, and he enclosed another petition for the king. Father Gazzelli then forwarded both letters to Marquis Pamparà who replied as follows:

Sovraintendenza Generale della Lista Civile

Turin, March 15, 1852

Dear Father:

Since the Reverend John Bosco could not obtain the "Trincotto" hall to display lottery prizes on behalf of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco for the reasons listed in his letter of February 25, and since in the meanwhile he has been able to obtain other premises, His Majesty (to whom I referred the Reverend Bosco's petition) has graciously consented that the two hundred lire previously earmarked from his private funds for the lease of the "Trincotto" hall be used instead as the Reverend Bosco sees fit for the success of this lottery.

I am pleased to inform you that suitable instructions have already been sent to the proper disbursement office. I remain in deepest esteem,

Your devoted servant,

S. M. Pamparà

Don Bosco cashed the king's donation and then supervised the arrangement of properly-decorated tiered stands all around the hall which the municipal authorities had put at his disposal. The 3,067 prizes, each with the donor's name, were displayed in this attractive setting. A 158-page booklet contained the list of prizes and donors, the first appeal which the committee had addressed to the public, the rules of the lottery, and the names of the promoters. It was sold at fifty centesimi a copy in the exhibit hall and in the Marietti and Paravia bookshops.

Don Bosco had written the following dedication:

TO THE

ILLUSTRIOUS AND WELL-DESERVING GENTLEMEN

AND TO THE

GRACIOUS AND CHARITABLE LADIES

WHO GENEROUSLY DONATED

MANY AND RICH GIFTS TO THIS LOTTERY

FOR FUNDS TO COMPLETE THE CHURCH

FOR THE BOYS' ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

IN VALDOCCO

* * * * *

IN TOKEN OF DEEP GRATITUDE

THE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In the midst of this whirl of activity Don Bosco had also written to Count Camillo Cavour requesting exemption from postal fees. The reply came from Marquis Gustavo, the count's brother:

Turin, February 16, 1852

Reverend Father:

After considering your appeal concerning the lottery for your Oratory, my brother has asked me to inform you that your request will be granted as soon as you forward the necessary formal application. Please see that this is done without delay. To expedite matters, you may show this letter

to anyone concerned and assure him that the Minister of Finance has already given you a definite commitment that the authorization requested will be granted.

I take this opportunity to express my great esteem and remain,

Your devoted servant,

Gustavo Cavour

Don Bosco sent in the necessary papers and the government exempted him from several postal fees. But once everything seemed to be going smoothly, another obstacle cropped up. According to law, the number of tickets had to be proportionate to the cash value of the prizes. The authorities appointed an appraiser, but Don Bosco thought that his appraisal was far from accurate and he formally registered a complaint to the Finance Office [probably in March].

Dear Sir:

On behalf of the executive committee of the lottery for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, the undersigned wishes to inform you that the committee, although pleased with the promptness with which your appraiser [Mr. Angelo Olivero] evaluated the articles on display, is nevertheless reluctant to accept his appraisal of objects of art. These are clearly outside his competence. We object for the following reasons:

1. Many of the art objects were appraised at less than a fifth of the value estimated by connoisseurs. This greatly harms an undertaking which enjoys the patronage of the distinguished members of the committee and of public charity.
2. Several people, on hearing of the low value placed on the objects donated by them, have stopped contributing further prizes.
3. The appraisal continually hinders and harms the lottery to the disappointment of the public and to the detriment of its aims.

For the above reasons I respectfully request your consideration for the success of this undertaking and ask for the appointment of a competent person to properly appraise the value of the art prizes while allowing Mr. Angelo Olivero to continue to evaluate the other gifts. If this is done, the executive committee will eagerly continue to promote the good of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and also succeed in putting an end to the complaints of the public.

Confident of your benevolent consideration, I am, on behalf of the committee,

Your humble petitioner,

Rev. John Bosco
Director of the Oratory
of St. Francis de Sales

This petition received the following favorable response:

City of Turin
Finance Office

Turin, March 22, 1852

In response to the petition submitted by the Rev. John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, to whom a permit for a lottery was issued on March 5, this office authorizes a special appraiser for the objects of art inasmuch as the previous appraisal by Mr. [Angelo] Olivero seems to be somewhat too low.

Professor Cusa, secretary of the Albertina Academy, is hereby appointed to appraise the art objects donated for the above-mentioned lottery. Professor Cusa will carefully appraise each prize, compile an exact list and make a sworn report to this office.

For the Finance Office

Casimiro Radicati

After all these wranglings, the way was finally clear for the publicizing of the lottery. *L'Armonia,* in a supplement to its issue of Sunday, March 21, carried the following article:

Yesterday (March 19) the lottery prizes for the completion of the church of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco directed by Don Bosco were first displayed. The prizes will soon number more than three thousand. We cannot dwell at length on their value here but shall limit ourselves to pointing out that many eminent persons have given their support. Outstanding among them are Her Majesty the Queen, the Queen Dowager, Duke Pasqua, superintendent of the royal palaces, the mayor of Turin, and others. Today's issue of the *Gazzetta Piemontese* also has high praise for this charitable undertaking.

Since the second appraisal was acceptable, the lottery's executive committee redoubled its activity, enthusiastically contributing

and soliciting prizes and selling tickets. Soon the number of prizes rose to 3,251 and an additional list had to be printed. In keeping with their high value, an issue of one hundred thousand tickets was authorized. The work involved would have been an exhausting task had it not been a labor of love. Printing the booklets, the double numbering of each ticket, separating them from the stubs, stamping them with the Oratory seal and the signatures of two committee members, keeping track of them, sending out circulars and receipts for money received—these were endless tasks which did not permit a moment's rest. Priests and laymen in every large city and town of the realm vied with one another to help make the lottery a success by purchasing tickets themselves or selling them to their friends and acquaintances and then forwarding the money to Don Bosco. Senators, deputies, and municipal aldermen also bought tickets.

As though all this work involved no effort at all, Don Bosco never wearied of including personal letters with the lottery tickets he sent to more prominent benefactors.

He sent one to Canon Vogliotti [rector of the seminary] through John Francesia. After reading it, the canon told Francesia: "I had no intention of accepting these tickets, but Don Bosco has written such a charming and moving letter that I can't help but oblige. Take these fifty lire. But please tell him that it was his charming letter that won the day."

Crowds came to see the prizes on display. Moreover, Marquis Gustavo Cavour promised to visit the display as we can see from the following letter:

Turin, February 22, 1852

Dear Reverend Father:

Several urgent matters have prevented me from replying sooner to your welcome note of the 18th. I am glad that the lottery for the holy and highly meritorious undertaking to which you dedicate so much energy promises to be a success. I shall not fail to visit the display of prizes and to purchase tickets, and I hope that your enterprise will greatly benefit by this expedient. From the very beginning I had thought the premises at your disposal for this purpose to be hardly suitable, and I am delighted that the municipal authorities have granted you better ones.

I take this opportunity to assure you of my sincere benevolence.

Your devoted servant,

Gustavo Cavour

The marquis kept his promise. Count Camillo also visited the display with Count Casimiro Radicati. Don Bosco doffed his biretta on greeting them at the door and led them on a tour of inspection of the more valuable prizes.

To prevent burglaries, Don Bosco had asked the cleric [Joseph] Buzzetti and one of the older boys to sleep there. They were armed with a small pistol, loaded only with gunpowder, with which to frighten away burglars, if necessary. One evening early in March as Buzzetti was loading his pistol at the Oratory before going on duty, the powder exploded and the wadding stripped his left index finger to the bone. He was rushed to St. Maurice Hospital, then located near Porta Palazzo, but his finger had to be amputated. Released after two or three days, he returned to the Oratory with his arm in a sling and immediately resumed his routine duties, which included teaching the boys to sing the antiphons for Sunday Vespers and helping with the extremely arduous tasks connected with the lottery. From that year onward, [Joseph] Buzzetti was Don Bosco's right hand in all subsequent lotteries, in the organization of which he acquired great skill and competence.

CHAPTER 32

Fomenters of Discord

WHILE he was busy with the lottery, Don Bosco, with genuine serenity of soul, concealed a sorrow which, though cruel, did not slacken his drive in the least. We have already referred to the misunderstandings arising in 1851 among the clerical personnel of the oratories.[1] At Valdocco, too, there were some who did not seem to like the way things were done, and they felt slighted because Don Bosco paid no heed to their suggestions or demands. They outdid each other in sowing discontent among the boys, never missing an opportunity to cut Don Bosco to pieces. Their leader was a priest whom we shall call "Father Rodrigo." He found a ready audience because "the words of a talebearer are like dainty morsels that sink into one's inmost being." (Prov. 26, 22)

The reader may wonder why Don Bosco tolerated such co-workers. The answer is that they were good and zealous priests, but passion clouded their intelligence and dimmed their power of reasoning. It is difficult to believe that they were unaware of Don Bosco's many virtues, but even if they had recognized them, it would have made no difference in their frame of mind. They saw him only on Sundays when they were busy teaching catechism or supervising a vast crowd of boys; hence, they had no time to study him in depth. Besides, Don Bosco was so plain in his speech and manner, and he gave such scant importance even to the most extraordinary things he accomplished, that when these co-workers were told of them, they either saw nothing extraordinary in them or merely regarded them as exaggerations.

Father Leonard Murialdo, who was not one of the dissidents, was for many years one of the mainstays of the Guardian Angel

[1] *See* Chapter 27. [Editor]

and St. Aloysius oratories, as well as an unswerving and loyal friend of Don Bosco. Although not very close to him because of the demands of his own work during the week, he gave us his opinion of Don Bosco which he had formed through several years. He admitted that it took him a long time to really get to know Don Bosco.

At first I regarded Don Bosco only as a zealous priest, not as a saint. After a time I began to think he might be such and I increasingly began to esteem him more highly when his undertakings, revealing him to be no ordinary man, showed his true worth and forced one to exclaim, "This the Lord did." [Ex. 8, 19] In a certain sense, the various things he accomplished reminded us of Our Lord's words, "These very works that I do bear witness to me." [John 5, 36]

On the other hand, Don Bosco was one of those servants of God whose sanctity lies in self-sacrifice for God's glory and the salvation of souls, in keeping with the motto which, if I am not mistaken, was dear to St. Joseph Calasanctius: "It is good to pray, but it is better to help others." I do not know whether Don Bosco indulged in prolonged prayer or extraordinary penances, but I do know that for many years he labored tirelessly and unceasingly for God's glory with calm and serenity amid afflictions and oppositions of all kinds, and with results that are nothing short of prodigious. God does not usually choose evil men or men of mediocre virtue as His chosen instruments in the great task of sanctifying souls.

Such is the witness of Father Murialdo. We should not be surprised, therefore, if Father Rodrigo and his coterie were unable to perceive what even the learned and far more spiritually-minded Father Murialdo himself had not [at first] seen.

Meanwhile, Father [Joseph] Cafasso tried to restore harmony with the following letter:

Rev. Father Peter Ponte
c/o Marchioness Barolo
Naples

Turin, January 6, 1852

Dear Father Ponte,

I thought I would be able to reply to your welcome letter before you left Rome, but a long series of chores and problems made this impossible.

I shall come immediately to the point. I urge you to put aside all worry

and disquietude regarding the decision you plan to take on the matter you mention. Your fellow workers are not motivated by preconceived ideas or animosity toward you, nor do they desire to break with you. On the contrary, I do know that they look forward to your cooperation as soon as—God willing, hopefully very soon—you will return to Turin. Since the items under discussion are yours, you are perfectly free to make whatever decision you choose, but if you want my opinion, I think that, as things are now, you would be well advised to put them at the disposal of the oratories rather than of any individual, reserving however priority rights for yourself as long as you will be able to help in this blessed work of the Lord. Should you judge otherwise, do what you think is best and disregard my suggestion.

I again advise you to be cheerful, serene, and tranquil. Crosses there will always be, but the Lord loves peace and serenity, too.

Please tell the marchioness that, though distant, we can pray for each other. I remember her in my prayers. My best regards to Mr. Pellico. With all my heart, I am,

Affectionately yours,

Fr. Joseph Cafasso

But Father Cafasso's solicitous intervention was not successful. Something most unpleasant, such as had never before happened nor was ever to happen again, took place at the Oratory. Father Rodrigo and his followers secretly plotted, as they themselves admitted, to destroy the Oratory. As a first step they tried to lure away from Don Bosco the older boys such as [John] Germano, [Charles] Gastini, and other Sunday catechists. Joseph Brosio gave us this account:

One evening after church services we were invited by some of these dissidents to attend a meeting about a matter concerning our reputation. Several of the more intelligent and experienced boys suspected a trap and refused to be present.

The purpose of the meeting was to accuse Don Bosco of having slandered and disgraced us in the newspapers by labeling us as thieves and vagabonds. This charge was a treacherous ruse to hinder—as partially it did—a work which was prospering with God's help. When we catechists assembled in a room of the ground floor, Father Rodrigo produced and read aloud Don Bosco's appeal for the lottery. When he was through he called our attention to this paragraph: "Several people interested in the sound education of the young have been deeply distressed by the

increasing number of boys who idly roam the streets with bad companions and earn their living by begging or petty larceny, thus becoming a burden to society and fomenting lawlessness. . . . Therefore they opened a center, etc."

Most of the catechists were young men from good families; some were pretty well-off and so were many of the boys who frequented the Oratory. For obvious reasons, the appeal did not mention them. Father Rodrigo, instead, drew this perverse conclusion, "It is to you, to you specifically, that Don Bosco refers, and it is a terrible insult demanding an apology!"

When he was through, most of the young catechists were greatly upset. I immediately asked for permission to speak, and quiet was restored. In order to ascertain what these hotheads were after, I could not take the role of an opponent, so I began to talk in the following vein: "Friends, I am as much interested as you about our reputations. Nevertheless, let's not rush into hasty decisions. First let us discuss what we should do. If Don Bosco is wrong, admits it, and bows to our wishes, then I suggest that we forget the whole thing. If, however, he refuses to retract his statement, we simply must take action. I can assure you that I am aware of the respect that is due to me and my family. You will see that I'll be the first to stand up and fight for what we value most—the respect of our fellow citizens.

"Before we take this radical step, however, let us examine the wording of this appeal calmly to see if it really calls for violent protest. Perhaps we are being a bit oversensitive. Let us see whether we have really been offended and dishonored. It seems to me that the interpretation given to that paragraph is not quite genuine. I believe that if the appeal makes no distinction between the two categories of boys attending the Oratory, it must be due to a printer's error or to the involuntary omission of a copyist. I think it would be rash and dishonest of me to believe that Don Bosco has deliberately slurred those whom he loves so dearly.

"Let us see, then, if the matter cannot be settled amicably. I think that a simple remonstration on our part would be more than sufficient to obtain an explanation from Don Bosco, indeed even an apology, if we are entitled to it. He will be the first to suggest some way of reconciliation: he will eagerly desire it, and we should not reject it. Thus both he and we will be spared serious troubles which could cause even greater evils, particularly to us."

I stopped talking, feeling that perhaps I had already given in too much to their blind, blazing resentment. My words were received in glacial silence; then a murmur of disapproval gradually swelled into an uproar as though this were a gathering of maniacs. The instigators of this revolt were quick to exploit such a propitious moment. They had let me talk

in favor of peace and harmony in order the better to disguise their own intentions, test the mood of the boys, and thus ensure their own victory.

After the shouting subsided to some extent, Father Rodrigo rose, called for silence, and began to speak: "My good friends, I prize your honor as much as the young man who has just addressed you, but I prize it in a different way. I want to see you uphold your honor! (*Cries of approval*) I too, of course, love peace, and I would deserve your contempt if I were to incite dissension for no reason at all, but who cannot see ample reason in this instance? Was it perhaps you who provoked Don Bosco, my good friends, or rather was it not he who tried your patience to the extreme by his ill-advised appeal? (*Further cries of approval*) Brosio suggests that a friendly chat will suffice to make Don Bosco correct the wording of that circular and thus restore your reputation. But do you know, my good friends, how such friendly negotiations would end under the circumstances? In a masquerade, in an even more humiliating farce! You would be reprimanded for having taken part in this discussion of our rights, and you would be expected to beg for pardon. (*Agitation among the listeners*) You would be told to apologize. While your honor is being trampled upon, are you going to send a committee to present your apologies? Speak up! Is this what you want?"

There followed a good deal of commotion. It was finally decided that all present should abruptly quit the Oratory. Thus an open breach was declared.

Father Rodrigo and his accomplices had hatched their plans beforehand. Father John Cocchis [2] had again taken up his old project of establishing a Sunday oratory and had sought and obtained on February 15, 1852, from the municipal authorities the use of St. Martin's Church near the city mills for the purpose of gathering boys on Sunday and holy days.

This little church had been one of the first places to which Don Bosco had moved his Oratory in his quest for permanent headquarters.[3] It was here that the dissidents set up their center for their war against Don Bosco. Father Cocchis, who was not sufficiently acquainted with the dispute and needed help, accepted their services; they began to teach catechism on the Sunday following their fateful meeting.

That same evening three of the more brazen among them called

[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 319f, 392f. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. II, pp. 236ff. [Editor]

on Don Bosco to dispute the appeal he had written for the lottery. Joseph Brosio gave us this report:

I was going around the playground teaching a military drill to the boys when, as I passed near the sacristy, I heard loud talking inside. I went in to see what was happening. A young man, his features distraught with anger and contempt, had just finished talking. I stood still and heard Don Bosco calmly explain that his lottery appeal, without enumerating the different categories of boys attending the Oratory, had limited itself to describing in a general way the great majority of boys. Truly the bulk of the boys attending the Oratory were of the type mentioned in the circular. Consequently (Don Bosco was telling him) young men of good families who had volunteered to teach catechism had no reason to take offense at a paragraph which did not concern them in any way. Indeed, they should be proud to cooperate in a work of this kind.

Don Bosco then cited the names of many boys from excellent families and of distinguished laymen who came to the Oratory for this purpose. None of these had taken offense, and therefore it was absurd to imagine that he (Don Bosco) could have been so stupid as to harm himself by deliberately and unjustly insulting them.

However, this young man and his two companions, determined as they were to obtain an apology and blind with anger, could not understand; in fact, they did not even listen to Don Bosco's explanation. Instead the one who acted as spokesman hurled insults at Don Bosco and at all the Oratory boys, saying that the appeal was a true description of Don Bosco and his boys, and that he and his friends had done well to withdraw from such company. They had flung down the gauntlet, so I took it up in the name of all the other boys who had gathered and were trembling with rage. I advanced on the rebel spokesman with clenched fists, but Don Bosco, with the gentleness of a kind father who can pity and forgive, stopped me. He himself took up the defense of his outraged sons, severely reprimanded the young rascal, and threatened to expel him from the Oratory. Abashed at the turn of events, the young man dropped his swagger and withdrew with his two companions. It was not long before he showed his true colors: he fell in with evil company and irretrievably lost the honor he had so boastfully claimed to possess.

The clerics at the Oratory took no part whatsoever in these disputes. Don Bosco said nothing about them. Ascanio Savio stated: "I never heard Don Bosco say anything disparaging about his adversaries. Once, when I ventured a few words of criticism, he instantly and gently corrected me."

CHAPTER 33

Fomenters of Discord (Continued)

FATHER Rodrigo and his emissaries continued to make overtures from time to time to the older boys of the Valdocco Oratory, inviting them to hikes and free meals. Some responded to their blandishments; nearly every Sunday a few skipped the Oratory church services. Father Rodrigo and his coterie were particularly bent on winning over Brosio, whom they rightly considered Don Bosco's right hand. At first they tried to bribe him to be an informer. A canon of the cathedral promised him many advantages if he would enroll at St. Philip Neri's Oratory. Brosio was seemingly receptive to the idea but he was actually stalling for time to thwart their plans and thus always gave evasive answers.

Brosio described their maneuvers as follows:

One Sunday Father Rodrigo asked me to join him the following week on a hike to the country. I immediately told Don Bosco about it, although he had forbidden me to mention these things to him. He allowed me to go, and I went willingly because I wanted to know what these people were up to. The following Sunday after Mass, therefore, I met them at Porta Palazzo, as agreed. All the rebels and their leaders were waiting for me, although the latter did not really expect me to show up. When I did, they were overjoyed and made a big fuss over me. Father Rodrigo exclaimed, "Today we'll have an even more wonderful time because our best friend, our 'bersagliere,' has joined us." We then set out for the Centauro Inn on the road to Milan. When we arrived, we first had some refreshments, and then at noon we were served a sumptuous dinner. One could not have wished for more. The wines were excellent and plentiful. After dinner, we played *bocce* and other games; then we sang and drank until evening when we returned to town. When we reached Porta Palazzo we did not go to Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament [as was our custom], but went instead to a café for an espresso.

After agreeing to meet again at St. Martin's Church on the following Sunday, we parted.

Instead of going home, I went to the Oratory to report to Don Bosco and ask him what I should do about next Sunday. After listening to me, he said I was to go again, and so I did. After Mass we went to the San Carlo Gallery Café at Porta Nuova (now Via Roma) for breakfast.

On these two Sundays the sermons kept advising those in attendance to quit the Valdocco Oratory, using the dangerous premise that God can be found everywhere and that one can become a saint in any place if he really wants to.

In the afternoon I went again to the Oratory and told Don Bosco that I had been invited to another big picnic. However, this time Don Bosco told me to quit them.

Father Rodrigo had given me six silver scudi (thirty lire), hoping to bind me more closely to his group. I did not want to accept that money, but he pressed it into my hand and so confused me with reasons that I did not know what to do. The moment I took the money, however, I lost my peace of mind and was seized by remorse. I felt that by accepting money I had betrayed Don Bosco. I therefore immediately got rid of it by giving it to a poor man for his family. Then I ran to the Oratory to make a clean breast of everything to Don Bosco. He told me that I could have kept the money without misgiving, but that I had done a good thing in giving it to charity.

Father Rodrigo was well supplied with money since very wealthy people had for some time been giving him donations in the belief that they were to be used for charity. Piqued as he was at Don Bosco, Father Rodrigo, by now a well-known figure in town, began a campaign against him with a zeal worthy of a better cause. He thus alienated many of Don Bosco's benefactors.

The following story, related by Father Leonard Murialdo as an example of Don Bosco's gentleness and forbearance, probably belongs to this period. "One day, Don Bosco confided to me that he had been seriously hurt by backbiters and that he had once felt constrained to tell the one who was most responsible, 'Do you realize the harm you have done me? You have robbed me of all my benefactors!' Don Bosco never for a moment doubted that his work would prosper and that he would always have benefactors to help him, but he regretted having lost some of his earliest and dearest supporters."

Archbishop Fransoni, though in exile, rallied to Don Bosco's defense when news of the intrigues reached him. He first encouraged Don Bosco and then strengthened his position by officially declaring him director of all the oratories he had founded.[1]

In another decree the archbishop gave also a public testimonial of appreciation to Father [Robert] Murialdo for his cooperation in Don Bosco's work at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia.[2]

It was a crushing defeat for Don Bosco's adversaries. Every claim of theirs to authority in the three oratories was now worthless. We read in the Book of Proverbs: "There are six things the Lord hates; yes, seven are an abomination to Him . . . the false witness who utters lies and he who sows discord among brothers. (Prov. 6, 16-19)

Meanwhile, what had become of Don Bosco's first catechists? Not daring to break completely with him, they would show up for a few moments on Sundays and then run off to where Father Rodrigo awaited them and spend the rest of the day there. One day Don Bosco gravely said to Charles Gastini: "All abandon me, but I have God with me, so what should I fear? The work is His, not mine, and He will see that it continues."

Don Bosco endured this situation for a few Sundays, but when he saw the game continued, he decided to end it and dismiss those who, as the saying goes, tried to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Therefore, one Sunday morning, when they put in their usual appearance, he called them into his little dining room. They had just given him a small handbell for summoning the boys to Mass. Although he sensed that some of them had an ulterior motive in so doing, he nevertheless thanked them for it, but then he told them calmly and frankly: "I am not at all satisfied with you. If you want to quit, do so; if you don't want to come here, go elsewhere. I shall train new catechists. I'm quite used to that. I have done it over and over again. I can do it once more." After these few words, Don Bosco calmly looked them individually in the eye and left them. The misguided catechists returned on the following Sunday

[1] *See* Appendix 7. [Editor]
[2] *See* Appendix 8. [Editor]

and gathered around him, but the usual cordiality was lacking. After that they did not show up anymore at Valdocco.

In the new Oratory attached to St. Martin's Church they were treated to hearty snacks of chicken, salami, sweets, fruit, wine, and other dainties. But were they really happy? One day one of them met [John Baptist] Francesia, a friend of his, and said to him, "St. Martin's is fine, but something is missing—that something which made us go more willingly to Valdocco." That something was Don Bosco with his fatherly affability and disinterested solicitude.

Eventually these young men, once their groundless resentments gradually subsided, felt such a strong new affection for Don Bosco that they came back to him and remained his loyal and staunch friends throughout his lifetime. Don Bosco, on the other hand, reciprocated their affection, ever mindful of the valuable service that they had rendered him and the Oratory as catechists. He wholly forgot the sorrows and troubles they had caused him when gripped by the passion of their cause. In the same way he always welcomed warmly those who, now well-employed, came back to visit him and spend a day in his company. To those in need he generously offered hospitality. Several who were not able to provide for their families because of limited capabilities found employment at fair wages in the Oratory workshops.

At the peak of trouble, Brosio, realizing that reconciliation was not possible, broke off all connection with the ringleaders. We shall now resume his narrative. He wrote:

> The vast majority of the boys, utterly unconcerned with the goings-on between the dissidents and Don Bosco, were all for him, to the acute annoyance of Father Rodrigo who now realized that his campaign had failed.
>
> On his part Don Bosco increased the Oratory's attraction with new games, thus thwarting his adversary's efforts. Inasmuch as the playground was not large enough for drills and *bocce* tournaments, he let us use the field where the Church of Mary Help of Christians now stands. To give our battalion more room we even strayed more than once as far as the Borgo San Donato meadows where, with Don Bosco's money, I always bought two big baskets of fruit for my would-be soldiers. Footraces and drills were the order of the day. I often asked Don Bosco to

race with us; he did, and to everyone's amazement he nearly always outran all of us.

Meanwhile Don Bosco had hurriedly trained new catechists, pressed by the fact that some of the recent trouble arose just as Lenten catechism instructions were about to start. In 1852 Lent began on February 25, and Easter fell on April 11. Don Bosco could not divert catechists from the St. Aloysius or the Guardian Angel oratories which were frequented by about a thousand boys, some of whom were also being instructed in scholastic subjects. Of his former catechists at Valdocco only one remained—fourteen-year-old John Francesia, who at that time did not board there. Don Bosco therefore called upon John Cagliero and some of his companions, as well as the boarders and some clerics. Although they were mere boys, each of them managed a class of twenty to twenty-five lively youngsters and performed their job earnestly. Although several pupils were older than their catechists, the classes were always orderly. Besides, Don Bosco kept constant watch over them. He had prescribed that catechism should be taught to the letter, and he often ran contests with prizes. On Sundays the new catechists, with a self-assurance and competence far superior to their age, supervised the boys at confession, at Mass, at the sermon that followed, and also at the afternoon church services and recreation. Often they were also entrusted with distributing breakfast rolls to the day boys, especially if they had gone to Communion, because it would have been rather hard for many of them to return home for breakfast.

Don Bosco was delighted with the splendid work of his new catechists, but he never tired of repeating: "For goodness sake, never leave the boys to themselves; keep an eye on them, always and everywhere." To inspire them he reminded them of St. Augustine's saying, "If you save a soul, you assure the salvation of your own."

The Lenten catechism classes, obviously blessed by the Lord, were now drawing to a close, and the Easter triduum had just started. A strange episode then took place which indelibly impressed the boys' minds, as we gather from Professor Joseph Raineri:

Easter was very close. One evening Don Bosco was speaking on avoiding occasions of sin and all dangers. At one point he said, "If you don't

want to get burned, keep away from fire." At that very moment, several matchboxes which a young gardener had bought to take home caught fire in his pocket. The smoke and crackling sound soon aroused everyone's attention. Never was any exhortation so promptly followed! We all laughed heartily and saw how right Don Bosco was. He laughed too, but his laughter could only be seen; it was never heard.

The other two oratories also yielded gratifying results. There Don Bosco was represented by zealous priests, especially by Father [John] Borel, who often went from one oratory to the other teaching catechism and preaching with great zeal and efficacy. From time to time, however, Don Bosco visited the other two oratories, and the boys there received him with unbounded joy and shouts of welcome. During these visits he usually preached the sermon; afterward he always sought a chance to give each boy some friendly and timely advice as if he had intimately known all of them for a long time. God blessed his efforts. Many boys, for whom no great future hopes could be entertained, benefited from their attendance at the oratory and were later a credit to the Church in various paths of life.

After Easter the new catechists, all members of the St. Aloysius Sodality, continued their work with increasing zeal on behalf of the boarders as well. Don Bosco keenly felt that the boys should learn sacred hymns and Gregorian chant. Therefore, following the custom started the previous year, every Saturday evening was set aside for learning the antiphons and psalms of the Sunday Vespers. A catechism class was also held every evening for those boys whose religious instruction had been particularly deficient, since Don Bosco wished them to receive First Holy Communion as soon as possible. "Our Lord should take possession of their hearts before they become tainted with sin," he used to say. He prepared them either in person or through his catechists, who also substituted for any teacher missing at the evening classes.

The young catechists also helped with the church functions. In 1851 Father Michelangelo Chiatellino had composed a Mass and had set the Litany of Our Blessed Mother to music, donating the score to Don Bosco. The catechists eagerly learned and sang both compositions, teaching them in turn to the new boys who year by year joined the choir. In addition, the catechists learned to work

with each other. Mainly for this reason there was never any serious breach of discipline. Occasionally some stickler for strict discipline might raise an objection. At that time there were open fields all around the Oratory, and some boys would stray as far as the meadows adjoining the Citadel, about a third of a mile away. But there was always a catechist among them to tactfully lead them back like good children to Don Bosco.

The storm that had rocked the Oratory was now over. A Catholic middle-of-the-road newspaper, *La Patria,* carried a glowing article praising Don Bosco's *Storia Sacra.* Father [John] Cocchis, who had been called to direct other foundations, especially the Istituto degli Artigianelli [The Young Apprentices' Hospice],[3] handed over the oratory at St. Martin's Church to Father Peter Ponte when the latter returned from Rome with Marchioness Barolo. Father Ponte continued to dedicate himself with great zeal to the education of the young until 1866, when he retired. He then handed over his oratory to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which in turn entrusted its spiritual direction to the rector of the Istituto degli Artigianelli. Nowadays [1904] this oratory is located across the Dora River on its own premises and is frequented on Sundays by more than four hundred boys.

[3] *See* Vol. III, p. 393. [Editor]

CHAPTER 34

A Devastating Disaster

DISASTER struck Turin in 1852 like a bolt out of the blue, and it was little short of miraculous that the city did not become a heap of rubble and a tomb for its citizens.

A gunpowder factory and three warehouses were located near St. Peter-in-Chains Cemetery in the heart of the Dora district. Several thousand pounds of gunpowder and small arms munitions were occasionally stored there, constituting a serious hazard to the district and the entire city.

On the morning of April 26, at a quarter to twelve, a spark set off by defective machinery instantly ignited two adjoining sieves. The fire spread to the bolters, and finally outside where the gunpowder was stored. The flames then shot out at two adjacent powder magazines, and in rapid succession they exploded with a terrific roar heard fifteen miles away.

The impact burst doors and windows and shattered countless windowpanes. Finally the massive gunpowder factory blew up, leveling surrounding houses and felling two rows of aged mulberry trees like twigs. Stones, nails, iron fittings, and flaming rafters hurtled through the air, striking buildings, falling into the streets and squares like missiles, and bringing wholesale destruction and death in their wake. Stones weighing two, three and four hundred pounds were hurled in all directions for nearly a quarter of a mile. Twenty-one workers in the gunpowder factory were killed instantly, either burned or crushed beneath the ruins; thirty-five others were injured. A dense pall of smoke hung over Turin, blotting out the sun and filling the city with terror. It seemed as if the end of the world had come. People screamed, wept, and fled in panic, not knowing the cause of the disaster. Gradually, as they found out,

they streamed in droves from the outskirts of the city to the gunpowder plant, only to be driven back by the crowds fleeing that area in fear of further explosions. Others, however—Don Bosco among them—bravely joined the soldiers and police who had hastened to the scene with Mayor Bellone and his councilmen, King Victor Emmanuel II and his cabinet, and the duke of Genoa.

At the time of the first explosion Don Bosco was in the hall where the prizes for the above-mentioned lottery were on display. He quickly ran into the street to find out what had happened. At that very moment the second blast went off; an instant later, a sack of oats whizzed by him and crashed to the ground. In a flash, Don Bosco realized that the gunpowder factory, just a quarter of a mile from the Oratory, was ablaze. Fearing the worst, he ran there without delay. The Oratory was deserted; all the boys, unharmed, had fled to the nearby fields for safety. Seeing that there was no possible danger, Don Bosco lost no time in running back to the scene of the disaster to minister to the victims. On the way he met his mother who tried in vain to stop him. Charles Tomatis also came running up to him, and Don Bosco told him: "Go back and direct all the nuns you find in the streets to Piazza Paesana.[1] There you will find a coach that will take them to Marchioness Barolo's villa at Moncalieri."

Tomatis hastened to do his bidding, wondering how Don Bosco could possibly know what arrangements the marchioness had made in this emergency. Meanwhile, Don Bosco reached the disaster area. With great difficulty he made his way through the ruins. It was a heartrending scene. Torn limbs lay scattered in every direction, and the moans of victims trapped under the smoking ruins could still be heard. To make matters worse, there remained the danger of a third explosion which at any moment could destroy everything in the vicinity, and beyond. The two magazines which had already caused death and destruction stored only about six hundred pounds of gunpowder; a few yards away another one contained over eighty thousand pounds. Its roof had already been blown off; all the surrounding buildings were aflame and sparks were hurtling through the air. If this volcano erupted, it would completely raze not only

[1] It was also called Piazza Susina. In 1860 it was renamed Piazza Savoia. [Editor]

the Dora district but half the city as well. That Turin was saved from such destruction we have to thank the Blessed Virgin Herself, acting through one of Her devoted servants, whose name we too should in all justice record for posterity.

Quartermaster Sergeant Paul Sacchi of Voghera, a foreman in the gunpowder factory, had miraculously escaped injury. He had been flung to the ground twice by the blasts, but each time, after invoking the help of the Blessed Virgin, he rose again. He was covered with bruises, his face and hands scorched, and his ears bleeding from the shock of the blast. But in the midst of this indescribable confusion, while his fellow workers lay either dead or wounded and desperate shouts and cries filled the air, he displayed such resourcefulness and courage that human praise is almost inadequate.

Recovering from the shock, he noticed that although the third magazine was still standing, a blanket hanging nearby had already caught fire. Scarcely able to breathe, he nevertheless dashed into the building, as though driven by superhuman strength, dragged the blanket outside, and stood there exhausted, calling for help. Inspired by his brave example several men ran to his aid, followed shortly afterward by some soldiers and firemen. While the firemen tried to contain the fire, the soldiers removed the eight hundred powder kegs stored in the building. No sooner would they bring out these kegs than the tireless Sacchi would cover them with wet blankets. The rescue work, which lasted without letup until four in the afternoon, unquestionably saved the city. Count Charles Cays was also among the rescuers who helped to remove the wounded.

We are convinced that Turin was saved by the intervention of the Blessed Virgin through the heroism of this man who, in that fateful moment, appealed to Her for help and strength. For the rest of his life Paul Sacchi knelt every Saturday before the altar of Our Lady of Consolation to fulfill a vow of thanksgiving, not only because She had saved him, but also because She had enabled him to save his fellow citizens. His singular experiences during the early years of his life seemed to portend that Divine Providence was preparing him for the noble task of saving Turin.

During the first few days after the catastrophe, this simple, honest

man was the object of flattering demonstrations of honor and esteem on the part of all, but soon he also had to taste the bitter gall of ingratitude. He had publicly attributed his heroism to the Blessed Virgin's intercession by stating repeatedly: "It is not I who saved Turin, but Our Lady of Consolation!" Immediately the anticlericals made him a target of sarcastic comments, derision, and slander; tabloids portrayed him as a hypocrite and religious fanatic. On the other hand, on the official parade grounds the government solemnly awarded him the gold medal for valor, the National Guard pinned a small symbolic wreath on him, and the municipal authorities made him an honorary citizen of the city of Turin. Furthermore, a street [2] was named after him, and he was awarded an annual pension of 1,200 lire for the rest of his life.

Unaffected by praise or mockery, honors or insults, Paul Sacchi continued to nourish a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Until his very last day, May 24, 1884, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, Paul, now a captain, went to pray long hours daily in the church of the Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament [3] together with another captain who was a friend of his. Since Archbishop Gastaldi had forbidden anyone with whiskers to serve at sacred functions, he and his friend shaved them off—no mean sacrifice for old soldiers.

Let us now return to our narration of the disaster. During the rescue work Don Bosco had been able to give absolution to a poor workman who, bruised and battered, had been dug out from under the ruins just as he was breathing his last. And although Don Bosco could not take part in the physical work of rescue, he allowed his hat at least to be put to good service. At the height of the danger, water was urgently needed to keep the flames from the blankets covering the powder kegs. In this emergency, Sacchi grabbed Don Bosco's hat and used it as a container until pails and water pumps arrived on the scene. "As recently as 1877," Father John Bonetti told us, "this brave man still recalled this episode to our mutual gratification."

[2] This street, adjacent and parallel to the side entrance of the Porta Nuova railroad station, intersects a very fashionable boulevard, Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, which runs in front of this main station. [Editor]

[3] Commonly called "Chiesa delle Sacramentine," at the corner of Via dei Mille and Via Belvedere. Its titular is St. Francis de Sales. [Editor]

In Turin it was common belief that heavenly protection had spared the city further havoc. The first to feel the effect of this divine intervention were the patients of the Little House of Divine Providence, better known as the Cottolengo Hospital. It was quite close to the powder factory; some buildings were only a stone's throw away.[4] During the blast, roofs, walls, and ceilings had collapsed, furniture and all fixtures had been flung wildly about, doors had been wrenched from their hinges, and rafters, pieces of wood and metal, stones, bricks and debris had rained from all directions. Yet, under this hailstorm of lethal missiles, not one of the thirteen hundred patients, whether bedridden, blind, lame, mentally ill, young or old, had suffered a scratch. Many of them faced instant death as they saw the flash of the awesome scythe above their heads, but they escaped. Ceilings caved in above the bedridden, but the debris miraculously fell clear of them. Buckling walls remained standing until the nearest patients were removed to safety. In the children's ward the roof was blown off, causing a veritable shower of bricks, yet not one fell on the tiny patients. There were more than twenty patients in the ward for mentally retarded girls. For nearly three years they had never left the ward until after midday. Yet, that morning, for no particular reason, they had all moved to an adjoining room. When the explosion took place, a rafter plunged through the roof of the ward, bringing down most of the ceiling along with it and crushing the iron beds; fortunately, all of them were empty.

Most amazing of all, and clearly demonstrating the visible protection of the Blessed Virgin, was the fact that in the very same rooms or wards where closets, cupboards, and doors were wrenched off and overthrown by the violent blast, Her pictures still hung on the walls. In St. Theresa's ward, there was a statue of Mary inside a glass case about six feet above the floor. Both were flung to the ground, but neither case nor statue suffered the slightest damage. All the windows in the orphans' dormitory facing the gunpowder plant had recently been walled up by bricks; the explosion blew them all in, except two where pictures of the Blessed Virgin were hanging. In a connecting underpass there was a niche, nine feet

[4] *See* Vol. II, pp. 51ff. [Editor]

above the floor, containing a wooden statue of the Queen of Heaven. The shattering blast knocked down the whole wall, yet the statue was found standing upright on its base amid the ruins as if it had been lowered gently to the floor. It seemed to have come to life and descended from the niche to reassure those who were fleeing through that passageway, begging God's mercy.

Behind the sanctuary of the private chapel, so very dear to the Venerable Cottolengo,[5] about three hundred pictures of the more famous Marian shrines of the world, each framed in glass, hung on the walls. This chapel fronted the gunpowder factory and was completely exposed to the impact of the blast. When the explosion occurred, it overturned heavy cupboards in an adjoining room separated by a wall, knocked down part of the ceiling, smashed the door, and twisted the iron bolt that locked it as if it were a soft wax candle. But despite this damage, the pictures remained in place, their glass intact. In the main chapel at a side altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary there was a niche with a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Only about eighteen feet away, the great arch supporting the cupola of the church was split in two; the organ encased under a stand was overturned and pushed a few feet away; the large frame with its crystal panes covering the niche was flung open, but the statue of the Blessed Virgin suffered no harm. Not even the crown on Her head was disturbed, although one of Her earrings fell off.

But the two incidents which we shall now describe were an even more eloquent proof of the Blessed Virgin's powerful protection on that day. A three-foot-high painting of Our Lady of Consolation hung (as it still does today) in the lobby of the Cottolengo Hospital between the two doors leading to the street. The painting, backed by a thin wood panel and protected by glass, was surrounded by flowers, votive silver hearts, and other ornaments. People entering or leaving usually paused before it to recite a Hail Mary. The lobby led into the courtyard facing the gunpowder factory. With no buffer in between, the explosion of the two powder magazines was so violent that even the locked doors of the Cottolengo Hospital were flung open, and more than ten thousand of its windowpanes were smashed to smithereens and their frames twisted into fantastic

[5] Now St. Joseph Cottolengo. He was canonized on April 30, 1934. His feast falls on April 29. [Editor]

shapes. All along the adjacent Via Dora Grossa as well as along other streets nearly a mile away, not a single pane remained intact. Missiles of every description were hurled into the lobby; large heavy cupboards which stood nearby were overturned. On the wall where the picture hung, a massive oak door led to the street and was locked with a heavy iron bolt; this door was torn open and the bolt split in half. Even the corner of the wall, against which the picture of the Virgin stood, collapsed. Nevertheless, the picture itself remained on the wall, its protecting glass and all its ornaments intact! The holy image of Mary seemed to be saying to Her terrified children: "I am here. Do not be afraid. I, your Mother, will protect you. Do not fear."

When, a few hours later, a man coming from downtown noticed the unshattered glass before the picture of Mary while the streets were littered with glass, he experienced a mysterious tremor within himself and wept for joy like a small child.

Attempts were made to explain away these happenings but no one was able to do so convincingly. Even now, after careful reflection, we must still conclude that the almighty hand of God saved Turin through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin.

One episode that stands out above all the others and furnishes clear evidence how the Blessed Virgin protected Turin on that day of horror is described by the late, lamented Msgr. Louis Anglesio who at that time was the superior of the Cottolengo Institute, a post he had been occupying for ten years:

> Of all the buildings along either side of the gunpowder factory, the closest, barely two hundred and fifty feet away, was Nazareth Hall. It was a modest two-story structure, housing over twenty mentally retarded patients on the first floor and about thirty chronically ill children, four to nine years old, on the upper floor. The attic and all the rafters of the roof were supported by a column that rose in the center of the large dormitory. Upon this column rested a hollow terracotta pillar which projected above the roof and served as a chimney for a heater.
>
> Atop this pillar stood a hollow, three-foot statue of the Immaculate Virgin, made of scagliola, the head bearing a crown of twelve stars. Our Lady seemed to stand there to shield and guard the Little House, or even to give orders to nature itself in order to restrain this calamity. The two powder magazines blew up one after the other with hardly any interval

between the blasts. In the wake of the double explosion, objects of every description and size rained from all sides. Many of them struck Nazareth Hall, and they also left their mark on the terracotta pillar, but the statue of the Virgin was barely pushed one inch from its base. It stood unscathed and intact with its crown still on its head; however, before the explosion it had faced inward, but now it was turned in the direction of the powder factory. How could anyone fail to acknowledge, hail, and thank the Virgin as a faithful guardian and loving protectress? The roof below the statue was almost entirely shattered. The ceiling caved in after the rafters collapsed, dragging along the roof shingles and crashing into the room where the children were either lying in their cots and cradles, or were sitting or standing. It was unrealistic to hope that anyone in that room could escape death. Indeed, this was the terrifying thought that gripped everyone. But when nuns and rescuers arrived on the scene, they were amazed. Our Heavenly Mother had watched over these innocent creatures; not one had received so much as a scratch. At the first explosion the more agile children had raced out of the room; the others, who were not so fleet of foot or who were bedridden, somehow were spared any harm whatsoever. One cradle with a child in it was overturned, but the cradle actually shielded him from the debris which otherwise would have crushed him. Amid all the cries and lamentations, it was deeply moving to hear those innocent children repeat: "Forgive us, Holy Virgin, forgive us; we'll be good from now on!" [6]

These events, especially the one involving that fragile terracotta pillar, were so exceptional and contrary to all physical laws that even non-Catholics who came out of curiosity to observe the results considered them miraculous. The following day, a disreputable character was wandering about in the vicinity blaspheming God for this disaster. When he took a look at the fragile statue still standing intact he fell silent. He stared at it for a long time and then remarked: "What the devil is this? This just can't be!" We feel sorry for the poor wretch. The devil would not only have shattered the picture of the Virgin, but would have overthrown the Holy Virgin Herself from Her heavenly throne, had it been in his power to do so. Without doubt the frail statue, intact in the midst of ruins, was a

[6] Luigi Anglesio, *Le meraviglie della Divina Provvidenza nella Piccola sua Casa, ecc. per l'intercessione della SS. Vergine,* Torino, Marietti, 1877 [The Miracles of Divine Providence in Its Little House, etc., through the Intercession of the Holy Virgin, Turin, Marietti, 1877].

visible token of Mary's invisible presence, as She lovingly watched over Her children and over the city of Turin to save it from total destruction.

Nor did the Blessed Virgin limit Herself to showing through the above-mentioned incidents that She watched over the city as a whole; She also gave proof of Her motherly solicitude for religious houses exposed to serious dangers. In the three institutions founded by Marchioness Barolo [7] there were about five hundred nuns and girls. Not one was even slightly hurt, although the missiles raining on them left deep scars on the north wall of St. Philomena's Hospital; a two-hundred-pound stone even fell on the convent grounds without doing damage. Today [1904] one can still view a closet full of stones, twisted iron bolts, and similar items which rained upon the courtyard and into rooms and corridors of the building itself. In the infirmary there were two sick nuns who had been bedridden for a long time. At about eleven that morning they had asked to be taken out into the garden for a breath of fresh air and, unexpectedly, the mother superior had consented. Hardly had they been moved when an enormous rafter crashed through the roof and flattened the two empty beds. Also, as the nuns wondered if they would be forced to flee from their enclosure and seek a safer refuge elsewhere, they saw a white dove fly to the top of the cross on the roof of their convent. They considered this to be a happy omen and said: "If the dove flies away, we shall go too; if not, we'll stay." The dove remained there until four in the afternoon, when official word came that the danger had passed.

Meanwhile, what had happened at the Oratory? A burning rafter, about twenty feet long, fell just a few feet from Don Bosco's rickety little house. It would certainly have crushed it and burned it to the ground had not Divine Providence disposed otherwise. The new church was still roofless and the scaffolding had just been removed. The blast could have collapsed or at least weakened it. Luckily, even though it was soon to be blessed, Divine Providence had ordained that it should still be without doors or windows; thus it offered less resistance to the blast and suffered no damage whatsoever. The walls of the house, however, developed dangerous cracks.

[7] *See* Vol. II, pp. 182ff. [Editor]

Needless to say, not a single pane remained in the windows; the windows that were closed were slammed so violently against the wall that several were a total loss. One of the chapel doors on the north side had not been opened for several months because its lock was rusty and the humidity had warped the wood. The blast solved the problem. The door was not only opened but wrenched off its hinges and hurled into the middle of the chapel. The same thing happened to another door in a small ground-floor room known as the cellar. Here too the door was ripped off its hinges, and for the next few days the boys could have had free access to the wine, had there been any.

Another rather extraordinary incident is the one we are about to relate. Among the boarders was a 13-year-old boy named Gabriel Fassio, a blacksmith apprentice, of excellent character and exemplary piety. Don Bosco, who greatly esteemed him, often cited him as a model to the others, occasionally remarking: "Oh, how good he is!" Don Bosco had also predicted that Fassio would shortly die. A year before the fatal explosion the boy fell ill and soon was at the point of death. He had already received the Last Sacraments when one day, as though inspired from above, he kept saying: "Woe to Turin! Woe to Turin!" Several schoolmates of his who were at his bedside asked him: "Why do you say that?"

"Because something terrible is going to happen to Turin."

"What do you mean?"

"A terrible quake."

"When?"

"Next year on April 26. Woe to Turin at that time!"

"What should we do?"

"Pray to St. Aloysius and ask him to protect the Oratory and everyone in it."

Shortly thereafter Fassio died a saintly death in the Cottolengo Hospital. In view of his outstanding virtues and the inspired tone accompanying his warning, he deeply impressed the Oratory boys and they followed his advice. At their request, a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* in honor of St. Aloysius were added to the usual morning and night prayers, together with the invocation: *Ab omni malo, libera nos, Domine* [From all evils, deliver us, O Lord], a practice still in force in our houses today [1904]. *L'Armonia* happened to mention

this fact, and the anticlerical press immediately aired the opinion that priests must have started the conflagration, a villainous accusation which under certain circumstances could have provoked a bloodthirsty lust for revenge.

The explosion caused tremendous property damage. Many buildings had been so badly hit that they had to be demolished. The government appointed a special commission to assess the losses and granted a subsidy to the needier landlords for repairs to their buildings. The commission also inspected Don Bosco's Oratory and granted him a three-hundred-lire subsidy. Another two hundred lire were awarded to him by the Chamber of Deputies.[8]

There is one further fact that we must mention. In the wake of the second explosion and with the likelihood of a third, many residents near the Oratory, even those who could hardly walk, sought refuge in a field near the Oratory, almost opposite the church under construction. Here some meditated on the power, justice, and mercy of God; others asked His pardon and promised to lead a better life; still others called upon the saints in heaven. All, without exception, expressed great confidence in the protection of the Blessed Virgin, recalling how in former times She had mercifully protected the city. They invoked Her now in this moment of disaster, reciting the rosary and filling the air with hymns in Her praise. It is gratifying to know that this field later became the shrine of Mary Help of Christians. To this shrine flock the afflicted and the sorrowful to seek and obtain Her help and consolation.

During this emergency Don Bosco also gave shelter and comfort to many terror-stricken youngsters from other institutions, as for hours and hours carts kept lugging away the powder kegs. When night came, Don Bosco called all the boys around him. They were still afraid of some new disaster during the night, but Don Bosco exhorted them not to worry, to be calm, and to trust in God. He was so convincing that they finally went to bed fully reassured.

We can find the reason for such confident assurance in a picture of the Immaculate Virgin, bearing the inscription "Help of Christians, pray for us," which hung in his room, and which we preserve as a relic.

[8] A footnote containing the official notice of this subsidy has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

As a remembrance of this event Don Bosco had five thousand copies of a beautiful picture printed by the Doyen Press, and he distributed them to the boys at the end of June. The background shows the city of Turin and the explosion of the powder factory. Our Lady of Consolation, whose shrine is visible amid the other buildings, is seen sitting on clouds amid angels. The foreground shows boys kneeling or standing, with hands joined or outstretched imploringly toward the Blessed Virgin; a priest is pointing to Her with his right hand, while his left rests on the shoulder of a child who is looking ecstatically at the Madonna. The holy picture bears two inscriptions. The first reads: "When in danger or in need, have recourse to Mary." The second states:

"Saved from frightful dangers,
Prostrate at Thy feet,
We give thanks to Thee, O Blessed Virgin!"

* * *

The Boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales
To Our Lady of Consolation

However, Don Bosco was not entirely satisfied with this gift. He wanted to express his gratitude by an act of singular generosity. On Tuesday, May 11, 1852, *L'Armonia* carried the following news item:

At its May 6 meeting, the executive committee of the lottery for the building fund of the church of St. Francis de Sales, now under construction in Valdocco for the religious and moral education of boys, has resolved to assign half of the profits, as permitted by law, to the Cottolengo Hospital.

The committee is convinced that only heavenly protection explains the fact that this new construction, despite its proximity to the scene of the recent disaster in the Dora district, suffered no damage whatsoever. Therefore, not knowing a better way, the committee chose to express its gratitude to Divine Providence by coming to the assistance of that wonderful institution called "The Little House of Divine Providence" which suffered such great damage.

A twofold purpose will thus be served by those generous and chari-

table persons wishing to contribute other prizes to the already rich collection, or to purchase the tickets still available: first, the welfare of poor boys who will receive a Christian education in the new church, and, secondly, the assistance to an institution which in its origin and expansion is in itself a miracle of Divine Providence.

The prizes will be on display daily from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. in the same hall in Via della Basilica No. 3, second floor. The public drawing is scheduled for the beginning of June.

CHAPTER 35

A Student Recital

THEIR miraculous escape from harm at the explosion of the gunpowder factory kindled an even greater love for the Blessed Virgin among Don Bosco's pupils. Devotions in Her honor had always been held daily during the month of May in the Oratory chapel; Saturdays, in particular, were marked by a short reading extolling Her glories, or by a brief sermon. In May of this year [1852], the month of flowers, the custom was started in all the dormitories of offering Her daily spiritual flowers. Every evening Don Bosco would suggest a small act of homage and a short prayer to be offered to Her on the following day.

His love of the Blessed Virgin made him ever grateful toward those benefactors who zealously promoted devotion to Mary. As an indication of this fact we cite here a letter of his to Bishop [John Peter] Losana of Biella:

Turin, May 4, 1852

Your Excellency:

I am most grateful to Divine Providence for having inspired you to become an outstanding benefactor of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. I wish to express my thanks to you for having recommended the construction of my [new] church to the charity of your flock in your pastoral letter of September 13.

I also wish to acknowledge receipt of the sum of 1,000 lire; this prompt and generous response to your appeal clearly shows that your flock realizes the need to safeguard the faith and morals of our youth.

You have good reason to rejoice, dear bishop, for this help given to the young people of Turin, and all the more so since your generosity also benefits quite a number of boys from your own diocese who for reasons

of employment spend several months in this capital [1] and come to this Oratory for recreation, instruction, and church services on Sundays and holy days.

Your Excellency is aware that, despite the generous contributions of charitable people, my building fund is depleted. However, Divine Providence mercifully came to my aid through a lottery. From the very beginning, it was well received; prominent people zealously gave their wholehearted support. Thanks to them, we have received more than 3,100 prizes; both in quantity and quality they surpassed my fondest expectations. I hope for similar success in the sale of tickets; this and only this will enable us to finish the construction of the church.

In any event, I now feel much more confident, and am happy to inform you that construction is proceeding in earnest. God willing, we shall bless this new church and start holding services on June 20, a day sacred to Our Lady of Consolation, thus filling an urgent need.

Your Excellency may imagine the joy and consolation with which I am looking forward to this solemn, longed-for day. I can think of no better way to express my gratitude to you and your diocese for your generous support of the lottery than by warmly welcoming the boys of your diocese to the Oratory. I assure you I will do my utmost for their intellectual and moral education.

I will also add my prayers to the prayers of those boys whom, so to speak, Divine Providence will entrust to me, and I will constantly ask God to shed abundant blessings on you and on all who in any way cooperate in this work of charity. I beg Your Excellency to continue your benevolence toward the Oratory. I ask your blessing on our new church, our lottery, and all our boys. I ask your blessing on me too; I feel I need your blessing more than anyone else.

Again, please accept my sincerest gratitude and deepest respect.

Your most humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Work on the lottery never slackened. With admirable zeal the bishops of Piedmont gave the project their enthusiastic support, as can be clearly seen from the following [extracts of] letters that individual bishops wrote to Don Bosco.

[1] At this time Turin was the capital of the kingdom of Sardinia. From 1860 to 1865 it became the capital of Italy. During that year the seat of government was removed to Florence. [Editor]

Alba, May 2, 1852

I shall try to dispose of the two hundred tickets you sent me. If I don't succeed, as I fear, I shall return the balance to you together with the proceeds. You will receive everything in good time before the 20th of this month. Remember me in your prayers. God bless your undertakings.

✠ C. M. V., *Bishop*

Saluzzo, May 4, 1852

It certainly was a good idea to send me three hundred tickets. I had been trying to get some for a long time but I did not know where to turn. I shall keep one hundred myself and do my best to dispose of the balance. I will promptly send you the money, and perhaps at that time I'll ask you for more tickets.

Should I have occasion to come to Turin, I trust you will kindly allow me to see the church under construction and your Oratory at Valdocco, as well as the other oratories you mention but which I have never seen.

Meanwhile, may God grant you the abundant blessings which your undertakings fully deserve.

Yours devotedly,

✠ John [Anthony Gianotti], *Archbishop*

Vigevano, May 21, 1852

I received your kind letter of May 13 and the enclosed three hundred lottery tickets. Please charge 150 lire to my account. I shall forward the money as soon as possible.

May the Lord bless your efforts to build a house of worship to Him. Please accept, etc.

✠ Pius Vincent [Forzani], *Bishop*

Acqui, May 24, 1852

I received your package of two hundred lottery tickets, together with your kind note of May 21. Although it is impossible to dispose of the tickets here inasmuch as general economic conditions are constantly worsening, nevertheless, as the building of a new church is at stake, I shall keep them all and shall remit 100 lire next week.

✠ Modesto [Contratto], O.F.M.C., *Bishop*

Mondoví, June 7, 1852

I received the two hundred tickets you so kindly sent me. However, since a similar number reached me but a short time ago, I have little hope

of being able to dispose of them all, even though I will keep a considerable number myself. Of course, I shall make every effort, but, as I said, I do not expect the results to match my efforts. If such is the case, I shall return the unsold tickets well in advance of the deadline. Please remember me in your prayers.

✠ John Thomas [Ghilardi], *Bishop*

Fossano, May 28, 1852

Besides the hundred tickets I had purchased myself, I have also received those you sent me by coach. I have already distributed them to several people and shall do everything I can to promote this project.

I, too, deeply regret that I could not attend the recitation given by your boys. I hope to do so on some other occasion.

Pray to God for me that my health will be restored. Please continue your friendship toward me.

✠ Louis [Fantini], *Bishop*

The recitation referred to by the bishop of Fossano had been held at the Oratory [on May 16]. Don Bosco had sent the following invitation to benefactors and other prominent people:

Turin, May 14, 1852

Dear Friend,

Your interest in the welfare of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales prompts me to send you this invitation. Please honor us by your presence this coming Sunday, May 16, from 2 to 5 P.M.

The students frequenting our evening classes will give a demonstration of what they have learned. There will be nothing spectacular, but nevertheless it will be sufficient to show you that they have put their heart and soul into their work.

The demonstration will consist of:

1. Reading and writing, elementary arithmetic, the metric system, Italian grammar, vocal and instrumental music.

2. Elementary biblical geography, New Testament history, vocal and instrumental music.

3. Two dialogues: *Touring the Holy Land* and *The Boy Who Didn't Win a Prize.*

Prose and poetry selections will be presented between numbers.

I hope you will be able to accept this invitation. I welcome the oppor-

tunity to thank you again for all you have done and, I hope, will continue to do on behalf of my boys.

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Distinguished educators—among whom was Father [Ferrante] Aporti [2]—several aldermen, patricians, other prominent citizens, and Bishop [Louis] Calabiana of Casale graced the occasion with their presence. All were visibly impressed with the forthright, flawless responses and the musical numbers presented by these young apprentices. They proved that a keen mind may often be concealed under callous hands and a rustic exterior. Their answers to the rather difficult questions moved the delighted audience to frequent and prolonged applause. The guests had come to the Oratory expecting to witness a recital by children; instead they saw sturdy young men who, unlike many others of their peers, spent their free time in completing their education.

It certainly is no simple matter to channel youth's natural inclination for fun into serious, painstaking duty. But what may be difficult to modern secular educators is a simple task for a Catholic priest inspired by Christian charity. When several hundred young men give up amusements to listen to a good priest, it is natural to ask: "Why?" The answer is: "Because they love their spiritual father." This love originated and grew in response to his love for them. Their reciprocal love was a natural outcome of their love for Jesus Christ.[3]

Father Aporti—a senator of the realm—was so pleased with their prompt and exact answers that he rated their performance on a par with that of full-time students. At the end of the recitation the boys were rewarded not only with applause but with various useful prizes donated by benefactors.

What made this recitation particularly memorable was a long poem in Piedmontese dialect.[4] Don Bosco had composed it and had then coached a young boy to recite it in order to dispel charges that the Oratory meddled in politics.

[2] At this time Father Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858) was one of the foremost educators in Italy. *See* Vol. II, pp. 148f, 165ff, 171f, 311f. [Editor]

[3] *See L'Armonia,* Tuesday, May 18, 1852.

[4] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

A noble lady who had been unable to attend expressed her regrets to Don Bosco in the following letter:

Chieri, May 23, 1852

Very Reverend Father:

I did not receive your kind invitation until yesterday evening due to my doorman's negligence. I regret it all the more since I may have seemed not only impolite but ungrateful in not attending this very interesting public recitation and in failing to express my thanks to you. Please forgive this involuntary slight, and permit me to hope that on some future occasion I may be allowed to admire the results of your holy undertakings.

I hope you will be pleased to read the enclosed article in which a young lawyer, at present here in exile,[5] wishes to make known to all Italy that by the grace of God we now have in our midst another St. Joseph Calasanctius, another St. Vincent de Paul. Indeed, when a priest carries out the teaching of the Gospel, he earns the esteem and respect of all, even of those who care little for religion but who would take an interest in it if more priests would follow in the footsteps of Our Savior.

Once again let me thank you for the honor of receiving an invitation in spite of my unimportance.

With the deepest respect and veneration, I remain,

Your grateful and devoted servant,

Octavia Masino-Borghese

Although the criticism of the clergy in this letter is unjustified, we have included it here because its praise of Don Bosco was truly justified. It also throws additional light on the spirit and opinions current in those days and on the fact that political exiles felt they owed the Oratory a debt of gratitude.

[5] Insurrections against Austrian rule in Lombardy and Veneto in 1848-49 resulted in the banishment of many patriots. Most of them flocked to Piedmont. [Editor]

CHAPTER 36

Love of Neighbor

AVERT not your face from the poor. [Sir. 4, 4] Thus will you be like a son to the Most High and He will be more tender to you than a mother." [Sir. 4, 10]

This exhortation and promise of the Holy Spirit enkindled an ever greater fervor in Don Bosco's charity toward his neighbor. He sheltered countless boys without any charge. He accepted any orphan who asked to be added as yet another son to the Oratory family. He took in many boys at the urgings of benefactors and relatives who promised to pay a minimum monthly fee. At times such promises were not kept, but Don Bosco still kept the boys there if their conduct was satisfactory. He also provided shoes, clothes, food, and the opportunity to learn a trade to many boys attending the festive oratory.

Father Rua recalls that, poor as Don Bosco was, his generosity also extended to adults who were complete strangers to him. "His charity was all-embracing," Bishop Cagliero declared. "He was open to the sorrows of others and full of compassion for the poor and unfortunate. His loving concern for them was one of his most characteristic traits throughout his whole life. This is all the more remarkable if one considers the calamitous times in which he lived. He took in many people who were completely indigent, either permanently or until they could find a job; others he tried to place in some other charitable institution."

He never turned the poor away. Father [John Baptist] Piano [1] recalled: "As a theology student in Turin I was with Don Bosco

[1] Assistant pastor and later pastor of the Gran Madre di Dio Church in Turin. This church, completed in 1831 to commemorate the reestablishment of the Court of Savoy in Turin, is modeled after the Pantheon of Rome. [Editor]

one day when we met a beggar. As was frequently the case, Don Bosco did not have any money with him, and he turned to me. I took out my wallet. When he saw I had a two-lire bill, he asked me to give it to the beggar, promising to pay me back. A few months later he reminded me about this incident and tried to pay me back, but I refused. I was only too happy to share in his charities."

Father [Francis] Dalmazzo [2] wrote: "Several times I saw Don Bosco hand out very substantial alms, especially to people who had fallen on hard times, or to women in moral danger. I recall having seen him give scudi, twenty-lire bills, and even, on three occasions, hundred-lire bills. This happened especially when the people concerned were repentant apostates, now totally indigent, or destitute non-Catholics entering the Church."

Father [Joachim] Berto [3] added: "One day in 1874 I was with Don Bosco when a beggar approached. There had been quite a few before him. Don Bosco asked me for some change, but I had none on hand. When I ventured to remark that there were far too many beggars on the streets and that we could not possibly satisfy them all, he replied: 'Don't you know that it is written: "Give and it shall be given to you"?' " [Luke 6, 38]

Don Bosco simply could not ignore anyone in need, and he would always do his utmost to lighten the burden of the persons involved. One day, while passing through a main street in Turin with Father Rua and Father Dalmazzo, he saw a boy pulling an overloaded cart. The lad was obviously unequal to the task, and was crying in frustration. Don Bosco unobtrusively left his two companions. Soon, to their amazement, they saw him pushing the cart for a considerable distance.

Don Bosco saw in his fellow beings the image of their Creator, and he did not differentiate between rich and poor on the material or spiritual level. He paid no heed to error, guilt, enmity, ingratitude, difference of opinion, or political affiliation. He was not prompted by likes or dislikes. Indeed, if he was partial to anyone, it was to the most destitute. He had always helped them generously

[2] A pupil at the Oratory, he later was ordained a priest and appointed rector of the Catanzaro diocesan seminary. [Editor]

[3] He entered the Oratory as a student in 1862. He then became a Salesian and the secretary of Don Bosco. [Editor]

even before opening his hospice, as Father [Felix] Reviglio told us. From 1849 to 1860 his charity was lavished upon yet another category of people, the political refugees who had come to Piedmont from different parts of Italy, especially from Veneto and Lombardy, to escape persecution.

The first among these was a notary from Pavia who had seriously compromised himself by his political views and who now was forced to earn a living as a street entertainer in Turin's Piazza San Carlo. He had trained quite a few canaries to perform in a surprising manner. He would place them on a table; at his signal one of the birds would begin to twitter, while the others kept silent. Then he would make two of the birds engage in a contest; it was amazing to see both birds make prodigious efforts to outdo each other. At times all the canaries warbled together in a chorus; then there would follow a solo, another chorus, and finally a duet. The concert would end with a grand finale with all the birds joining in. A vast crowd would watch this performance and admire these canaries who were so responsive to their trainer.

One particularly charming and amusing show is well remembered. Two canaries would engage in a mock duel. It was intriguing to watch them raise the tiny cardboard sword attached to one of their claws to strike their opponent. One canary, pretending to be wounded, would limp and stagger around as the other tried to press the attack. At last the assailant would raise its claw and strike a second blow. The vanquished bird would then collapse and remain perfectly still as if dead. Thereupon the other canaries, trilling in a mournful key, would all approach and encircle the victim. After a while they would grasp him with their beaks and drag him to a small mound in the middle of the table. With their beaks they would then pull a small piece of paper over him like a funeral pall and cover him with some hay. The "dead" canary would never stir. After thus burying their companion, the canaries would run to the edge of the table with much shaking of their heads, trilling slowly and intermittently in sorrow and grief. Now and then they would lift their heads and look toward the grave; then sadly they would twitter a funeral chant. At a certain point the "dead" bird would shake off the paper and hay, jump to its feet, and begin a lively song. At this signal, all the other canaries would run over to him and join in a festive chorus.

Anyone who had not actually seen the performance would not have believed it possible that someone could train a family of canaries so well. Don Bosco had heard about this performance. One day, therefore, as he was passing through Piazza San Carlo with some boys on his way to the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova, he stopped to see the act for himself. Something very strange then happened. Usually the canaries became frightened when any spectator approached too close, but they were not in the least afraid as Don Bosco came toward them. They perched on his shoulders, arms, and hands and allowed him to caress them. He soon became friends with their trainer, who confided to him how he had first tried to train several other kinds of birds before finally finding canaries the most responsive. This was Don Bosco's way of winning friends: showing a sincere interest in their achievements.

The notary called many times on Don Bosco at Valdocco. On his part, Don Bosco invited him to make his Easter duty and send his young son to the festive oratory. The notary was very happy with his new trade and with his friendship with Don Bosco, until human malice and envy brought sorrow to his life.

One morning he found all his canaries dead. Some evil person had smothered them in their cage. Don Bosco offered to help this unlucky man by boarding his son at the Oratory at a reduced rate. Often the boy would remark to Don Bosco: "My father worked so hard to train those canaries! You have no idea how much he suffered because of that spiteful deed."

Another political refugee who experienced Don Bosco's charity was a man whose fame would spread far and wide. In 1852 [Marquis Massimo] d'Azeglio and [Count Camillo] Cavour had not yet shown the great concern for political refugees that they would eventually manifest. Francesco Crispi [4] had been invited to write for the *Risorgimento,* a moderate semiofficial newspaper that had a sizable number of Catholics among its readers, but Crispi had emphatically refused. Later on, however, when he applied for the position of municipal secretary at Verolengo,[5] his application was rejected. Crispi then experienced stark misery. One day in Turin he stopped

[4] An Italian statesman (1819-1901), born in Sicily, he led the insurrection which broke out on that island in 1848. Upon the restoration of the Bourbon government in 1849 he was compelled to flee to Piedmont. Eventually he became premier of Italy from 1887 to 1891 and from 1893 to 1895. [Editor]

[5] A small town near Turin. [Editor]

as a group of boys, accompanied by Don Bosco, passed by. Don Bosco, noticing the man's haggard face and his half-starved condition, invited him to come along to the Oratory, where he fed him. During the next six or seven weeks he often had Crispi as a guest at his table and discussed with him his own plans for the education of youth. Don Bosco could see that this indigent refugee, despite the ups-and-downs of his political career, still felt the influence of his early Catholic training.

Crispi had rented a small room near Our Lady of Consolation Church. Don Bosco had [Francis] Bargetti of Castelnuovo [then a young man at the Oratory] bring him food; he also helped Crispi with money. On another occasion, noticing that Crispi's shoes were quite worn out, Don Bosco had a new pair delivered to him. Crispi also went to confession to Don Bosco and many times spent his Sundays at the Oratory, thus having an opportunity to observe Christian faith and charity in action. He benefited by this experience, and he never forgot it, although for many years he gave no sign of acknowledgment. When his political fortunes took a turn for the better, Crispi returned to Turin and rented an elegant apartment. A lady who had helped him in his days of misery called on him to offer her congratulations, but he pretended not to know her. Don Bosco, an experienced and just appraiser of human nature, wisely refrained from calling on him at this time.

Another man to whom we shall refer by his initial, "M," received free room and board at the Oratory when he was destitute. However, some people never mend their ways because their hearts are already too hardened to respond to the healing influence of religion. This man showed young Francesia [a boy at that time] a book of his own memoirs containing some unedifying and erotic episodes. Francesia reported this to Don Bosco who immediately took steps to prevent all contact between "M" and the boys. Don Bosco, however, could not find it in his heart to turn him out into the street; in 1853 he rented and moved him into two rooms at the Albergo della Giardiniera.[6] The man belonged to a secret society and later became a well-paid writer on the editorial staff of *L'Opinione*. He was also seriously suspected of being an informer. One day, "M"

[6] *See* Vol. II, pp. 336, 401, 421. [Editor]

and a friend of his met Francesia, who by this time had already donned the cassock. Nodding toward Francesia, "M" remarked to his friend with an important air: "Here is one of the future hopes of our country!" Hopefully, perhaps, he had intended to give Francesia a patriotic education with his memoirs! This episode shows us how Don Bosco continued to extend Christian charity to this man once the danger of scandal had been removed.

There was yet a fourth exile for whose story we are indebted to our confrere, Father [Angelo] Caimo. A well-known college professor had related the following story to him:

> I was studying in Turin and deeply in debt. I did not know to whom I could turn for help. I went to the Oratory, explained my situation to Don Bosco, and begged him to help me, adding that in exchange I would do some teaching to his boys. Don Bosco received me with more than fatherly kindness and helped me as much as he could, assuring me that I was welcome at the Oratory if I could adapt myself to the regular routine like everyone else. As you know, my religious and political opinions were, and still are, diametrically opposed to Don Bosco's. My upbringing rebelled against the idea; I simply could not accept that condition. However, I was fully convinced that Don Bosco was an extraordinary man, a shrewd and profound judge of men, and a genuine and gifted educator. I am still of this opinion and am not afraid to admit it. I consider Don Bosco my benefactor, and I do not hesitate to assert that he is an outstanding Italian and a saintly priest.

We could say, therefore, that Don Bosco's charity resembled the charity of Our Heavenly Father who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the just and sinners alike.

We must add that there were also many political exiles who were a source of great comfort to him, as, for example, Father Zattini, a learned professor of philosophy who had been condemned for insurrection and hung in effigy in Brescia.[7] During his stay at the Oratory he never discussed politics and willingly agreed to teach reading and writing to the day pupils. He was a model of humility and piety.

[7] In 1849 Brescia (52 miles east of Milan) was the only Lombard town to rally to the aid of King Charles Albert (*see* Vol. III, p. 358), but it was captured by the Austrians after ten days of obstinate street fighting (March 23-April 1). Its heroic resistance earned for the town the name of "Lionessa d'Italia" (the Lioness of Italy). [Editor]

The talented young musician, Jerome Suttil, whose unguarded remarks had set the police of Venice [8] on his trail, also sought refuge at the Oratory. He took a liking to Don Bosco and for many years delighted the boys at the Oratory with his Venetian ballads. Later he went to France; on his return he again settled at the Oratory, and there he ended his days. He was deeply religious to the last. We will pass over other names.

Don Bosco also had a special gift for telling a true indigent from an impostor. Late one night he was walking through a dimly lit street in Rome when a woman approached him, holding in her arms what appeared to be a child wrapped in a blanket. Plaintively she begged pity on a poor mother in dire need. Don Bosco ignored her and kept walking. We who were at his side, moved by the woman's pitiful insistence, suggested that he give her something. We were quite surprised when Don Bosco, whose eyesight was quite poor, raising his voice, replied: "But don't you realize that this woman is trying to fool us? That bundle is not a child; it's only a doll." At these words the woman hastily retreated.

Except for obvious cases of fraud, Don Bosco was always generous toward the poor. We know for a fact that every year his charities amounted to several thousand lire, either by actual alms or in cancelled debts. He was generous not only to the poor but also to those who had means, especially country folk who came to the city for business or work, assisting them in various ways and helping them to fulfill their religious duties on Sundays and holy days regardless of their state in life.

Among the several available testimonies in this respect we have chosen that of the shopkeeper John Filippello of Castelnuovo, in which he also gives us a graphic sketch of those years.

Frequently my business took me to Turin and occasionally I called on Don Bosco at Valdocco. I noticed that the number of boys was increasing every year. One day I met Don Bosco near the royal palace. It was a Friday, and he insisted that I have dinner with him at the Oratory because he feared that in a restaurant even meatless dishes might have been prepared with meat fats. While on our way, Don Bosco stopped

[8] An insurrection against Austrian rule in 1848 established a provisional republican government. In August, 1849, however, Austria recaptured the city. [Editor]

many times to talk with all sorts of people. He apologized for these delays. When we reached the Oratory, all the boys crowded around to kiss his hand with such obvious reverence and affection that I was deeply moved. I spent the night at the Oratory; the next morning I saw them all go to Don Bosco's Mass. I was happy to join them in the old chapel. What I saw convinced me that the boys were really good. However, I also felt that many of them could have come to a bad end if they had not been sheltered at the Oratory.

Helping young people grow up as good Christians was Don Bosco's most cherished reward, and God repaid him abundantly in this way.

CHAPTER 37

Preparations for a New Religious Congregation

DON BOSCO, meanwhile, was not losing sight of the religious congregation that he was destined to found. Often, over the years, when pleasantly conversing with some boys or young clerics grouped around him, he would sit on the ground, Indian style, and the others would follow suit. He would then shape his handkerchief into a ball and toss it from one hand to the other. As the boys watched silently, he would suddenly exclaim: "If I had twelve boys as manageable as this handkerchief, I would spread our Faith not only throughout Europe, but far, far into the remotest lands." He would not add another word. Father [John Baptist] Piano, at present [1904] pastor of the Gran Madre di Dio Church in Turin, heard him say these words in 1857, when he was still a boy.

Moreover, in his sermons, conferences, or informal talks Don Bosco tried to instill in his boys love for a life totally dedicated to God and to the salvation of souls. Occasionally he would speak about the advantages of community life, such as freedom from worry for the future or the daily necessities of life, thanks to the protection by Divine Providence of those who served God. But his approach to this topic was always indirect; he would not specifically allude to the religious life. At times he would recount some edifying episode in the lives of saints who had consecrated their lives to God in monasteries, but he did so in such a way as to make the religious life attractive and to impress upon them that it was a state of perfection; however, he never appeared to promote vocations. All he asked of his pupils was that they help him. Capitalizing on their love for him, he often expressed the desire to have

them always at his side, to always be able to lead them to heaven, and to enjoy eternal bliss with them forever.

Sometimes he made puzzling remarks to excite a boy's curiosity: "Will you do something for me? How about a confession of your future life?"

To another he would say: "How is everything? Are you all right? Don't you think you should prepare yourself to make a general confession of your future life?" What he was driving at especially was their priestly vocation and the importance of thinking about it seriously and constantly.

Now and then he would ask a boy: "Will you let me behead you? I really wish you would!" To him that symbolized perfect obedience, whose advantages and merits he would often describe without, however, specifically pointing out in what state of life this virtue could especially be practiced.

Don Bosco had resolved not to demand from his boys anything more than could be expected of any good Christian for the salvation of his soul. Thus he never talked to them about regular meditations or prolonged spiritual retreats. Already at that time he had taught them other practices of piety so effectively that some of his boys attained the highest degree of perfection. He would have jeopardized his whole plan if he had introduced at the Oratory practices suggestive of the religious life. Nevertheless, in the course of our narrative we shall see how, gradually yet imperceptibly, he moved toward his goal to place the Salesian society on a par with all other religious congregations.

Don Bosco worked tirelessly toward this end, but he never once uttered the word "congregation" until he had carefully prepared the terrain over a period of fourteen years. He realized that if he were to unveil his plan, even slightly, many would implacably oppose him: not only the anticlericals, but also bishops, pastors, the boys' parents, and even the boys themselves. His fears were well grounded; subsequent events proved him to be correct. Many who formerly had greatly admired and hailed him as a great and holy man later rebelled and denounced him as a fanatic, a stubborn and proud priest, a sower of discord, and an unruly subject who wanted to be supreme in his own domain. This also was part of God's plan.

To overcome these anticipated difficulties Don Bosco continued to strive in every possible way to bind the boys more closely to him. For this reason, from time to time he spoke about himself and what the Lord did through him, told them certain dreams whose fulfillment they could verify, hinted at some special mission entrusted to him on behalf of boys, and insistently pointed out that the Oratory was under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. He did all this to make them understand what a privilege it would be for them to offer their help in a place so dear to Our Lady. He took pains, however, to dispel any notion of self-praise. Therefore, when now and then he talked about the pioneer days of the Oratory, he would remark: "Sometimes I talk about things that happened in the early years of the Oratory, and therefore I cannot help speaking also of myself. I think I can truly say that it is good to reminisce because all these things clearly show the power of God. I don't think there is any self-pride in all this; none at all, thank God. These tales are very enlightening; they teach us that God achieved great results through a worthless instrument. I want this to be known so that we may all lift up our thoughts to God and thank Him for all He willed to do on our behalf."

Don Bosco set a fine example by thanking God incessantly, not only for the favors already granted him, but also for the future ones he knew lay in store for him. It should suffice merely to recall what we have already said on this score.

In 1846 and 1849, when Don Bosco conferred with Father [Sebastian] Pacchiotti [1] and the other priests at the Rifugio or with Father [John] Cocchis [2] and others about ways and means of giving the festive oratory a permanent footing, he always overcame their objections by assuring them that in due time young clerics and priests, all his own, would rally to his aid and bring his undertakings to completion. In those years, several fellow priests who once seemed so interested in the work of the oratories gradually deserted him, seemingly disproving his prophecy; to them it brought a wry smile.[3] Yet the first of these young clerics soon arrived on the scene,

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 189, 226, 265, 389. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 319ff. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. II, pp. 322ff. [Editor]

just as he had foretold. They were well known and well liked by all because, publicly and privately, they helped their companions, supervised their recreation, taught evening classes, and catechized the festive oratory boys. On Sundays they scouted the meadows, rounded up the boys they found playing there, and led them to the oratories. These young clerics also found jobs for unemployed youngsters and visited them when they were ill in accordance with Don Bosco's instructions. At the same time, they continued their own studies.

In 1852 Father [Sebastian] Pacchiotti was preaching the novena in honor of the Holy Spirit at the Oratory. The boys were very fond of him. On Pentecost Sunday, after the sermon, they accompanied him to a room on the ground floor for some refreshments. In that room there were eight of these young clerics. When Don Bosco came in, Father Pacchiotti patted him lightly on the shoulder and, deeply moved, said to him: "Now I believe what you said about clerics and priests of your own." On another occasion, when construction of a residence at the Oratory was well under way, he said: "Now I believe that you will have a church and a house." Several of those who had formerly called Don Bosco a madman came to preach in St. Francis de Sales Church and could not help but recall that what they had considered utterly impossible was now a reality. Yet what they saw then was only a modest beginning, a fraction of what was later to develop.

Don Bosco took great pains to prepare some of the more promising and religious-minded boys for that longed-for day by gradually getting them used to practices common to religious orders. Therefore, he would occasionally call them aside for a special talk. One of those present was the deacon Joachim Guanti who was then teaching Latin.

On one such occasion (it was June 5, 1852) Don Bosco suggested that they each choose a secret monitor among themselves whose duty would be to point out in a gentle way to the one who had chosen him any fault he might have noticed. Michael Rua, for example, chose [Felix] Reviglio, and he assured us that his friend's opportune admonitions were very beneficial to him. Rua made a note of this conference on a postcard, which read as follows:

On the evening of Saturday, June 5, 1852, Don Bosco, [Joachim] Guanti, [James] Bellìa, [Joseph] Buzzetti, Gianinati, Angelo Savio, Stephen Savio, [Secundus] Marchisio, [John] Turchi, [Peter] Rocchietti, [John Baptist] Francesia, Francis Bosco, [John] Cagliero, [John] Germano, and [Michael] Rua gathered for a conference, during which they resolved to recite the Seven Joys of Mary every Sunday until the first Saturday of May the following year. At that time we shall see how each of us carried out this resolution; may Jesus and Mary help us all to become saints.

The undisclosed intention of these prayers was that the Salesian Society might come into being. All those present at that conference faithfully carried out what Don Bosco had suggested, fully convinced that it would really benefit them.

Meanwhile work on the church of St. Francis de Sales was progressing so rapidly that the structure was completed in June, 1852. Dr. Francis Vallauri, his wife, and their son, Father Peter, contributed the main altar. Commendatore Joseph Duprè agreed to pay for the decoration of a side altar dedicated to St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and he also donated a marble altar. Marquis Dominic and Marchioness Maria Fassati paid for the second side altar dedicated to Our Lady and for the beautiful statue that adorned it. Mr. Michael Scanagatti contributed some handsome candlesticks; Father Joseph Cafasso donated the pulpit, while yet another benefactor gave the choir loft to which a small organ was later added. Don Bosco's untiring efforts and zeal were matched by the generosity of a charity-minded public, or, rather, by Divine Providence which never abandoned him.

On April 7 [1852], Celestine Fissore, the pro-vicar general, authorized Don Bosco to bless the new tabernacle; on Sunday evening, May 22, Father [Augustine] Gattino, the pastor of SS. Simon and Jude, blessed the new church bell which had been installed in the tower alongside the church.

In order to have the church blessed with the greatest possible solemnity Don Bosco wanted a bishop to perform the task. He first invited the archbishop of Vercelli. Unsuccessful in this quest, he then approached the bishop of Ivrea, with whom he was discussing

a society for circulating good books among the people. Both had to decline his invitation for the reasons set forth below:

Vercelli, June 8, 1852

Reverend and dear Father:

I would love to be with you and your many boys on the occasion of the blessing of the church of St. Francis de Sales, for which this capital is greatly indebted to you.

Unfortunately, I am nearly 72 years old and racked by coughing spells and those sundry ailments which are inseparable companions of old age. I am unable, therefore, to accept your gracious invitation which I greatly appreciate. I am sure you will understand.

With the deepest respect, I am,

Yours devotedly,

✠ Alexander [d'Angennes], *Archbishop*

Ivrea, June 12, 1852

Very Reverend Father:

I would be most happy to take part in the ceremonies for the blessing of the new church that you and your cooperators have zealously erected. Indeed, I would be delighted to pay tribute to you and to your zealous undertakings, and also to congratulate Dr. Vallauri, whom I greatly esteem, on his appointment as "prior" [4] of this solemn event.

Unfortunately I cannot come. On that same day I have to administer Confirmation; the following day is my name day and I am invited to the minor seminary for a little celebration; then comes the anniversary of my Baptism. On these occasions I would rather stay at home. Besides, those are also the days when our seminarians will take their final examinations in theology and philosophy. I am indeed sorry, but I just cannot come.

I would very much like to read your pamphlet *Warnings to Catholics*.[5] I also received a note from my secretary regarding the two Philadelphias.[6] I talked with several priests not of this diocese regarding our circulating library, and everyone agrees that it would fill an urgent need and be a great success.

[4] An honorary title bestowed on prominent benefactors. They usually reciprocated by having a small party for the boys. [Editor]

[5] *See* pp. 157 ff. 242. [Editor]

[6] Probably some geographical information in connection with a biblical publication. [Editor]

I sincerely hope and pray to the Lord that the blessing ceremonies will spread joy and be spiritually fruitful. I shall be with you in spirit.

With the greatest esteem, I remain,

Yours devotedly,

✠ Louis [Moreno], *Bishop*

After receiving these replies, Don Bosco presented the following request to the chancery:

Very Reverend Vicar:

The new church of St. Francis de Sales at the Valdocco Oratory is now ready for worship. The undersigned, Father John Bosco, requests your permission to transfer the church services from the present chapel to this new church and convert the present chapel to some other use.

I also invite you to bless the new church or to delegate someone to do so.

Fr. John Bosco

The chancery promptly replied:

Turin, June 19, 1852

The pastor of SS. Simon and Jude has been delegated to bless the new church of St. Francis de Sales according to the Roman Ritual.

After the blessing, church services may be held with all the privileges previously granted. The former chapel may be converted to other use.

Philip Ravina, *Vicar General*

T. G. Caviassi, *Secretary*

Don Bosco then sent the following invitation to his benefactors:

Oratory of St. Francis de Sales

June 16, 1852

Dear Friend:

This coming Sunday, June 20, will be a day of great joy for me, and, I believe, for you too. This day will see our aspirations and expectations fulfilled by the blessing of the new church of St. Francis de Sales, for which you have shown such commendable charity and zeal in many ways.

Although the interior is not yet finished, it is suitable for the solemn blessing and the celebration of services. An urgent need will thus be filled.

The dedication ceremonies will start at 8:30 in the morning. After the blessing, Mass will follow, at which some of the boys will receive Communion. The Mass will be offered for the intentions of all benefactors of the Oratory. After Mass there will be the dedication sermon. The ceremonies will close with Benediction. At 3:30 in the afternoon there will be the chanting of Vespers, the usual catechetical instruction, and Benediction.

Upon leaving the church, please go to the old chapel for an opportunity to meet our other benefactors. This is an occasion of mutual joy in the Lord who has so generously helped us to bring this project of His to completion.

There will be a seat reserved for you so that you may attend the sacred ceremony in comfort. I am eager to show you every consideration on that day as you so well deserve. If, however, I should unwittingly fail in something, please be indulgent and attribute this to my multiplicity of chores, and not to any lack of good will.

Bring along any friends who, to your knowledge, have contributed to this pious undertaking in some way or other. Let us all be one in experiencing this joy, in giving glory to God, and in partaking of the spiritual benefits that will derive from this celebration.

I hope you will continue your benevolence to this Oratory. I wish to thank you with all my heart, and I assure you that I shall deem it a great honor to be of service to you.

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also sent an invitation to the mayor of Turin. The latter would gladly have accepted if previous engagements had not made it impossible, as he graciously explained in a letter of June 18 revealing his deeply religious spirit and the great esteem he felt for the Oratory:

Reverend and dear Father:

I was very pleased to receive your gracious invitation, and deeply regret that a previous engagement will keep me from attending the dedication services. On [Sunday, June 20] the feast of Our Lady of Consolation, I am duty-bound to attend the morning church services with the municipal council; in the afternoon I must be present at a meeting of the Congregation of Charity in Reaglie. I am delighted to hear of the progress of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales which you so zealously

established to give our young apprentices a thorough Christian and civic education.

With the deepest respect, I am,

Yours devotedly,

G. Bellone, *Mayor*

The deputy mayor was also unable to attend for the same reason.

Turin, June 17, 1852

On Sunday, June 20, at 9 A.M., I shall have to attend Mass with the municipal council in Our Lady of Consolation Church. For this reason, I deeply regret that I will be unable to be present at the ceremony to which you so graciously invited me in your letter of June 16.

Nonetheless, I expect to be able to call at the Oratory at 3:30 and take part in the ensuing gathering in the old chapel after settling some pressing matters here at the office and completing some domestic duties at home.

My colleagues, rather than myself, are entitled to this gracious invitation because I realize that not only have I contributed least of all to this charitable undertaking, but I am far below those who did the least. I am on a par with the others only in rejoicing that this undertaking succeeded, and in my sincere esteem for you, the organizer of it all. As a citizen and as a Christian, I wish to express my respect, gratitude, and earnest good will for all the good you are accomplishing with God's guidance and protection.

[Hyacinth] Cottin, *Deputy Mayor*

The renowned naturalist and archeologist [G. T.] Baruffi also wrote to Don Bosco on this occasion.

Turin, June 18, 1852

Reverend and dear Father:

Many cordial thanks for your courteous invitation. Unfortunately, I shall be out of town this Sunday.

Nevertheless, I heartily endorse this holy undertaking and pray for God's continued blessings on you so that you may see the completion of your noble and evangelical aspirations.

Your zealous efforts and incessant sacrifices on behalf of poor, neglected boys in order to lead them back to the path of virtue and provide them with material and spiritual nourishment will never be forgotten by

the Turinese and all who know of and can appreciate your endeavors.

Please accept my respectful and cordial good wishes for your own well-being so that the Oratory you have founded may continue to grow and yield those fruits which society and the Church await from its establishment.

I am glad of this opportunity to express once more my esteem for you.

Your devoted and most grateful servant,

G. T. Baruffi

Although Don Bosco was terribly overworked he still found time to invoke his muse and compose a simple but charming ode for the occasion. It was set to music and taught to the boys. Don Bosco prefaced it with the introduction that follows and had several thousand copies printed:

On the occasion of the blessing of the new church of St. Francis de Sales, the Oratory boys, overjoyed, wish to express their sincere gratitude to their benefactors with this song.[7]

As the preparations for this festive occasion progressed, all the boys at the Oratory, whether day students or boarders, were brimming with joy. It reached its peak on June 14.[8]

Professor [Joseph] Raineri, who frequented the Oratory from 1846 to 1853, recalls the following incident:

It was a Sunday afternoon; Don Bosco, in his usual inimitable and gifted way, was telling us the story of how the young shepherd David became king. He ended with the words: "So, lo and behold, the shepherd was now king!" We all responded instantly: "Long live Don Bosco, our king!" Thereupon the tallest and strongest boys lifted him on their shoulders and carried him in triumph around the playground while the rest of us followed, singing the song we had been learning for the dedication ceremonies of the following Sunday. We enjoyed it immensely and perhaps he did too. We did what ancient people used to do after they chose a leader: they carried him high on their shields. Indeed, Don Bosco was our leader, our king! His teachings were golden; good for all, they were ideally suited for the young. I think it quite proper to mention a few:

"Act today in such a way that you need not blush tomorrow."

[7] In this edition we have transferred this ode to Appendix 9. [Editor]

[8] Judging by what follows, it must have been June 13; June 14 fell on Monday. [Editor]

"Do not put off till tomorrow the good you can do today. You may not have a tomorrow."

"Let us strive to fare well in this life and in the next."

"Be slow to pass judgment."

"Do you want your companions to respect you? Always think well of everyone, and be ready to help others. Do this and you will be happy."

After the church services Don Bosco usually made his way through the crowds of boys, all busily playing. They were of widely different ages, temperament, habits, social status, and education. Don Bosco was alert to each one's individual temperament, ready with the right word for each, a word that would encourage us and make us happy. He seemed to read into our souls, and each of us thought: "Don Bosco really cares for me!" And indeed he did! How consoling it is to reminisce about our boyhood years!

Bishop Cagliero added:

At night Don Bosco himself would accompany the day students up to the city limits [9] to make sure that they would go home in groups without wandering about. As the boys passed by the Rondò, where executions by hanging were then held publicly, they often remarked: "Don Bosco loves us so much that even if we were about to be hanged, he'd find a way to save us!"

This was also confirmed by Father [Felix] Reviglio.

[9] The Oratory was surrounded by open fields. [Editor]

CHAPTER 38

The Fulfillment of a Dream

THE solemn blessing of the new church was set for June 20 [1852], the third Sunday after Pentecost. This was a very important date in Turin because it was the feast of Our Lady of Consolation.[1] All essential work had been completed and all appurtenances for the blessing and sacred services were ready. We shall pass over many details of that memorable occasion, truly a red-letter day for the Oratory. A tall arch stood at the entrance to the playground, bearing in giant characters this inscription:

May This Red-Letter Day
Ever Be Remembered!

At dawn groups of boys were already making their way through the neighboring fields and meadows, singing verses [2] written by Don Bosco for the occasion.

The pastor of SS. Simon and Jude, Father Augustine Gattino, blessed the church and then celebrated the first Mass during which he delivered an inspiring address.

The festivities reached their peak in the late afternoon. The new church was literally packed. In his sermon, among other things, Don Bosco pointed out the wonderful transformation that very spot had undergone: a playground had become a place for prayer; profane songs had given way to sacred hymns; a rowdy tavern and a

[1] Our Lady of Consolation (La Consolata) was the Madonna of the Turinese. The church, erected by the city in the piazza of the same name in thanksgiving for graces received, is formed by the union of the two churches of St. Andrea and La Consolata; both were built by Guarino Guarini (1624-83) and enlarged and decorated several times. [Editor]

[2] In this edition we have transferred these verses to Appendix 10. [Editor]

den of iniquity had been converted into a place where love of God and holy joy reigned. He exhorted the boys to honor that hallowed spot ever afterward by unfailing and constant observance of their religious duties. Lastly, inviting them to reflect that a church is an image of the soul, which is appropriately called a "temple of the Holy Spirit," he exhorted them to keep their souls sinless so that the Lord might be pleased to take up His abode therein and make them worthy to enter one day into the great temple of heaven and there to enjoy eternal bliss.

A unit of the National Guard was also present, both to maintain order (quite a task, considering the large crowd) and to add to the solemnity. Their volley at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was very impressive. Vying with them was the Oratory guard of honor sporting dummy rifles.

All in all the celebration was a great success. The religious-minded experienced great consolation and the worldly-minded felt great admiration. That same evening, after the church services, the executive committee of the lottery, several priests, some prominent laymen, and many others who had had a hand in the construction of the new church gathered in the old chapel for refreshments provided by benefactors. Don Bosco expressed his gratitude to them in a short speech. He touched upon all that had been accomplished, mentioned their solicitude and contributions to the success of the undertaking, and with great satisfaction he pointed out how all their efforts had been crowned that morning with the blessing of the sacred building. He added that since he could not recompense them individually for their sacrifices, he and the boys of the Oratory would pray to God to bless them abundantly in this life and grant them eternal glory in the next. The Oratory choirboys then sang a delightful motet composed by the renowned Joseph Blanchi. One of them, 15-year-old Secundus Pettiva, won thunderous applause for his stirring solo.

In this setting, Don Bosco, beaming with joy, looked like David, the prophet of old, who sang and played devoutly among his people while the Ark of the Lord was being borne through their midst. Then, on behalf of Don Bosco, his co-workers, and all the Oratory boys, a boy declaimed the ode Don Bosco had written for this occa-

sion, [3] to the great delight of the audience. A brilliant display of fireworks made and directed by Father Chiaves [4] closed the celebration.

This solemn event, its noble purpose, and the order that marked the proceedings seemed so significant to *La Patria,* a contemporary political newspaper, that it gave a detailed account of the celebration. We report it here in full, both to complete our description and to indicate what political-minded men of those days thought of the Oratory.

We consider ourselves very fortunate at the start of our journalistic career to have the opportunity to write about a local undertaking which successfully manages to be interesting, even though not of earthshaking importance. We are very happy, indeed, to brush aside the usual news items that deal with the shortcomings of society and our political concerns in order to delve into a subject which arouses the sympathy of all.

If we have a heart, how can we withhold our good will from a generous soul who is as zealous as a philanthropist, as persevering as an apostle, and as unwavering as a true Christian? We speak of a man who, sacrificing the best years of his life and overcoming countless obstacles by sheer will power, firmness, and patience, has succeeded after long and difficult years in accomplishing a task which puts him on a par with such giants of charity as Epée,[5] Assarotti,[6] and Cottolengo.[7]

If we bear in mind that the undertakings of these giants had humble beginnings, we will easily see that Don Bosco's works are the equal of theirs, and that the great good he has already done justifies our rating him on a par with the heroes of charity we have just mentioned. We do not intend to dwell now on the difficulties which he encountered; rather, we wish to mention the overall assistance which came to the aid of this tireless laborer of the Lord's vineyard despite the political turmoil of these unsettled times when not only the purses but even the hearts of men are shrinking. It is not our intention either to enumerate those who joined forces with Don Bosco and helped him with untiring zeal, al-

[3] *See* Appendix 8. [Editor]

[4] A diocesan priest who for several years had been helping Don Bosco on Sundays and holy days. *See* Vol. II, p. 336. [Editor]

[5] Charles-Michel de l'Epée (1712-1789) is famous for his work on behalf of the deaf and dumb. [Editor]

[6] Ottavio Giovanni Battista Assarotti (1753-1829), a Genoese educator and a Piarist, founded the first institution in Italy for deaf-mutes. [Editor]

[7] In 1832 Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842), now a saint, opened La Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza in Turin, a vast institution which at the present time provides for more than 7,000 patients. [Editor]

though we shall refer briefly to the myriad forms in which our city revealed its inexhaustible charity. Rich and poor, great and small, young and old—all vied with one another in supporting this holy undertaking in a spirit of true socialism, the only form that is just and feasible because it springs from a holy and admirable principle—namely, that of giving according to one's ability: the artist with a painting and the merchant with his wares.

The prizes for the lottery on behalf of the Oratory are the result of amusements, excursions, and toys sacrificed on behalf of the poor. Over and above this, women, ever in the forefront of charity, have contributed to this work an inexhaustible goodness; this is their most precious trait and a far nobler form of charity than the prosaic giving of money, which is better suited to men who by nature are less sensitive and refined.

We use the word "prosaic" in the sense that the provider of the material means for a task of this kind, compared to the one who starts it and brings it to a successful conclusion, is like a soldier compared to a general. In no way, however, do we intend to belittle the act of giving. The undertaking which Don Bosco has placed under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales is a great one and worthy of our consideration. To safeguard boys from the dangers of idleness on Sundays and to keep them occupied in holy and wholesome activities is so sublime an endeavor that we think it best to describe it as he himself related to us in his simple but impressive manner.

With deep distress he saw many young apprentices squander on Sundays their meager, hard-earned wages in drinking and gambling. Anxious to eradicate this evil that could result in dire consequences, he decided to open a center where they could gather, fulfill their religious duties, and, at the same time, receive education, guidance, and advice for leading an honest Christian life.

This undertaking which Don Bosco described so simply had its official start yesterday with the blessing of the church of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco. Appropriately, the sacred edifice is simple and plain since it depends on public generosity, but its naves are full of youngsters whose Faith is the most beautiful ornament of the house of God. Yesterday they flocked there in vast numbers, under a beautiful sky. The sun's rays seemed like so many blessings to those whose hearts thrilled with serene and devout joy. Everything seemed to contribute to make that day unforgettable in the memory of everyone present: unforgettable for those who have been rescued from the dangers of the streets and who owe their gratitude; unforgettable for those who supported the undertaking and received the tribute of this gratitude.

The religious ceremony showed a solemnity befitting the occasion. [Father Augustine Gattino], pastor of SS. Simon and Jude, a scholarly priest and a credit to the local clergy, delivered a stirring sermon in which he stressed the essential features of a church: a house of God and a house of prayer. His solid presentation, stripped of the trappings of artificial eloquence, brought home to the congregation the sanctity of our Faith and its superiority over the beliefs of other people. We felt ourselves carried back in time to the days when the faithful gathered together under the immense temple of the sky, or within the bowels of the earth, to listen to the words of that same God who died that we might be saved.

After the religious ceremony, all the members of the organizing committee gathered in an adjacent room to exchange their impressions of this wonderful event; while there, a boys' choir entertained them faultlessly. A unit of the National Guard added solemnity with its presence. All honor is due this fledgling institute which eminently deserves the gratitude of our government and graciously opens its gates to the people on these occasions of mutual rejoicing. The Oratory is now on a firm footing; Don Bosco's goal has been realized.

We say this with a certain hesitancy, however, for fear that our generous citizens may slacken their efforts. This newborn institute still needs a great deal of assistance. Our city expects great things from it and hopes that similar ones may rise in other parts of the realm. We have been unable to disguise our joy at the news of the blessing of this new church, but we would not wish our words to dampen the zeal of our fellow citizens in the erroneous belief that their help is no longer needed.

Don Bosco has undertaken a noble task and pursued it with great perseverance and skill. We trust that the people of Turin, fully appreciating these efforts to protect youths from pitfalls which they have neither the experience nor the knowledge to avoid, will continue to respond with such generosity as befits their reputation.[8]

[8] *La Patria,* June 21, 1852.

CHAPTER 39

Eucharistic Piety

SOME time after the blessing of the church of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco made slight additions [1] to the regulations of the festive oratory [2] by spelling out in greater detail the duties of some staff members. These changes throw additional light on the procedures followed in those days. For example, the boys attended only one Mass; before Mass, the boarders recited and sang Matins of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin.

There were also changes affecting the Pinardi house. Successively the old chapel was turned into a dormitory, a classroom, and a general study hall for the students.[3] Since all knowledge proceeds from God, Don Bosco even at that time wanted them to recite the prayer "Come, Holy Spirit," a Hail Mary, and the invocation "Seat of Wisdom, pray for us" before starting their homework and lessons. During the last quarter hour of this study period before supper some pages of an edifying book were read aloud, a custom that prevailed for many years. Whenever he was able to do so, Don Bosco used the same study hall as the boys; there he wrote and pondered his writings.

With his unreserved devotion to the Faith Don Bosco made his new church the center of his affections. He requested and obtained permission to keep the Blessed Sacrament permanently in it. It was with great joy and fervor that he gave this news to his boys. Thereafter, whenever he had a moment's respite he paid a visit to adore the Divine Savior; then he seemed more a seraph than a man.

[1] For these additions *see* Appendix 11. [Editor]

[2] *See* Vol. III, p. 441. [Editor]

[3] These were the boys taking academic subjects. They were called "students" to distinguish them from those learning a trade who were known as "artisans." [Editor]

Divine worship was his very life. He was very insistent about the cleanliness and proper condition of the sacred vessels and vestments and about the lamp before the Blessed Sacrament always being lit. He took pride in the cleanliness of the House of God and joyfully removed cobwebs, swept the church, dusted the altar, and washed the predella. All these tasks he had previously done in his seminary days in Chieri when he had been appointed sacristan.[4]

Poor as he was, Don Bosco succeeded in his dreams of building majestic churches in which the maximum decorum was observed and the greatest cleanliness maintained, even in the sacristy. He also saw to it that his churches were properly ornamented.

Don Bosco took great pains to ensure the devout behavior of the boys during worship, and their making the Sign of the Cross and genuflections correctly. He did not tolerate irreverence for the holy place or for the sacred mysteries; he insistently recommended that all seriously reflect on Our Lord's presence in the tabernacle. He was deeply distressed when he saw or heard of someone showing disrespect, and he never hesitated to call it to that person's attention, even if he was a perfect stranger. He scrupulously obeyed all the directives of his diocesan superior regarding divine worship. On the days when greater solemnities were observed he did not want professional singers or singers of lukewarm faith invited to support the choir, because generally they did not show the proper reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. Whenever he passed in front of a church, or even several of them in close proximity, he removed his hat; when he was bedridden, he often made the Sign of the Cross and turned toward the church in an act of adoration. He urged his fellow priests to recite the Divine Office before the Blessed Sacrament. It grieved him to think that in many places Jesus was little honored. He endeavored to find devout and charitable persons who would help in the construction and maintenance of poor churches and chapels in mission lands, and he would provide them with sacred vessels and other appurtenances.

We do not recall ever having seen Don Bosco sit down in church, except during a sermon. There was no affectation in his demeanor. He would kneel upright, his whole body motionless, his hands

[4] *See* Vol. I, pp. 339f. [Editor]

clasped and resting lightly on the kneeler or against his chest, his head slightly bowed, his eyes steady, his countenance radiant. Nothing around him could ever distract him from his spiritual concentration. Those who observed him, inspired by his demeanor which reflected such Faith and charity in the presence of his Divine Savior, were inspired to pray with the same fervor themselves.

Vocal music at the Oratory served the purpose of enhancing the liturgy. At times Don Bosco delighted in taking it upon himself to teach the boys a sacred hymn, although he could have assigned this task to others. To promote vocal music he even sought special indulgences from Pius IX for teachers and pupils. He showed himself particularly pleased when the boys sang Gregorian chant faultlessly.

Don Bosco placed very great importance on religious festivities. To the very last years of his life, he reserved to himself the celebration of the Christmas Midnight Mass; the joy that radiated from his countenance enkindled the most intense devotion in others. Likewise, he performed all the Holy Week services with a recollection and fervor that inspired the congregation. Beforehand, moreover, he enjoyed briefing the boys about these sacred rites. The source of this information is John Villa, who began frequenting the Oratory in 1855.

Don Bosco never omitted the liturgical blessings of candles, throats, ashes, olive branches, and palms. He also directed that the Forty Hours' devotion be held every year at the Oratory, and that during those three days a small group of artisans and students with clerics and priests take turns during the adoration; he himself took his turn with the others. During that period the church was also open to the public. As long as his health permitted, Don Bosco always participated with his boys in the procession with the Blessed Sacrament at the cathedral on the feast of Corpus Christi. The following Sunday he would send them to their parish churches and even to other churches to enhance the solemnity of the local procession.

Although Don Bosco usually officiated at many liturgical services at the Oratory, he did not disdain fulfilling minor offices. On one occasion, when he invited a canon to give Benediction, he himself acted as thurifer. If he chanced to pass by a church and heard the bell calling for a server, he immediately went to the sacristy and

served the Mass. Several times in various boarding schools he himself performed the office of acolyte.

He would not, however, invite anyone superior to him in rank to perform a minor office even if the latter shared his own sentiments in such matters. If the need arose, he usually managed to solve the problem with the utmost tact.

We are indebted to Father James Bellìa for the following incident:

> On the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, around 1851, I happened to be in Via Dora Grossa with Father Cafasso and Don Bosco. Suddenly, Don Bosco struck his hand against his forehead and exclaimed: "Oh, my! I forgot to send four clerics to serve Benediction at the Depository of the Society of St. Paul."
>
> "We can still do something about it," Father Cafasso exclaimed. "Why can't *we* go? Three is better than none!"
>
> It was no sooner said than done. We were not too far away, so we turned back and arrived just as the priest was going to the altar with only the thurifer. Each of us grasped a torch and took our places in the sanctuary: Father Cafasso on the right, Don Bosco on the left, and myself in the middle. Afterward, Father [John] Giacomelli, the rector, profusely thanked Father Cafasso for his gracious assistance, but he replied that even the lowliest office in the House of God was always a privilege. What a lesson to dignity-conscious young clerics!

The spirit of Faith with which Don Bosco was imbued even with regard to minor liturgical offices gives us a clue to the fervor with which he performed the higher ones. His grave, absorbed, and devout bearing when celebrating Mass and his exactness in every detail greatly edified worshipers. He pronounced the prayers of the Mass that are to be said aloud with great devotion and in a very clear voice so that all could hear. Following the instructions of Pope Benedict XIV, he never took longer than half an hour or less than twenty minutes to say Mass, and he also reminded his fellow priests about these directives. In keeping with the spirit of the Church and the custom of primitive Christianity he preferred to give Communion during Mass rather than before or after. He always cherished the privilege of distributing Holy Communion, and as he did so he would pronounce the accompanying words with great reverence.

Don Bosco never neglected to celebrate Mass except for very grave reasons. If he had to set out on a journey early in the morning, he would either curtail his sleep and say his Mass at an earlier hour, or he would postpone its celebration until he arrived at his destination; the hour or personal inconvenience was of no concern to him. Occasionally, as he said Mass, his face would be bathed in tears; at times he seemed to be in ecstasy or experiencing extraordinary spiritual gratification. It also happened that once, after the Elevation, he looked so ecstatic that he appeared to be seeing Our Lord Himself. While pronouncing the words of the Consecration, his face would often change color and take on a saintly aspect. Nevertheless, he always acted in a natural and calm manner, and without affectation, never permitting anything extraordinary to affect his demeanor, especially when he was celebrating Mass in a public church. But both in Turin and elsewhere, the faithful eagerly flocked in great numbers to assist at his Mass and gain the support of his prayers when they had foreknowledge of the time that he would be offering the Holy Sacrifice.[5] Those who were privileged to have a private chapel considered themselves fortunate if they could have him celebrate Mass in their home.

He spoke very frequently about the importance of the Holy Sacrifice. He also prescribed that the members of his congregation should attend daily Mass. He counseled others to do likewise, recalling to them St. Augustine's assertion that whoever would attend Mass regularly and devoutly would not die in the state of sin.

To those who asked him how this or that grace might be obtained, his suggestion was to assist at a Mass offered for their intention and to receive Communion frequently. He would also tell them that the Lord would listen to them with particular attention if they prayed devoutly at the moment of the Elevation.

He was always very exact in recording Mass intentions, and he scrupulously fulfilled this obligation of justice. Years later, he often found himself surrounded by many people offering him alms for Masses. Lest some omission might inadvertently occur, he arranged for a daily Mass to be celebrated for just such an eventuality.

Undoubtedly this zealous interest on his part to preclude the

[5] *See* Vol. I, p. 387. [Editor]

possibility of some person being deprived of spiritual favors to which he was entitled had its source in his constant meditation on the sublime act he was to perform every morning. Every once in a while he used to go to the church of St. Francis of Assisi and pray at the side altar where he had celebrated his first Mass,[6] there renewing the resolutions he had made on that solemn day.[7] He always carried with him the booklet containing the rubrics of the Mass, consulting it often so that he would not forget even the most minute ones. This was the spirit in which he trained his priests. Marquis Scarampi once told Bishop Cagliero: "I like to attend Mass at the Oratory because Don Bosco's young priests celebrate Mass as if they were experienced old priests; in other churches I see old priests say Mass like inexperienced youngsters." During the spiritual retreats, Don Bosco exhorted his priests to serve each other's Masses and in a gentle manner to point out to each other any fault they might unwittingly have fallen into by force of habit. He himself used to observe his priests and correct them even in the smallest details, and he urged them to reciprocate.

He always was careful to recite the prescribed prayers before Mass and to offer his thanksgiving immediately after its conclusion unless he was prevented by some emergency. In such instances, he sacrificed his own spiritual satisfaction for his love of neighbor. However, Father Ascanio Savio used to assert his conviction that Don Bosco, in these circumstances, would later pour out his entire heart to God, whether in his room or in church. He also made sure that his priests fulfilled this duty. As a remote preparation he himself observed and required others to observe strict silence in church and even in the sacristy, as is still the custom. If it was necessary to speak about spiritual matters there, he would do so, but in a low voice, and he would express his disapproval if someone did otherwise.

"When we were still fellow seminarians," Father [John] Giacomelli recalled, "he explained to me the meaning of the letters 'S. T.' often seen in ancient cloisters. They mean *'silentium tene'* [observe silence]. He also required absolute silence to be maintained

[6] *See* Vol. I, p. 386. [Editor]
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 385. [Editor]

from after night prayers until the conclusion of Mass the following morning. We met him several times early in the morning as he left his room to go to church. At such moments he would smile at us and allow us to greet him by kissing his hand, but he would not say a word, so absorbed was he in his preparation for Mass."

He wanted the altar boys to serve Mass flawlessly and he always cherished the privilege of training them himself. In 1902 several aged men of Sassi [8] told Father [John] Garino how Don Bosco had taught them to serve Mass when, as a convalescent guest of their pastor, he had spent a couple of weeks there.[9] To promote interest in the liturgy, Don Bosco established the regulation that on Thursdays the clerics should learn how to serve solemn high Mass and that every evening students and artisans be taught the ceremonies of low Mass and the distinct pronunciation of the responses. If anyone served his Mass less than perfectly, Don Bosco would point out the mistake to him in a kindly manner as soon as he returned to the sacristy; he would then encourage the server to correct his flaw by promising him a nice present. Unfailingly, though, he was always courteous and tactful in correcting them. For example, an altar boy was in the habit of slurring his responses. After returning to the sacristy and removing the sacred vestments, Don Bosco whispered to him: "You're always too hungry!"

"What do you mean?"

"You bite off the responses!"

The boy did not reply, but that day he practiced pronouncing distinctly the words he was accustomed to slur. After serving Don Bosco's Mass again the following day, he asked: "Well, am I still too hungry?"

"Not so much anymore," replied Don Bosco.

"On another occasion," Father [Dominic] Milanesio [10] told us, "Don Bosco pointed out to his altar boy a mistake he had made. The boy, who was very lively and outspoken, rejoined: 'You made one too!' and then explained what he meant. Inadvertently (a very rare occurrence for him) Don Bosco had blessed the water at the

[8] At this time a suburb of Turin at the foot of the Superga hills. [Editor]

[9] *See* Vol. II, pp. 351ff. [Editor]

[10] He made his perpetual vows as a Salesian in 1872 and a few years later volunteered to serve as a missionary to Patagonia, where he achieved outstanding success. [Editor]

Offertory in a requiem Mass. Amiably, and with great humility, Don Bosco replied: 'Oh, well! I guess we're both in the same boat; we sure can mess things up!' "

We must not fail to mention that Don Bosco was the apostle of frequent Communion and of daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament. When he preached on Our Lord's love for us, he would often weep and bring tears to the eyes of his hearers. Even during recreation time, if the conversation turned to the subject of the Holy Eucharist, he would beam with holy ardor. He frequently said to the boys: "My dear boys, love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with all your heart, and you shall be truly happy!" His words made the boys more convinced than ever of the truth of the real presence of Jesus Christ. He was truly happy when he succeeded in having a goodly number of communicants every day. He exhorted young and old alike to shun sin in order to be able to receive daily with their confessor's approval. He himself never hesitated to give such permission to anyone who had the necessary dispositions. However, when he spoke of sacrilegious Communion to the Oratory boys, he did it in such terms that their blood ran cold, so horrified were they at his words. When Father [John] Giacomelli once hinted to Don Bosco that perhaps he was too easy in permitting boys to receive Communion, Don Bosco reminded him that the Council of Trent had declared it to be the wish of the Church that at every Mass there be at least some communicants.

To promote frequent Communion Don Bosco founded associations and sodalities, and he urged their members to receive frequently, especially on the occasion of triduums, novenas, and religious festivities. He also published and distributed thousands of pamphlets at popular prices or even gratis, and he exhorted his boys to read them. He was also tireless in hearing confessions and in preparing his boys with the greatest care for their First Holy Communion; he was anxious that this sublime act be given the greatest importance and that it be performed with very special solemnity. These boys' Communions must truly have pleased the Lord.

Often, when giving the "Good Night" to the boys, Don Bosco urged them to say a prayer and if possible to receive Communion on the following day with great Faith because he needed special graces on behalf of the house. Many times, too, on the following

evening, he would tell them that the Lord had heard their prayers. He used to say that all the good he and his co-workers accomplished, the favors Our Lady granted him, and the financial assistance his benefactors gave him were due to the prayers and Communions of his boys. He never claimed credit for anything. How often we heard him exclaim: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory." [Ps. 113B, 1] Another favorite phrase of his was: "Divine Providence sent us this or that help."

Finally, we must point out how great was his spirit of union with God, even in the so-called exterior life. Considering his prodigious activity in the field of charity and in his priestly ministry, we might suppose that he was primarily a man wholly taken up with projects and their execution, and thus with little time for prayer except the required minimum.

"This was not so," Professor [Francis] Maranzana, his pupil, declared to us. "I always saw him so deeply recollected, so serene and tranquil, that he seemed to me to be continually absorbed in contemplating heavenly things. True, he was on this earth to do good, but his spirit was in heaven. Jesus Christ lived in him."

His secretaries always saw him begin his work with a fervent prayer. As long as his health permitted, he said his night prayers with the boys, kneeling upright on the bare floor of the portico; if he noticed any boy making the Sign of the Cross carelessly, he never failed to correct him. He was equally devout in saying grace before and after meals.

"Many times," Father Rua wrote, "I came upon him absorbed in prayer during his brief moments of respite. Once he confided to a confrere who was very close to him: "Sometimes I cannot be present at the [community] spiritual reading. To make up for it, before going to bed I kneel down and read or reflect on some verses of the *Imitation of Christ*."

Thus, united in heart and mind with the Blessed Sacrament, Don Bosco lived a life of incessant prayer.

CHAPTER 40

A Solemn Celebration

AT the Oratory [in the month of June] a number of festivities occurred in rapid succession. The feast of St. John the Baptist [1] with its traditional bonfire in Piazza Castello (a custom observed that year for the last time) was soon followed by the feast of St. Aloysius whose external solemnity was held on June 29. Don Bosco had dedicated an altar to this saint in his newly blessed church. "In preparation for St. Aloysius' feast day," Father Ascanio Savio wrote, "Don Bosco constantly spoke to the boys of this saint's purity, holding him up to them as a model. From his words we could sense that the purity of his own soul matched that of St. Aloysius. I recall that often he himself would intone the hymn to this saint to express his deep devotion."

Joseph Brosio recorded an excellent detailed description of these festivities:

This year [1852] the celebration topped all others. The church was decorated inside and out, while numerous lighted candles on the main altar and the two side altars cast a celestial glow. More than three hundred boys received Communion at the Mass which was celebrated by a bishop whose name I do not now recall; this was a very large number, considering that there had already been two general Communions during the previous weeks. Over eight hundred boys were treated to a good breakfast. We also held a solemn procession in which many guests took part. During the services, I occasionally received an assignment to take up the collection, and about eighty lire was given into my basket.

[1] The titular of the Turin cathedral. At Baptism Don Bosco had received the name of the Apostle John, but the Oratory boys, believing his patron to be John the Baptist, began to observe his name day on this occasion. *See* Vol. II, p. 381. [Editor]

To keep order among the crowds my splendid army [2] with its wooden rifles and lone bugle had the support of a contingent of the National Guard in dress uniform, with drums. Their commanding officer was Mr. Dasso, a good friend of ours and a dealer in notions. None of the present, past [3] or future schools or oratories ever had or will have more fun than we did on that afternoon—simple fun, to be sure, but spiced with such joy and cordiality as to make us of one heart and one soul. We had sack races, juggling acts, military drills, and calisthenics. The fountains in the playground spurted multicolored jets, and balloons floated gaily above the crowd.

Under a tent there was a refreshment counter well supplied with caramels, assorted candies, fruit, soft drinks, beer, etc.

There were also vendors who had small carts, piled high with tempting things to eat, conveniently located throughout the playground. Count [Charles Albert] Cays, Baron Bianco of Barbania, Chevalier Mark Gonella, Chevalier [Joseph] Duprè, Count Agliano, Marquis Gustavo Cavour, Count [Francis] Viancino, Father [Hyacinth] Carpano, Father Chiaves, Father Robert Murialdo, Father [John] Borel, Father [John] Vola, Father [Francis] Marengo, Father [John] Giacomelli, Father [Peter] Merla and Father [Joseph] Trivero, chaplain of SS. Maurice and Lazarus Basilica, and also an [unnamed] army general—all vied with one another for the privilege of treating the boys. With money supplied by Don Bosco and some gentlemen, I distributed about ten lire's worth of candy. All these treats were over and above what had already been given to all the boys. Don Bosco did not taste a single piece of candy. I offered him one to relieve his throat which was parched by the sweltering heat, but he broke it in two and gave half to a boy. He always thought of us, and seldom of himself.

A triumphal arch, made of branches, had been erected in the middle of the meadow near the shed which had been leased to Mr. Visca.[4] When night came it was bathed in light. The festivities ended with a brilliant display of fireworks and lusty shouts of "Long live Don Bosco!" Amazingly, there was not the least squabble among the more than one thousand boys gathered there, three hundred of whom, at least, were twenty years old or more. The greatest concord reigned among them.

[2] Joseph Brosio had served in the Bersaglieri Corps of the Piedmontese army. To attract boys to the Oratory at a time when Piedmont was greatly stirred by the concept of wars of liberation, Brosio had organized a mock army among the boys. *See* Vol. III, pp. 309ff. [Editor]

[3] Obviously Brosio wrote this description many years after the events here described. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. II, p. 418. [Editor]

Nevertheless, just as something usually occurs in all human events to cast a pall over the happiest moments, so it was on this occasion. The celebrations began on a comic note, but ended on a sorrowful one.

That morning (as Don Bosco had arranged) hot chocolate, coffee, milk, and pastries for some twenty people were delivered by a café in Piazza della Consolata, with the compliments of Chevalier Joseph Cotta, "prior" of the feast. The delivery boy left the order in the place appointed and went to Mass. After Mass, those invited for breakfast found the pots almost empty and only a few pastries left. There was some commotion as some laughed and others worried about the choirboys being deprived of their breakfast. There was nothing else to do but send for more, which Don Bosco did as soon as he came in from church and realized the situation. The owner of the café was annoyed, but he refilled the order. Meanwhile, someone rushed in to tell Don Bosco that a day pupil, a boy named Vilietti, had been seen lying in a nearby field, obviously very sick. Don Bosco hastened to the spot and found him in a ditch.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I feel terrible; I want to go to confession!"

"What's the trouble? An upset stomach?"

"No, not that."

"Tell me the truth. It is something you ate?"

"I only ate a little of the food in the sacristy."

It was a masterpiece of understatement. In his anxiety not to be caught red-handed, he had wolfed down enough food to satisfy ten persons!

Don Bosco smiled and helped him to his feet. The boy then started to go home, but before he reached his destination he became very sick to his stomach. To make matters worse, all around him there were open fields with very few trees to hide behind, and people kept coming into that area from all directions, while hundreds of Oratory boys were watching him from afar and having a good laugh at the consequences of his gluttony. Eventually he was helped home and was sick for several days. Afterward he rarely came to the Oratory because everyone used to tease him about the incident. Prior to his disgrace he had been a catechist, sacristan,

choirboy, and handyman, enjoying the confidence of his superiors. His downfall was all the greater since previously he had basked in the admiration and envy of his companions. They now nicknamed him "Hot Chocolate" and taunted him whenever he was around.

The other incident occurred in the evening. John Chiesa, another boy, was milling through the crowd selling Roman candles from a basket hanging from a strap about his neck. When ignited and hurled into the air, these fireworks added color and sound to the festivity. Unfortunately, some sparks from one of them, which a boy standing nearby was holding carelessly in his hand, fell into the basket. The resulting flames spread quickly to Chiesa's clothes. With all his clothes afire, he flung the basket away, ran to a nearby canal, and dove in. Later he was taken to the hospital with such severe burns that the doctors feared he might die that same night. He was in such critical condition that a convalescent patient had to vacate his bed to make room for Chiesa.

Don Bosco went to see him at once and gave him his blessing. The boy eventually recovered. When the scabs peeled off along with the skin from his face, they looked like a mask. Fortunately, his eyes had not suffered the slightest damage.

These festivities had not interfered with the routine work of the lottery. Thousands of circulars announcing that the drawing would take place on June 20 were soon followed by others containing the news that it had been postponed until July 12.

The bishops were continuing to give the lottery their support, as is evidenced by the following [extracts from their] letters:

Nizza, June 22, 1852

I sincerely endorse your praiseworthy and edifying zeal in building a church most fittingly dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, the most powerful protector of our country, and the liberator of a large part of Savoy from the scourge of heresy which at this very moment seems about to infest our native Piedmont. May your piety receive proper acknowledgment. I am sure you will encounter many obstacles before completing this noble undertaking, but Our Lord, who never fails those who put their entire confidence in Him, will not deny you His support and consolation.

Meanwhile, I welcome the two hundred tickets which you sent me, and I shall endeavor to dispose of them among my flock. A messenger of mine will soon remit what is due. Keep up the good work you have

begun so well. The Lord will bless it in a special manner since it is so timely. Please accept my most cordial congratulations.

✠ Dominic [Galvano], *Bishop*

Aosta, June 28, 1852 [5]

I received your letter with the hundred lottery tickets. I shall try my best to distribute them. At any rate, I am setting aside fifty lire for them now. I am glad that your church is finished and that Mass is already being celebrated in it. This must be a source of great satisfaction to you and all right-minded people. Providence has blessed your work and rewarded your efforts.

I am sincerely grateful to you for what you have already done, for what you are doing, and for what you will do in the future on behalf of my poor flock.

✠ Andrew [Jourdain], *Bishop*

Gozzano, July 9, 1852

A few days ago I asked for a report from the person I had entrusted with the selling of your lottery tickets. I found out that only about a dozen had been sold, the alleged reason being that other tickets had already been mailed to prospective buyers.

Since the date of the drawing is approaching, I thought I would not delay this report any longer. Inasmuch as many boys from this diocese, as you yourself mentioned, will frequent the church you so zealously erected, I shall purchase another hundred tickets in addition to the hundred I have already taken.

I shall mail you a money order tomorrow.

✠ Philip [Gentile], *Bishop of Novara*

Ventimiglia, July 10, 1852

Together with your kind letter of June 9 last, I received the two hundred tickets you sent me for distribution in my diocese. I commend the excellent work you have undertaken in these difficult times, and I am happy to inform you that I have been able to dispose of all of the above-mentioned tickets. As soon as I receive the returns, I shall forward one lump sum to you or entrust it to whomever you designate.

If any prizes are won by those who purchased tickets through me,

[5] This letter has been translated from the Italian version of the original French. [Editor]

please ship them in one single package with proper identification so that I may give them to the winners immediately.

✠ Lawrence [Biale], *Bishop*

The bishops did not limit their assistance to letters and offerings; they also honored Don Bosco's humble dwelling with their presence. Charles Tomatis remembers the day when Bishop [Louis] Fantini of Fossano paid a visit there. Don Bosco welcomed him joyously; to honor him he had Charles Gastini, who had a beautiful voice, sing a few stanzas of a song which Don Bosco had composed in honor of the prelate.

Bishop [John] Losana of Biella visited the Oratory a few Sundays after the solemn blessing of the church. He delivered a stirring sermon, motivated also by the fact that hundreds of those boys in the congregation were young bricklayer apprentices from his own Biella. He expressed his thanks to Divine Providence and to Don Bosco, exhorting his young flock to frequent the Oratory which he hailed as their shield and protector against dangers to their Faith and morals. He concluded his sermon with these words: "It is not only here that Don Bosco has been called to build a church. He must build another at Porta Nuova near Corso del Re, near the temple of the followers of Luther, Calvin, and Peter Waldo.[6] This is necessary; God wills it and Don Bosco will do it." In this statement he proved himself a prophet.[7]

Meanwhile all the lottery tickets had been shipped out. People even offered as much as five lire for a single ticket [instead of the original price of half a lire] but were unable to obtain any since the unsold ones had not yet been returned. At last the public drawing took place at the City Hall. It suffices to read the minutes of that occasion to get an idea of the detailed organization that was required.[8] What with thank-you letters, lists of winners and prizes, the mailing of prizes, and personal replies to requests for informa-

[6] Peter Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons, in 1176 shocked by the sudden death of a friend, abandoned the world and dedicated himself to preaching evangelical poverty. His doctrinal errors resulted in excommunication from the Catholic Church for him and his followers. [Editor]

[7] Don Bosco purchased land for this church on November 29, 1869. The laying of the cornerstone took place on August 12, 1878. The church, dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, was solemnly consecrated on October 28, 1882. [Editor]

[8] *See* Appendix 12. [Editor]

tion, explanations or complaints, the lottery necessitated a great deal of toil and care on Don Bosco's part.

Many winners generously donated their prizes to the new church. Expenditures had been considerable and many tickets had been lost; the returns amounted to seventy-four thousand tickets [9] or thirty-seven thousand lire—a tidy sum. Don Bosco kept his promise [10] and generously shared the proceeds with the Cottolengo Hospital in the person of Canon Louis Anglesio.

A few days later, Don Bosco informed Archbishop Louis Fransoni [in exile at Lyons] of the solemn blessing of St. Francis de Sales Church. The archbishop's reply shows how pleased he was and also reveals his appreciation and paternal affection for the Oratory.

Lyons, July 29, 1852

My dear Don Bosco:

I can well imagine that your new church has only the bare essentials, but it is beyond me how it could have been constructed and put into service in only eleven months. This is quite an achievement. All praise to God for having inspired you to build it and for granting you the grace to complete it on behalf of so many boys who eagerly flock to its doors.

I am sorry that you were unable to get returns on all one hundred thousand tickets. After deducting expenses from the proceeds of the seventy-four thousand that were sold, you will still be far from your goal of thirty-two thousand lire for your building fund, especially since you have generously given half the proceeds to the Cottolengo Hospital. Both your Oratory and this institution, so near to each other, are a visible demonstration of God's Providence.

I don't know yet whether any of my hundred tickets has won a prize. In the prize list you sent me I noticed several choice items, but my poor luck is usually limited to some fire screen or napkin ring. I wish it were otherwise so that I could donate it to your church.

May all your oratories continue to prosper.

With all trust in our merciful Lord, I remain, with the most cordial affection,

Your devoted and affectionate servant,

✠ Louis [Fransoni], *Archbishop of Turin*

[9] Out of a total of 100,000 at fifty centesimi each. *See* MB 363. [Editor]
[10] *See* p. 278. [Editor]

This welcome letter reached Don Bosco when he returned from his spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine [11] with Father Cafasso. The customary four retreats had been cut down to two in 1852, one for priests and one for laymen, since the Society of St. Paul no longer subsidized them—a victory for the enemies of good.

For several centuries the Society of St. Paul had done splendid work in preserving unity and purity of Faith among the people and in helping the needy. Anticlericals, eager to have a hand in the administration of its funds (then exceeding more than six million lire), insidiously began a smear campaign against its board of directors, all men of great integrity who were devoted to the Church. On the basis of a law of 1848, the mayor of Turin and his council took over the administration of this charitable institute. Furthermore, a royal decree ruled that the new board of directors was to consist of twenty-five appointees of City Hall and fifteen other members elected within the Society of St. Paul, a flagrant violation of the will of the founders. The members of the Society protested, objecting to the demands of City Hall and the royal decree; they argued that they should at least be permitted to have equal representation on the board of directors, but to no avail. Their request was turned down. On January 17, 1852, the president of the Society of St. Paul had to hand over all the official records of the Society to a government official.

[11] *See* Vol. II, p. 96 and *passim*. [Editor]

CHAPTER 41

Plans for a New Building

IMMEDIATELY after his return from Lanzo Don Bosco proceeded to put a new plan into effect. While the new church of St. Francis de Sales was large enough for all the boys who came on Sundays and holy days from every section of the city, and while the former chapel was quite suitable for the day and evening classes frequented by several hundred boys of various ages and levels of instruction, the boarding facilities were very inadequate. Every day some needy boy knocked at Don Bosco's door in search of a home, but the few small rooms were already filled to overflowing, especially because some of them had been extensively damaged in the gunpowder factory explosion. After pondering the matter at length, Don Bosco remarked one day: "We have provided a house for the Lord; it's time that we prepared one for His children. Let's get started."

Plans were drawn up for a three-story building and basement to rise on the site of the present Pinardi house and to extend as far as the Filippi house. The plans also called for two rows of rooms facing each other and separated by a narrow corridor on each floor. At the point where the new building met the Filippi house, a wing parallel to the church of St. Francis de Sales, and extending as far as the church did, was to have three rooms in a single row on each floor. This involved cutting off a small area of the playground on the east side. By rural standards this construction could have been considered a large undertaking. In addition, plans called for attics, pillar-supported porticoes on the ground floor, and an adequate carriageway for access to the strip of land behind the house. To the right of this carriageway was the only interior staircase, going up to the upper floors and balconies, and down to the basement where

the kitchen, pantries, and dining rooms were to be located. Another staircase in the belfry of the church gave access to the corridors, the attic, and two rooms above the sacristy and Our Lady's side altar. Balconies with iron railings were to run along the entire length of the two upper stories, at the front and back of the house, thus providing an additional entrance into the rooms, each of which had a window. The main body of the house was about 131 feet long and 38 feet wide; the east wing was roughly 41 feet long, 20 wide, and 53 high.

Far from being luxurious, the building lacked even essential comforts. The clerics and even the boys—John Cagliero in particular—pointed out to Don Bosco that the corridors were too narrow and dark, that the staircases and doors were not wide enough for a boys' school, and that the dormitories located in the attics would be quite uncomfortable because of their low ceilings. Don Bosco's routine reply to these objections was: "Let's be satisfied with a little. Let's forget about appearances and conveniences and we shall earn the favor and help of Divine Providence." He also told them that precisely because the new building was unattractive and uncomfortable it would be safe from requisition by the civil and military authorities, should they need it some day, and thus the boys would not be driven away from it.

Subsequent events, a few years later, proved him to be right. In 1859, after the battle of Solferino,[1] the Turin municipal authorities asked Don Bosco, as a patriotic gesture, to turn his new building over to them as an emergency hospital. Don Bosco agreed, but when the inspectors found that the staircases, corridors, and doors were too narrow, they thanked him but declined his offer.

A problem had to be solved: the existing Pinardi house could not be demolished to make way for the new construction because there were no other sleeping quarters. Don Bosco therefore decided to build the eastern section of the new building first, starting from the interior staircase. He began work that summer, shortly after the blessing of the new church. Once started, work progressed at a rapid pace. Upon seeing the size and speed of the construction,

[1] At Solferino, on the hills to the south of Lake Garda, the French and Piedmontese forces won a signal victory over the Austrians on June 24, 1859. There were heavy casualties on both sides. [Editor]

people unfamiliar with the ways and means of Divine Providence would ask: "But where will Don Bosco find the money to keep pace with the construction?" This same question would be repeated time and again in the future at every new undertaking of Don Bosco, but invariably he would reply: "Divine Providence will send it to me. The Lord knows our needs and He will help us."

At the beginning of September when the work was well advanced, Don Bosco took more than fifty Oratory boys to the Giaveno seminary for a spiritual retreat. Some of them were boarders and the rest day boys. They went by coach up to Rivoli and walked the rest of the way,[2] passing through Avigliana. We will not go into details, but will merely recall [John] Cagliero's and [John] Turchi's statements that all the boys were greatly impressed by the sermons of Canon [Innocent] Arduino and Don Bosco, and that among the apprentices frequenting the Oratory there were some who were truly exemplary. One of them was Joseph Morello. He came to the Oratory on Sundays and holy days, remaining to watch the games but rarely joining in them. When everyone was busy playing, Morello would quietly steal into the church where, undisturbed, he would pray for the souls in purgatory, adore the Blessed Sacrament, recite five decades of the rosary, and make the Stations of the Cross. Despite his precautions to avoid attracting attention, several equally religious-minded companions took notice of him and followed his example, thus starting the entirely optional Oratory custom of reciting five decades of the rosary after Benediction.

Don Bosco once had this to say about Morello:

One evening at dusk I was on my way home along the boulevard [3] that leads from the Po to Porta Palazzo. At a certain point I overtook a boy who was carrying a long, heavy wooden shaft with several iron spikes driven into it. He seemed to be groaning under its weight and muttering something.

"Poor boy," I said to myself. "He must be tired out!"

As I drew near, I noticed that he would bow his head from time to time as we do when reciting the *Glory be* or some other prayer. Then it dawned on me that he was praying. It was Morello.

"Joseph," I said to him, "you look very tired!"

[2] About twelve miles. [Editor]

[3] The present Corso Regina Margherita. [Editor]

"Not really; I've been on an errand for my boss. I had to pick up a cylinder at the repair shop."

"You seemed to be muttering. Are you mad at someone?"

"Oh, no! This morning I couldn't go to Mass, and I didn't say my rosary. I had a chance now and so I began saying it. Besides, today is Tuesday, a special day for me! An aunt of mine who was very fond of me and helped me a lot died on a Tuesday. Since I can't do anything else for her in return, every Tuesday I recite five decades of the rosary for the happy repose of her soul.

Let us now resume our narrative. Two things occurred at this spiritual retreat that made it memorable. The first had to do with Morello. Again we quote Don Bosco:

At the beginning of every sermon Morello would stand in a corner of the church as though waiting to see what the preacher would talk about. I noticed that at times he would move up closer to the preacher, while at other times he would leave the church hurriedly. Since this happened repeatedly, I wanted to know why.

"Joseph," I asked him one day, "what's all this moving about in church? Why don't you sit with the others instead of standing in the back?"

"I do that so I won't cause any disturbance," he answered.

"What disturbance?" I asked.

"Well," he continued, "if the preacher talks about mortal sin, I just can't stand it. It hurts me so much I have to leave the church or I'll start crying."

His reply made me understand why even at the Oratory he would sometimes leave the church suddenly and occasionally utter a cry or make strange gestures. From then on, whenever I saw him in the congregation during a sermon, I took care to speak moderately; it was enough for me to pronounce the words "mortal sin" with just a little stress to make him jump up from his pew and run out. That is why he usually stood near the door during sermons.

He had such a warm, affectionate heart that he was greatly affected when anyone discussed spiritual matters. He was deeply moved at the mere mention of heaven, of God's love, or of His goodness. Once when he and the other boys were around me, I said to him: "Joseph, what a grand time we'll have together one day in heaven, provided that you remain good! We shall be with God always, enjoying and loving Him

for all eternity!" I had spoken almost casually but it made such a vivid impression on him that he suddenly grew pale and would have certainly fallen to the ground in a dead faint if his companions had not supported him.

The second remarkable event was Don Bosco's sermon on chastity. Bishop Cagliero reported it as follows:

During the spiritual retreat at the Giaveno seminary in the summer of 1852, Don Bosco spoke on chastity with such ardor and holy rapture that we all were moved to tears and we resolved to preserve this beautiful virtue until death. Placing myself under his spiritual direction, I found him to be not only a guide but a father most solicitous for our spiritual welfare and most eager to instill a great and pure love of chastity in our hearts.

He was so delicate in this matter that although he spoke to us frequently he shied away from talking about impurity. As a matter of fact, in the course of several years I never heard him speak on that subject, leaving it to Father [John] Borel, Canon Borsarelli, or the other priests who helped him. He preferred to dwell on the virtue of chastity, calling it the loveliest flower of paradise, one that we should cultivate in our young hearts, a pure lily whose immaculate candor would make us akin to the angels. His beautiful imagery inflamed us with love for this precious virtue. When he spoke of it his countenance radiated holy joy, his silvery voice sounded warm and convincing, and his eyes glistened with tears for fear that we might dim its luster even if only by unseemly thoughts or words.

We boys loved him as a father and our dealings with him were always marked by filial trust and familiarity; nevertheless, our respect and veneration for him was so great that we observed an almost religious demeanor in his presence; we were fully conscious of the saintliness of his life.

On the return trip from Giaveno, Don Bosco took the boys to visit the shrine at Trana, a custom he followed in succeeding years. When he was back in Turin, he learned that one of his students, Bartholomew Bellisio, who was taking courses at the Fine Arts school, had been called up for military service despite Don Bosco's attempts to have him exempted for family reasons. It was Don Bosco's habit to go to the assistance of his boys whenever possible,

and so he now wrote to Bellisio, who was spending his summer vacation at Cherasco, in reply to one of his letters:

My dear Bellisio:

I received your welcome letter. Although I admire and commend your resolution to resign yourself to God's Will calling you to military service, I still thought it advisable to recommend your case once more to Father Lunel, your good benefactor, urging him to make another attempt.

You should also ask him to do so again. Meanwhile, keep praying to the Blessed Virgin that in all things God's Will be done.

May the Lord be with you always. I remain,

Your friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Your many friends wish to be remembered to you.

Bellisio reported to the barracks in the Turin Citadel. When night came, after the bugle blew taps, he heard a subdued murmur near him. The soldier in the next bunk—a practicing Catholic, as Bellisio soon discovered—was saying his prayers. Within a short time Bellisio discovered a few others; together they formed a living rosary, each choosing a day for himself during the month to recite it. His turn fell on the 23rd of the month. Two soldiers of his group secured a waterproof snuffbox and filled it with holy water from the neighboring church for use when secretly [4] making the Sign of the Cross. Thanks to Don Bosco's intervention, Bellisio was honorably discharged after eight months. Of him Don Bosco used to say: "I defy any of you boys to find one single fault in Bellisio!"

We are indebted to Bellisio for the painting portraying Don Bosco in the act of hearing confessions. He used a photograph as his model. In 1855 he also painted a portrait of Mamma Margaret and gave it to Don Bosco on his name day. Without it, future generations would not know what our dear Mamma Margaret looked like.

We have mentioned Bellisio because he is one of the older pupils who supplied a mine of information to Father [John] Bonetti for

[4] In those days, when anticlericalism was the official government policy, the outward display of one's religious beliefs would have occasioned endless scorn and harassment. [Editor]

his history of the first twenty-five years of the Oratory, and also because the letter we have reproduced above is one of the first written by Don Bosco to one of his boys. Bellisio sent it to us together with this letter:

Cherasco, March 4, 1891

Reverend and dear Father,

In the *Bollettino Salesiano* you requested that anyone possessing any letter or other writing by Don Bosco should send it to you for possible use in the proceedings for the cause of beatification of our beloved and revered Don Bosco.

Since I have one, I hasten to send it to you. It has no date because, if I remember rightly, it perhaps was enclosed with another letter addressed to my great benefactor, Father Lunel [count of Cortemiglia], who in April, 1850, placed me in the Oratory. Checking the time when I was drafted for military service, I must conclude that this letter was written in the summer of 1852. It has grown yellow with age, although I have guarded it jealously as one of my most valued possessions.

I have already given a written report on Don Bosco's relationship with me and with others during the more than six years I spent with him. That was in answer to a circular sent to all the alumni requesting them to report whatever they had seen, heard, and experienced in their contacts with Don Bosco. My report should be on file in the Oratory archives. Since the circular stated that all manuscripts by Don Bosco would be returned, I would appreciate having my letter back again. I shall treasure it even more now in view of his expected beatification. I am very proud to have enjoyed his benevolence and help. What I do regret very much is my inability to contribute to the maintenance and growth of his enterprises. Straitened circumstances, caused by sickness and other difficulties, limit my response to your appeals to offering prayers to God that he will grant us more propitious times.

My most cordial respects to you and to the superior general, Father Michael Rua.

Your most humble subject in Don Bosco,

Bartholomew Bellisio

CHAPTER 42

Vacations at Becchi

ON September 22 [1852], Michael Rua entered the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales as a resident student after consulting Father Cafasso, as Don Bosco had suggested. The great affection Rua had felt for Don Bosco the very first time he had met him [1] kept increasing as, with the passing of time, he was better able to appreciate Don Bosco's saintliness and achievements. The day after his arrival at the Oratory Rua, went to Becchi with Don Bosco, Mamma Margaret, and twenty-six other boys. Here he had an opportunity to see the great esteem Margaret enjoyed in her own tiny hamlet and in Castelnuovo as well. This esteem was also enjoyed by her family and relatives, not only because of their own personal worth but also because their social condition had not been affected by Don Bosco's success and therefore could not arouse envy.

Don Bosco's relatives were extremely poor. Although he was intensely devoted to them, he never gave them financial assistance because he judged, quite rightly, that the donations he received were exclusively for his boys. He considered himself to be an administrator of the goods of Providence, and therefore accountable to God. He cherished the poverty of his relatives, delighted in speaking about it, and openly expressed his belief that if they lived detached from worldly goods they would more surely gain the kingdom of heaven as Our Lord promised.

On the other hand, his brother Joseph never asked Don Bosco for anything, even when he was in straitened circumstances. He had done much to help Don Bosco pursue his studies for the priest-

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 247f. [Editor]

hood and had even relinquished his own share of their estate to provide him with the required ecclesiastical patrimony prior to receiving major orders.[2] For this reason among many others Don Bosco was very close to his older brother and shared with him both sorrows and joys. Truly they were one in heart and soul.

Since he lived on his farm at Becchi, Joseph obviously could not see Mamma Margaret too often, but he never failed to visit her several times a year when he came to Turin. On those occasions he stayed at the Oratory as long as he could in order to enjoy the company of Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret, and they were equally delighted to see him. Margaret had every reason to also be proud of this son. Joseph was a genuine Christian, a devoted spouse and father, and a good-hearted and generous man. Although he had a family of his own, he nevertheless looked upon the Oratory boys as his sons, and every year he provided them with produce from his own farm. Moreover, at harvest time he would solicit similar contributions from relatives and friends. He was so successful in pleading for Don Bosco's boys that every fall he was able to send them several cartloads of walnuts, wheat, potatoes, and grapes.

One day he came to Turin to buy two calves at the Moncalieri market, but he stopped first at the Oratory to see his brother. When he saw that the boys were in dire need of life's essentials and heard that pressing debts had to be paid that same day, he said to Don Bosco: "Look! I was planning to spend three hundred lire at the market, but I see that you need this money more than I do. Take it."

Deeply moved, Don Bosco remarked: "But what about yourself?"

"I'll buy the calves some other time."

"Maybe it would be better if you just lend me the money. I'll pay it back as soon as possible."

"That's a laugh! You'll never be able to do that; you're always in debt. No, no, forget about it! I'm giving it to you and that's that. I'll manage somehow. Don't worry!"

The Oratory boys were so fond of Joseph that whenever he showed up they all ran to him with the joy and affection of children welcoming their own father. They respectfully called him "Signor

[2] *See* Vol. I, p. 366. [Editor]

Giuseppe." He looked very much like Don Bosco and was about the same height. Don Bosco always treated him with unfailing deference, particularly when distinguished visitors were present. Now and then he would invite him to say a few words to the boys from the rostrum where he generally gave the "Good Night" after night prayers. We assume that Joseph, a simple farmer, may have been a little reluctant at first to do so, but nevertheless he would oblige by giving the boys some sound advice in the Piedmontese dialect. Father John Garino was present on one occasion in 1858 when Joseph addressed the boys.

Joseph's house at Becchi was always open to Don Bosco and his boys, and every year, in groups of thirty, fifty, or even a hundred, they spent a short vacation there. Joseph looked forward to their annual visit and did all he could to make their stay pleasant. Those who were visiting for the first time were so charmed by his kindness and affability that they immediately made friends with him. He never accepted any reimbursement for his hospitality, although he did benefit by some alterations made to the building. For example, a spacious dormitory had to be constructed on the top floor to accommodate the boys who came there from the Oratory for the feast of the Holy Rosary. This addition, of course, made the house relatively large, even though it still remained unpretentious. However, Don Bosco made no alterations or improvements on the existing rooms. After the house was enlarged, the number of vacationing boys increased, and Joseph was always equal to the task, even to the extent of keeping an eye on them. Since they stayed from fifteen to twenty days, he watched over them so that the inevitable scatterbrains among them would not trespass on the neighboring fields and thus cause justified complaints. The boys, with rare exceptions, obeyed him.

One Sunday morning he came across a boy in the playground and reprimanded him for having sneaked into the vineyards. The boy tried to deny it, but Joseph cut him short with the comment: "Can't you see that the prickles still clinging to your trousers give you away?"

With Joseph around to watch the boys Don Bosco felt tranquil and could find the time to prepare his novena sermons for the feast of the Holy Rosary. However, while caring for the boys who were

with him, he did not forget those who were in Turin with Father Borel, as the following letter to the cleric Joseph Buzzetti [3] shows:

Castelnuovo d'Asti, September 29, 1852

My dear Buzzetti,

Please take care of a few things for me before leaving Turin.

1. Ask John Ferrero if he would like to come along with you. Pay his train fare, and Pettiva's, too.[4]
2. Bring a bottle of Mass wine with you.
3. Also, bring six pairs of spats, one pair of pants, a jacket, and three pairs of socks. If the bundle is too heavy, you can give it to our friend, Minin, or to the driver of the coach.
4. Give Mr. [Joseph] Gagliardi [5] my regards and tell him that I am counting on him to help out at the Oratory, especially on Sundays. Tell Joseph Marchisio that I am depending on him to supervise the boys in the playground and in church. Ask Arnaud to lend a hand in the singing. Tell Fumero [6] I did what he asked me to do.
5. Give Father Borel my best wishes and tell him that if he will take the time to pay us a visit, we will be delighted, and he will also have an opportunity thereby to exercise his priestly ministry.

Everyone here is fine, but we have been cooped up indoors because of the rain. The church is always crowded. *Deo gratias*. Remember me to all the boys.

Believe me to be

Yours in the Lord,

Don Bosco

On Sunday, October 3 [1852], the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, two boys donned the clerical habit to the great joy of Don Bosco and of all their companions. Father [Anthony] Cinzano, the pastor, celebrated the solemn high Mass in the Becchi chapel and performed the investiture ceremony. He blessed the two cassocks, and then he and Father John Bertagna assisted Joseph Rocchietti

[3] He had been among the first Latin students of Don Bosco. He donned the clerical habit on February 2, 1852 (*see* p. 161), but due to the loss of his left index finger a month later, he became unqualified for priestly ordination and eventually had to drop his studies for the priesthood. As a coadjutor brother he was a godsend to Don Bosco. [Editor]

[4] Two Oratory boys. [Editor]

[5] A dealer in novelties who afforded great help to Don Bosco. [Editor]

[6] Three older boys who acted as subassistants at the Oratory on Sundays. [Editor]

and Michael Rua respectively in donning them. At the dinner table, Father Cinzano turned to Don Bosco and exclaimed: "Do you remember what you said to me when you yourself were still a cleric? You said: 'One day I'll have clerics, priests, students and artisans, choirboys, and a beautiful church!' I used to tell you that you were crazy! Now I see that you really knew what you were talking about!"

He then invited the entire group to have dinner with him at Castelnuovo.[7] John Cagliero acted as the unofficial host. Mr. John Germano, a notary, wrote to us in 1887:

I still recall the first time I met Bishop Cagliero. He was just a boy. Don Bosco came with twenty-six youngsters to Castelnuovo to have dinner with the pastor. An enormous polenta (for which I was mostly responsible) fed everyone. Afterward, young Cagliero generously took us down to visit the pastor's wine cellar and treated us to samples of various wines, including Mass wine, just as if he owned the place.[8] I shall never forget Cagliero's youthful exuberance.

After a wonderful day with Father Cinzano, Don Bosco made preparations to return to the Oratory with the boys and the two new clerics in whom he had placed great hopes. Rua fully met his expectations. He dedicated himself to the mission the Lord had entrusted to Don Bosco. He will always be remembered as a holy man, unassuming but intellectually gifted, indefatigable, and able to master the skills necessary for his office. Don Bosco's dreams [9] were beginning to come true. At last he could say: "This cleric is mine." Several times he paid Rua this glowing tribute: "If God had said to me: 'Choose a boy endowed with all the virtues and talents you would like him to have, and I will give him to you,' I would never have imagined anyone as gifted as Father Rua."

Joseph Rocchietti also was a very intelligent youth of impeccable character; he likewise yearned to dedicate himself entirely to the Oratory, but his poor health failed him.

When Don Bosco returned to Turin from Castelnuovo he found the following letter from the Royal Secretariat of the Grand Master of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus:

[7] This became an annual custom. *See* Vol. III, p. 315. [Editor]
[8] *See* p. 198. [Editor]
[9] *See* Vol. II, pp. 190f, 232ff; Vol. III, pp. 25ff. [Editor]

Turin, October 11, 1852

His Majesty has taken notice of the charitable and noble purpose of your oratories on behalf of the poor and abandoned youth of this capital, of your untiring zeal, and of the moral benefits accruing to the boys who frequent them. His Majesty is therefore pleased to take your petition into consideration and assist your excellent institute by granting it a subsidy of three hundred lire for the current year. This sum shall be paid to you by the Treasury of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus.

I take this opportunity to convey to you also my great personal esteem.

[Louis] Cibrario, *Senator of the Realm*
First Secretary to His Majesty
on behalf of the Order

Don Bosco thanked Count Cibrario who at that time was also preparing to honor Don Bosco by having the king confer on him the Cross of the Knights of SS. Maurice and Lazarus in recognition of his merits. Though always tactfully observing protocol in his relations with his benefactors and other eminent persons and taking care to address them by their proper titles, Don Bosco himself had no desire for worldly honors. For that reason, when a gentleman called on Don Bosco one morning while he was with Francesia and Cagliero and presented him with a packet containing the cross of the order and a scroll signed by the king, Don Bosco did not open it in their presence. From the seals and the feel of it he had surmised its contents. Later he called on Count Cibrario at the order's headquarters to thank him for the honor he had received, but then he gently and tactfully tried to make him understand that he had no desire for such recognition. "If this is being done out of regard for my humble person," he said, "I do not know what merits single me out for this honor, and although I am grateful, I cannot accept it. If, instead, the government means to express its appreciation, approval, and support of my oratories for the poor abandoned boys of Turin, I accept it gratefully, but with the request that the title of chevalier be withdrawn and a subsidy for my boys substituted in its place."

When Count Cibrario insisted that he accept, Don Bosco, hinting at his many debts, replied jokingly: "My dear count, if I had the cross and the title of chevalier, people would think that Don

Bosco no longer needs help; besides, I already have enough crosses —too many, in fact. I'd sooner you gave me some money to feed my orphans."

The count was finally persuaded. The *Gazzetta Ufficiale* did not report the honor, and Don Bosco's point of view was well received at court. The Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus then granted him an annual subsidy of five hundred lire. It was paid to him regularly until 1885; in 1886 it was reduced to three hundred lire, and in 1887 still further to only one hundred and fifty lire because of lack of funds caused by diminished revenue on real estate holdings of the order. This subsidy lasted until 1894, six years after Don Bosco's death. Don Bosco never wore the decoration he had received, nor did he ever make the slightest allusion to it.

His charming humility so endeared him to Count Cibrario that their cordial friendship continued for the next twenty-five years. [Back in 1848] Don Bosco, in Father Borel's company, had called on Gioberti [in Turin] and registered his objections to some of Gioberti's statements in his book *Il Gesuita Moderno*.[10] On that occasion Gioberti had replied in self-defense: "What do you know about politics and its intrigues, or about the true causes underlying so many events, confined as you are to your little corner down there in Valdocco?" Count Cibrario, on the contrary, was of the opinion that in Valdocco he could learn something. Bishop Cagliero declared that the count would often call on Don Bosco and converse for hours as he puffed on his huge pipe. The count helped Don Bosco immensely. As first secretary of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus, he had control over the bestowal of decorations, and he gladly secured the king's approval to confer them on those whom Don Bosco recommended as deserving of this honor for their many charitable contributions. This turned out to be a wonderful device for loosening the purse strings of wealthy people who were willing to pay any price to gratify their vanity while helping a good cause. Don Bosco was also blessed with the faculty of selecting the most propitious moment to offer a chevalier's cross to a creditor, if he was willing to reduce or cancel what Don Bosco owed him. Sometimes a generous benefactor would receive a decoration out of the

[10] *See* Vol. III, pp. 301f. *See* also pp. 163 and 219. [Editor]

blue to his great surprise and delight. On these occasions Don Bosco would usually invite the benefactor to dinner. When the dessert was being served, Don Bosco would address a few warm words to him as he was breaking the pleasant news, and then he would pin on him the chevalier's cross amid the music of the band and the applause of the other guests. The many decorations Don Bosco secured through Count Cibrario either earned large donations to the Oratory or rewarded valuable services already rendered to it. Around 1875 we heard from Count Cibrario himself how happy he was at having been able to help Don Bosco by this means. He also added that when foreign visitors, who yearned for some decoration, applied to him, he would gratify their wish upon payment of a substantial sum, which he then handed over to Don Bosco. God was indeed assisting Don Bosco with powerful friends in the government.

Don Bosco, however, was quite discreet; he never pestered his influential friends, and above all he never forgot his own station and their sensibilities. Bishop Cagliero stated:

> I remember that when I was still a young boy at the Oratory, I was surprised at the respectful, reverent, and humble manner in which Don Bosco, a priest, called on certain laymen or received them. My surprise ceased when I found out that these were persons in authority—cabinet ministers, prefects, magistrates, mayors, aldermen, superintendents of schools, or their secretaries. Besides, as a matter of principle, Don Bosco always showed respect in word and deed to civil authority, no matter in whom it was vested, even when such authority was hostile to him, because it stemmed from God. I often heard him say: "Obey your superiors and be subject to them." [Heb. 13, 17] At other times he would remark: "Many people [in authority] oppose us, persecute us, and would even like to destroy us, but we must be patient. As long as their commands are not against our conscience, let us obey them, but when the case is otherwise, let us always uphold the rights of God and of the Church, for these are superior to all earthly authority."

CHAPTER 43

Unexpected Defections

DON BOSCO had just gained two new clerics [Michael Rua and Joseph Rocchietti],[1] but unfortunately he was to lose four. Poor health forced Charles Gastini to put aside his cassock. [Two others left him to join a religious congregation, and a fourth was railroaded into the diocesan seminary.] The second and third mentioned above, attracted by the fervent religious spirit of the Oblates of Mary and convinced that this was their vocation, decided at about the same time to join this congregation. When they consulted Don Bosco on this matter, he first praised their intentions, but he then told them that God was not calling them there. They nevertheless persisted in their intent. Father Rua is a witness to what we are about to relate, and the story clearly shows that Don Bosco had clear knowledge of their future. "One morning," Charles Tomatis wrote to us, "Ascanio Savio, an outstanding student and an excellent young cleric much admired by his companions, disappeared from the Oratory. We later heard that he had joined the Oblates of Mary at Our Lady of Consolation in Turin."

Upon bidding him farewell, Don Bosco had told him: "I wish you well, but you will not stay there long!" This warning was prophetic. A few years later, afflicted by extremely severe headaches and in danger of a stroke, he was obliged to leave the Order. After his recovery he became a leading theologian in the archdiocese. Father Savio himself confirmed this story when he came to the Oratory to lecture on moral theology to Don Bosco's priests.

Shortly thereafter the cleric Stephen Vacchetta decided to follow Savio's example. Don Bosco's parting words to him were: "I wish

[1] *See* pp. 337 f. [Editor]

you well too, since you also want to go, but though you are not suffering mental disorders at the moment, you will soon be so afflicted." All wrapped up in his plans, the boy paid no heed to those words; he entered the novitiate and made his religious profession. Eventually he became insane and had to be confined to an asylum. Even after extensive treatment he remained a burden to his congregation; he was barely able to teach some catechism to children. We gathered this information from Father Paul Albera [2] who met him at St. Pons in Nice after Don Bosco's death. Don Bosco's predictions had been fulfilled.

We shall speak of the fourth cleric at greater length as an illustration of the difficulties frequently encountered by boys who wanted to join Don Bosco's ranks. Father [Augustine] Gattino, pastor of SS. Simon and Jude (within whose territorial limits the Oratory was located), demanded that more clerics from the Oratory should be at his beck and call whenever he needed them. With this in mind he went to the chancery to complain. Canon Vogliotti's reply was: "Please try to understand that Don Bosco brought up his clerics himself, and it is only right that he should use them to look after the crowd of boys he has at Valdocco. If you want to have clerics at your beck and call, do likewise."

This reply so nettled Father Gattino that he began to investigate the social and economic status of the Oratory clerics. He thus discovered that a young cleric, G., came from a well-do-do family; his father, a master builder, did not have to depend on others for his son's education. Father Gattino therefore concluded that Don Bosco had not "brought up" this cleric. His conclusion was erroneous because, as a matter of fact, it was Don Bosco who had taught him Latin and secured authorization from Archbishop Fransoni to permit him to don the clerical habit. Moreover the young cleric was an ardent supporter of Don Bosco whose trust he enjoyed and who had arranged for him to study philosophy. He spent all his time at the Oratory and only went home at night; his father paid for his board, and the young cleric was quite happy with this arrangement. Regrettably, one day someone approached his father to persuade

[2] Father Paul Albera (1845-1921) entered the Oratory in the fall of 1858, donned the clerical habit in 1861, and made his religious vows in 1862. He became Don Bosco's second successor in 1910 and remained in office until his death. [Editor]

him to remove his son from the Oratory on the grounds that if he remained with Don Bosco he would have no future in his priestly career. This meddler also stressed that, intelligent as the boy was, he could be a great success only if he completed his studies in the archdiocesan seminary.

The cleric's father was an honest man and quite friendly with Don Bosco who liked to call him "father." He had carried out the first alterations at the Oratory, and when the time came for building the church of St. Francis de Sales he had entered into partnership with [Frederick] Bocca, the building contractor. Seeing however that Don Bosco's interests were jeopardized, he informed Don Bosco of this fact and then withdrew from the partnership. The architect had prepared the design of the church without remuneration, but the man Don Bosco had appointed to supervise the faithful execution of the contract perhaps was protecting the contractor's interests rather than Don Bosco's.

The above-mentioned sly insinuations had stirred the good man's pride about his son, but, prudent as he was, he decided to consult with the rector of the archdiocesan seminary at Chieri. The latter told him that in the seminary the boy would certainly have a greater opportunity to prepare for a successful ecclesiastical career. Further, the rector declared that since he, the father, was in charge of all masonry work in the seminary, it was hardly justifiable that his cleric son should attend any other school. Besides, very likely the boy could be enrolled at the seminary at half the fee and perhaps even gratis.

The good man was won over completely. He returned home and then went to the Oratory by coach to pick up his son. He sent for him and told him: "Get your hat and come with me." Entirely in the dark about his father's intentions, the young man obeyed and soon found himself being driven directly to the Chieri seminary. This abrupt withdrawal was a painful blow for Don Bosco. The young cleric was dear to him; he had acted as his secretary, and it was to him that Don Bosco had dictated his first writings. He had also placed great hopes in him, and a few months before his sudden withdrawal he had given him a breviary and a copy of Rebaudengo's *Institutiones*.

On the other hand, G., accustomed to the routine of the Oratory,

was unhappy with the change. Don Bosco went to visit him several times. As was his policy, he did not try to dissuade him from the new life that had been forced upon him. Rather he encouraged him to persevere and to leave his future in the hands of Divine Providence. As Don Bosco's conciliatory spirit was well known at the seminary, the rector allowed him to take the young cleric to town and also, on one occasion, to dinner at Canon Cottolengo's. Don Bosco's visits greatly comforted the young seminarian, but they also filled him with nostalgia for his vanished ideals. Gradually his health was undermined and he had to return home. There he was ordered to keep away from the Oratory, and even forbidden to go to Don Bosco for confession. He then began to frequent the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation, and gradually he became charmed by the peaceful atmosphere of the Oblates' monastery. Thinking that perhaps this was his vocation, the young man sought Don Bosco's advice, but he frankly replied: "Your vocation is to be with Don Bosco!" He then told him how he himself [in the matter of vocation] had abided by Father Cafasso's advice. Don Bosco exhorted the cleric to be patient and to wait, pointing out again that what he wanted so badly now was not the best thing for him. However, the young cleric yielded to the advice of others and applied to the Oblates of Mary for admission. His father somewhat reluctantly gave his consent.

Before leaving to enter the novitiate at Nice, G. went to say good-bye to Don Bosco, who once again told him: "If that's what you want, go ahead, but let me tell you that your mind will suffer as a result of your decision, and you will not be able to persevere in the life you have chosen."

When the cleric was about to make his religious profession, he wrote to Don Bosco to ask his advice once again, and received this reply: "You will accomplish some good, but this decision is not what God wants of you." He made his perpetual vows, but was soon seized by scruples and by such a mania for perfection that he nearly went insane. For this reason, and also for family reasons, after ten years as an Oblate, following the advice of Father [Vincent] Berchialla [3] (whose secretary he was), he requested and was

[3] Later archbishop of Cagliari. [Editor]

granted a dispensation from his vows. Once in Turin he recovered completely and recognized his cure to be a signal favor from God.

Don Bosco had been right again. Father G. often remarked: "He who acts on his own in the matter of vocation is highly imprudent." His greatest wish now was to return to the Oratory, but it was no longer possible, since Archbishop Fransoni had made it a policy not to accept former religious into his archdiocese. To help him in his dilemma Don Bosco recommended Father G. to the bishop of Biella who accepted him on condition that he remain with him.

After many years passed with a resultant change in diocesan policies, Father G., who still loved the Oratory, again felt a desire to be with Don Bosco and enter his religious congregation. He wrote to Don Bosco about this wish and received this reply: "You are welcome, but wait until the Lord calls your father to eternity." His father, who was nearly eighty years old, had suffered many misfortunes and needed his priestly son at his side.

This story provides an excellent illustration of the solicitude of Don Bosco even for those who, either of their own free choice or under compulsion, had forsaken him when he needed them most. He could not help being deeply disappointed at their desertion because he appreciated their sterling qualities; nevertheless, he turned these losses into gain in terms of his growth in humility. When Ascanio Savio left, Father [John] Giacomelli heard Don Bosco exclaim: "Worthless is the help of men" [Ps. 59, 14], thereby intimating that he should trust more in God than in men. But then, in his usual unruffled manner, Don Bosco immediately commenced the task of choosing new pupils to train.

In October [1852] the boarders at the Oratory numbered thirty-six, including the diocesan seminarians who now occupied part of the dwelling.[4] From Don Bosco's records we shall mention a few who should not be forgotten. The roster of 1851 included Giolitti, Calamaro, and Peter Gurgo; in 1852 we find Francis Mattone, Bonino, Bernard Savio of Castelnuovo d'Asti, John Turco of Montafia, Bartholomew Fusero of Caramagna, John Benovia, Victor

[4] After the closing of the archdiocesan seminary in 1848 (*see* Vol. III, p. 210), Don Bosco opened a temporary seminary at the Oratory. For the next twenty years it functioned as a seminary for the archdiocese and for the whole of Piedmont. *See* Vol. III, pp. 428ff. [Editor]

Turvano, Bertagna, Fontana, and John Baptist Bonone. Nearly all of them attended Professor Bonzanino's private school, together with John Baptist Francesia who was then beginning the study of Latin. Francesia had just started boarding at the Oratory, although he had been frequenting it for a considerable period of time as a day student.

Among the boarders admitted in 1852 one merits special mention. During the previous year his father had ignored the wise advice of prudent friends to place the boy at the Oratory. Instead, he had sent him to one of those fashionable boarding schools with a reputation for academic excellence but with rather poor religious formation—a school where there was little time for prayer, no kneeling, no daily Mass, and no reception of the sacraments except at Easter. Since the boy, who was gentle and pliable, was deprived of spiritual means, he gradually fell in with bad companions, began to read immoral books, became bored with studies and religion, and failed his examinations.

When the boy came home for his summer vacation, his father was greatly disturbed, for he realized the blunder he had made in entrusting his son to secular educators. The boy, who used to be very obedient, was now unruly, insolent, irresponsible, and irreligious. Punishments and reprimands proved to be of no avail. His father thought about putting him in a reformatory, but was reluctant to do so. The boy still greatly loved his mother who had died only a short while before, and despite the change in his character, he still said a prayer every night for the repose of her soul before going to bed. By now his father was convinced of the absolute necessity of a religious education for his young son, and he decided to make one last attempt to salvage the damage. It was nearly the end of October; he had to find another boarding school for his son. To win him over he stopped reprimanding him, bought him the presents he liked, and one day took him out for an enjoyable outing. That evening he had a chat with him and gradually led the conversation to the subject of the last moments of life of the boy's mother. At these recollections, the boy broke into tears. His father then disclosed to him that one of his mother's fondest hopes was for him to attend the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. When asked what he thought of the idea, the boy unhesitatingly replied: "If

that's what mother wished, I want it too. I'd do anything to please her." His father was overjoyed at this reaction, and he considered it to be truly heaven-inspired. To avert any possibility that the boy might change his mind, he took him to the Oratory the very next day to register him.

Don Bosco was taken aback at first when he saw the boy, whose name was John. He was wearing a custom-tailored suit and a Calabrese hat over fastidiously parted hair; a glittering watch chain hung from his waistcoat, and a slender cane completed his dandified appearance. Everything about him revealed inordinate vanity. The father quickly agreed to the Oratory's admission requirements, and then, with the excuse of having to attend to some business, he left the boy alone with Don Bosco. Adapting himself to the situation, Don Bosco steered his conversation to topics that appealed to the boy: outings, races, calisthenics, fencing, singing, and music, the mere mention of which excited the frivolous boy's interest. His father returned to pick him up, and as soon as they were alone he asked his son: "Well, what do you think of the place? Do you like it? How did Don Bosco strike you?"

"I like the place a lot, and Don Bosco seems all right, but. . . ."

"But what? Tell me; we still have time to change our plans."

"I like him all right, but he's a priest. That's what spoils it."

"Never mind that. Just look at his personal qualities. You like him, don't you?"

"Yes, but staying with a priest means praying and having to go to confession and Communion. From some of the things he said, he sounded almost as though he knew too much about me. . . . Well, I promised I'd go there and I'll keep my word. I'll give it a try."

When John entered the Oratory a few days later, his father thought it advisable to brief Don Bosco on the boy's background and on his still intense love for his deceased mother. In a short while John began to enjoy good friends, competition in studies, music, recitations, and dramatics. Away from bad companions and unwholesome reading, he soon forgot the dissipated life he had led the previous year. His mother's admonition—"Avoid idleness and bad companions"—often returned to his mind; gradually he also resumed his former practices of piety. However, he could not bring

himself to go to confession, even though two months had elapsed since his arrival and there had been novenas as well as solemn feast days on which all the other pupils had received the sacraments. One evening, therefore, Don Bosco called him to his room. Mindful of how much John treasured his mother's memory, he began by asking him: "Do you know whose anniversary it is tomorrow?"

"Of course I do. It's the anniversary of my mother's death. What I wouldn't give to be able to see her again and talk to her."

"Would you do something that would please her and would also help you a lot?"

"Of course!"

"If you really mean it, then go to Holy Communion tomorrow and offer it for the repose of her soul. This would be a great help to her if she should still be suffering in purgatory."

"I'd do it gladly, but before going to Communion, I'd have to go to confession. . . . Oh, well, if that would please my mother, I'll do it; in fact, if it's all right with you, I'll do it right now."

Things had turned out just the way Don Bosco had hoped. He praised the boy's resolve, gave him time for his emotions to subside, and then prepared him for confession. It was a consoling experience for both. On the following day, John received Communion and prayed at length for his mother's eternal repose.

From that day on he was truly a source of great satisfaction to Don Bosco. One day he rid himself of some immoral books by bringing them to Don Bosco. "Please burn these," he said. "I do not want to go to hell on account of them." He also destroyed some letters that contained bad advice from former companions by tearing them into pieces.

He then began to apply himself diligently to his studies. In order not to forget his mother's admonition, "Avoid idleness and bad companions," he wrote it on the cover of all his books. On New Year's Day he wrote a fine letter to his father, who was filled with joy at the wonderful change in his son. His good conduct continued throughout his stay at the Oratory.

Remembering that at home there were many immoral books and magazines, John did not rest until he succeeded in persuading his father to get rid of them. He wrote to him, cajoled him, and made promises until he attained his goal. He also scored another victory.

For trivial reasons John's father did not observe the Friday abstinence. By word and example, by narrating timely incidents, and by begging him, John was finally able to persuade him to keep the precepts of the Church.

This is but one of the countless examples of similar transformations achieved by Don Bosco.

CHAPTER 44

A Harrowing Night

THE construction of the new building was progressing at a rapid tempo, and Don Bosco capitalized on the opportunity to effect a moral reform of the construction crew. For several months the men and their young apprentices, during their lunch break, had joined the Oratory boys as they gathered around Don Bosco to listen to his vast repertoire of stories and anecdotes. As though unaware of the workmen's presence, Don Bosco, while ostensibly directing his remarks, humorous sallies or exhortations to the boys, would skillfully but concisely tell them why they should lead a Christian life and avoid sin and its punishment. He also spoke about the consoling effects of a good confession, the terrifying meaning of eternity, and the danger everyone faces of being suddenly summoned before God's judgment seat. Don Bosco's remarks so impressed the construction crew that most of them went to confession. There were a few, however, who quite clearly showed that they did not wish to be reminded of certain truths. One of them interrupted Don Bosco one day and in an icy tone of voice told him: "I know very well what you're driving at. You won't catch *me!*" Joseph Buzzetti, then a cleric, was present at this incident and felt sorry for the poor fellow. Don Bosco ignored the remark.

Toward the end of October Canon Lawrence Gastaldi [1] arrived from Stresa to pay a visit to Don Bosco. They talked at great length about the future of the Oratory. The canon was so greatly concerned that after returning to Stresa he wrote to Don Bosco about a doubt that had arisen in his mind regarding Don Bosco's legal title to the Pinardi estate. Don Bosco replied as follows:

[1] The future archbishop of Turin. At this time, and until he became an archbishop in 1871, he was a close friend of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. III, pp. 406ff. [Editor]

Turin, November 24, 1852

My dear Canon:

Here is how I stand in reference to my legal rights. I own this land and therefore I also own any building that I choose to erect on these premises. To be doubly sure of this, I have channeled all contributions, including the lottery donations, into the church building fund. However, for the construction of this building, I am depending on the income made a few years ago from the sale of a small house [2] as well as from a recently sold adjacent lot.[3] Several prominent lawyers I have consulted assure me that the government can claim no right whatever to this property as long as I live. But what would happen at my death? This is the crux of the problem. In view of present-day circumstances it seems that the only way to retain title to this property is to jointly purchase it with Father [John] Borel, Father [Robert] Murialdo and Father [Joseph] Cafasso and to make a will providing that at the death of one of the signatories the property would pass on to the three survivors who would certainly then be free to enter into partnership with a fourth party. Naturally, succession fees will have to be paid on behalf of the deceased partner.

According to several lawyers that I trust, this is the only way to solve this problem. As for the new purchase,[4] I shall leave matters entirely up to Father Rosmini and will do whatever he, in his wisdom, will suggest. I shall make every effort, feeble though it may be, to cooperate in whatever will redound to the greater glory of God and to the salvation of souls.

Please give my kindest regards to Father Rosmini and pray for me. May God bless you.

Your friend and servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. While I am writing, your mother is in the sewing room cleaning and mending clothes; her presence has turned it into a little paradise.[5]

This letter clearly shows that Don Bosco had no doubts about the legal stability of his new building. He had not the least reason

[2] *See* Vol. III, p. 328. [Editor]

[3] *See* p. 190. [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 438. Probably Canon Gastaldi, on behalf of his superior, had broached the matter of a Rosminian foundation in Turin. [Editor]

[5] Ever since the beginning of the Oratory, Canon Gastaldi's mother had gone to the aid of Mamma Margaret. *See* p. 99. *See also* Vol. II, p. 414; Vol. III, pp. 178f. [Editor]

to suspect that during those very days he would undergo an unexpected and harrowing experience. On Saturday, November 20, part of the eastern end of the third floor of the building under construction collapsed when the scaffolding supporting it caved in. Three workmen were seriously injured, one of them critically. Everyone was filled with consternation and fear, but not Don Bosco. In those anguished moments, when his grief was all the more intense because of the injured workmen, he lifted his eyes to heaven with resignation and uttered words that were familiar to him: "God's will be done! God knows best!" The need to start the evening classes for young workers made him take this setback in stride. Undismayed by the damage, he ordered the rebuilding of that section without delay.

Unfortunately, a still greater loss was in store for him and his generous benefactors. Only the roof now remained to be completed. Girders and lintels were in place and tiles were neatly piled near at hand when all work was halted by a violent rainstorm that lasted several days and nights. The downpour lashed the girders and lintels and softened and washed away the fresh and perhaps poor-quality mortar; as a result the walls remained standing like naked piles of bricks and stones.

On December 1 [1852], several hundred day boys were attending their usual evening classes at the Oratory. When the sessions ended around nine o'clock, the day boys lingered for a while (as they always did) to chat with the boarders and amuse themselves by racing through the empty rooms of the new building. Don Bosco had clearly forbidden them to do so, fearing that they might slip and hurt themselves now that everything had been soaked by the rain. But on that particular evening, unmindful of his warning, the boys ran up and down the stepladders and chased each other over the scaffolding, while others played on the ground below amid the rotting sodden planks and rafters. Eventually, all the day boys went home.

Shortly after eleven, while Don Bosco and all the boarders were fast asleep, a frightful crash that continued to grow more thunderous in intensity made them jump out of their beds. Part of the southern wall of the new building had collapsed. The impact of falling bricks and stones shook the old building which was located

just a few feet away. It was a terrible catastrophe, but also a clear manifestation of God's mercy watching over the safety of Don Bosco and his boys. If the wall had collapsed two hours earlier, who knows how many victims would have been crushed beneath it?

Don Bosco's mother heard the ear-splitting noise just as she was about to retire, and she rushed out of her room in tears, fearing with good reason that her son might be buried beneath the ruins. "Don Bosco, Don Bosco, get out; save yourself," she cried out at the top of her voice. She ran to his room and pounded on the door, but there was no answer. She tried to open the door but was unable to do so. Then she noticed that a huge stone had fallen through the ceiling of the room, leaving a gaping hole through which the rain was pouring. Hoping to find a duplicate key to open Don Bosco's room, she rushed downstairs to the kitchen.

The cleric Michael Rua, already awakened by the noise, heard Mamma Margaret's shouts, but at first he was unable to identify their source. As soon as he recognized Mamma Margaret's voice, he quickly dressed and ran to her aid, fearing that someone might have been seriously hurt.

Meanwhile, the terrified boys had leaped out of their beds, some in underpants, some in their shirts. In the midst of the confusion, unaware of what had happened, they wrapped themselves in sheets and blankets and rushed pell-mell out of their dormitories through the ground-floor exits. Some ran toward the outer gate, others fled into the church and sought refuge near some altar, and still others crouched under the nearby trees or huddled together in the middle of the playground. It was indeed a piteous sight to see about fifty terrified boys running around in search of shelter from the lashing rain. In the darkness of the night some were sobbing and others were screaming; a few bumped into benches or tripped and fell into the mud or in a puddle. Rafters, tiles, and other construction material littered the ground and left no doubt as to what had happened.

But where was Don Bosco? The boys were still calling for him and Mamma Margaret was just rushing back with a key to his room when they heard the familiar sound of a small bell. A moment later a light appeared at the far end of the balcony. It was Don Bosco calmly coming out of his room and down the stairs to inspect the damage. At the sound of the first crash, half-awake, he had cocked

an ear and then heard what sounded, to his surprise, like the crack of thunder. But since no lightning followed, he realized the nature of the trouble and the danger he was in since his room was very close to the new building. He got up, but in the total darkness he could not immediately find matches to light his lamp or even to get to the door.

As soon as the boys saw him, all of them started shouting: "Don Bosco is safe! He's safe!" Heedless of the mud and the debris scattered about them, they ran up to him, bombarding him with questions such as: "Don Bosco, didn't you hear the wall crashing and your mother calling you? Are you sad? Are you hurt? Why didn't you leave your room at once?" Others told him: "Don Bosco, look at us! Aren't we a mess?" They all tried to outtalk each other, telling him how smart they had been in that emergency and describing their prowess and acrobatics in the dark. Don Bosco listened to them sympathetically and spoke comforting words. He had first inquired if anyone had been hurt, and when he learned that there were no casualties, he was so relieved that he began to joke with them; he teased them about their grotesque attire, laughed off the scare they had had, and even urged them to play around a bit. His calm and humor helped to banish all fear from their minds. He then led them all into the dining room and entertained them by describing to them the troubles the Oratory had already endured as a result of harassment and forced wanderings, and how it had nevertheless flourished and prospered. Exhorting them to trust fully in Divine Providence, he concluded by saying: "Now, in thanksgiving for having been spared all physical harm, let us recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin." Full of gratitude, they all fell to their knees.

However, despite his calm demeanor, Don Bosco was seriously concerned. What was he to do next? It was a miserably cold night, and the rain continued to fall in torrents. For some time, though, no sinister rumblings had been heard. Don Bosco reasoned that whatever was shaky had already collapsed. He had also noticed that the dormitories had apparently not suffered serious damage.

It was already past midnight. Anxious for everyone to get some rest, Don Bosco told the boys: "Now go back to bed and don't be afraid; the danger is over. Let's do this: very carefully move your

cots into the sacristy and into the dining room." The boys immediately scattered, and in less than fifteen minutes, with the skill and dispatch of disciplined soldiers, they had moved twenty cots to new temporary quarters.

Throughout the emergency Mamma Margaret displayed exemplary courage. Like a selfless mother exclusively concerned with the safety of her children, she kept all the boys away from the danger zone, directed them to this or that room, and kept watch until dawn, moving fearlessly from one part of the house to another. Don Bosco, her worthy son, was also equal to the occasion. To ensure the safety of the boys he placed himself in danger several times by checking potential danger spots in the faulty structure. By her pleas Mamma Margaret finally persuaded him to give up his inspection tour and return into the house, just as the boys were getting ready to go to bed. They were turning the pockets of their clothes inside out, checking to see if they had lost anything in the hurried move to new quarters. An amusing incident provided some fun for all. One of the boys, a certain Innocent Brunengo, was a tailor's apprentice. When the crash had awakened him, he had jumped out of bed like everyone else and rushed from the building, forgetting under his pillow the bun for his breakfast. (Since many of the boys had to be at their jobs in town before dawn, a bun was given to them at bedtime.) When he later returned to the dormitory to move his cot to other quarters, he did not notice that in the process his bun dropped to the floor. When he realized that he had lost his bun, he retraced his steps, ignoring his companions' warnings not to do so. When he finally found his treasured bun, he hobbled back as quickly as his lame leg would permit, shouting triumphantly: "Success, success! My breakfast is safe! Don Bosco, my breakfast is safe!" The laughter this remark provoked was a tonic to everyone, and the incident itself made history. As long as Brunengo remained at the Oratory, he was habitually greeted with the words "Success, success!" and then teased a little about his prowess in rescuing his breakfast.

By now it was already after one in the morning and Don Bosco was anxious to get the boys to bed. He set the example by saying a brief prayer and then retiring to his room which potentially was still the most in danger. Soon all stretched out on their cots and

tried to resume their interrupted sleep; a few, however, decided to remain in church and pray. Michael Rua and two other clerics also retired to their quarters when their help was no longer needed.

Strangely enough, three clerics—[Louis] Viale, [Felix] Reviglio, and Stephen Vacchetta—whose rooms were on the upper story, slept like logs throughout. We are indebted to Stephen Vacchetta for a detailed description of this unusual episode in a letter he wrote to [James] Bellìa who was then attending the Chieri seminary. The letter, now in our possession, is dated December 25, 1852. A portion of it is recorded here:

> The clerics Danussi, [Joseph] Buzzetti, and [Michael] Rua came into my room while I was fast asleep and awakened me with their loud laughter. I asked them whether the bell for rising had already rung. I certainly had not heard it. At this Danussi laughed even louder. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Didn't you hear the crash of the new building?"
>
> "I heard nothing!" I replied. Then I added: "If it did crash, it's a good thing. The contractors will have to start all over again. This is providential. Our Lord wants the Oratory to be built on strong foundations, not on sand. He made the building fall—or rather, he allowed it to collapse—because of its poor construction. This is a godsend. Our Lord knows that Don Bosco is too good and that some people try to take advantage of him, and so in His Divine Providence He let this happen." With this we ended our conversation.
>
> The boys were in bed, but they did not get much sleep judging by what everyone had to say the next morning about the bricks, stones, rafters, and planks that kept tumbling down throughout the night.
>
> At five most of the boys were already up to inspect the damage. Then about half an hour later, the northern wing suddenly crumbled. It crashed against the central portion of the building which was higher, and both sections fell with thunderous noise. The impact was such that the adjoining building shook for several seconds. Those who were still asleep sprang to their feet, dressed in record time, and rushed down to see what had happened.

Thus read Vacchetta's letter in part. Don Bosco was already in church at this time. As always, he put himself completely in God's hands, and thus he was unruffled by this new disaster. He gathered the boys in church to thank God for having again spared them and then celebrated Mass. Afterward, as the boys flocked around him,

he smilingly remarked: "The devil played a trick on me again. He's mad because he doesn't want me to put up a new building and have more boys, but we shall do it in spite of him!" Then he added: "The devil gave us a good kick, but don't worry; the Lord is stronger, and the devil will not succeed in his attempts."

Soon the playground was filled with people who were drawn there by curiosity. Shortly afterward the mayor arrived by coach with two municipal engineers. As the mayor comforted Don Bosco, assuring him that the damage would not hinder the expansion of the Oratory, the two engineers immediately began to investigate the extent and causes of the disaster. As we have already mentioned, the new building adjoined the low-roofed old Pinardi house. A tall, heavy pillar of the new building, dislodged from its base, was now leaning perilously above Don Bosco's room. After studying the situation carefully, the engineer, pointing to Don Bosco's quarters, asked him: "Who slept there last night?"

"About thirty of us did," Don Bosco replied. The engineer then took Don Bosco's arm and commented: "You and your boys should thank the Blessed Virgin; you've every good reason to do so. The way that pillar is leaning defies every law of gravity. It's a miracle you were not crushed." He then gave orders for its demolition. Cautiously, workmen ran heavy ropes around it to support its weight; then, standing on the scaffolds, they began demolishing it piece by piece, thereby saving the old building from disaster.

There was yet another sign of heaven's manifest protection. It was now eight o'clock. The only section of the new building that was still intact was the wall overlooking the courtyard on the south with its arcades and pillars. While the members of the municipal commission, together with Don Bosco and several boys (including [John] Cagliero, [John] Turchi, [Charles] Tomatis, and [Hyacinth] Arnaud), were standing there, staring at and deploring the enormous damage, one of the boys noticed that the pillars were swaying, and he shouted: "Watch out!" Immediately all ran from the area toward the center of the playground. As they were doing so, the wall came thundering down with an awesome din; rafters, bricks, and stones fell in a wide radius. Everyone was aghast. The impact made the ground tremble like an earthquake, and more

people came running from all sides. For an instant the stunned Don Bosco grew pale, but he immediately regained his calm. Turning to one of the bystanders, Mr. Duina, he remarked with a smile: "We've been playing bricks!" He was alluding to the popular children's game of placing a row of bricks in a standing position and then knocking one down, thus causing a chain reaction. This disaster made such an impression on the Oratory boys that, for the next several months, any sudden noise, such as the rumble of a passing cart or the emptying of a basketful of bricks, made them jumpy and nervous.

Don Bosco bore this crushing setback with his customary Christian fortitude and resignation to the inscrutable designs of God. He never uttered a word of complaint, nor did he appear sad, despondent, worried, or alarmed. On the contrary, he continued to reassure his pupils by his calm demeanor and soothing words. Speaking to all of them, he said: " 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' [Job 1, 21] Let us accept everything as it comes from His hand, and we can be sure that the Lord will greatly appreciate our resignation." He also used to repeat: "Yes, we must truly be very grateful to Our Lord and to the Blessed Virgin. No matter how trying the evils that oppress mankind, we can always see in them the merciful and providential hand of God. He is there to temper our misfortunes." Another of his frequent sayings, which he used to apply to himself, was: "Let nothing dismay you; he who possesses God possesses everything. The Lord is master of this house; I am His humble servant. Whatever pleases Him must also please me."

The following letter to the pastor of Capriglio [6] clearly shows Don Bosco's great serenity:

Turin, December 6, 1852

Very Reverend and dear Father,

I have already spoken to Chevalier Curtine, First Officer of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus, and found him very favorably disposed toward you.[7] Act as if you knew nothing about it and, leaving me out

[6] The native village of Mamma Margaret. *See* Vol. I, p. 11. [Editor]

[7] The pastor was probably seeking a title of honor for some worthy person. [Editor]

entirely, write again to the above-mentioned chevalier and to Count [Louis] Cibrario. I hope this procedure will bring results. As the saying goes, *repetita iuvant.*

I am teaching a Greek class here, and I need some books on the subject; at the moment they are at my house at Becchi. I would be indebted to you if you sent someone, Father Duino perhaps, to pick up these books and ship them to me as soon as possible, thus saving me a little expense.

I have had a misfortune; the new building under construction (already at roof level) has collapsed almost entirely. There were no fatalities, but three workmen were seriously injured. The scare and consternation almost sent your poor Don Bosco to his grave. The Lord's will be done!

Love me in the Lord, give my best regards to your curate, and please let me know if I can do anything for you. As always,

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

In addition to the material damage, the collapse of the new building caused other discomforts as well. It was late in the season; there was no time to repair, let alone complete the construction. Roofing the eastern wing which was still standing proved a particularly difficult job, and Don Bosco was faced with the additional problem of coping with completely inadequate space. But charity is industrious, and so was Don Bosco's. After reinforcing the walls of the former chapel, he converted it into a dormitory, and he then moved the day and evening classes to the new church after first taking measures to properly safeguard the respect due to the Blessed Sacrament. Thus the church of St. Francis de Sales was used for worship every morning and all day on Sundays, while the rest of the time it served as a school. Classes were held in the apse, in the sanctuary, in the side chapels, and in the nave. A certain amount of confusion was unavoidable, but the arrangements were so unusual and pioneer-like that the boys delighted in them even though there was no heating system.

Don Bosco had always endeavored to accept adversities with a smile and to look for the comical side of things. If he had to introduce changes in routine, he always did so with a certain air of gaiety that seemed to guarantee that it would be all for the better. By this method the boys always gladly welcomed any new arrange-

ment, no matter how unusual or inconvenient it might be. Following his example, they too formed the habit of looking for the funny side of things in their misfortunes. Once this disaster and its frightening aspect became a thing of the past, Charles Tomatis, who had a natural bent for humor, preserved its memory for history with a poem in Piedmontese that drew much laughter on the stage of the Oratory theater.

The poem, published in the *Bollettino Salesiano,* was translated into Italian by Father John Baptist Francesia for the enjoyment of a wider audience.[8]

[8] In this edition we have transferred this poem to Appendix 13. [Editor]

CHAPTER 45

A New Undertaking

MEANWHILE, intrigues and hostilities against the Church were continuing without letup.[1] On November 4 [1852], Count Camillo Cavour was appointed Prime Minister. In August he had gone to London for consultation with Lords [Henry J. Temple] Palmerston, [John] Russell, and [William E.] Gladstone, all three vying to surpass one another in their hostility to the Catholic Church and in their support of revolutionary wars. Cavour then went to Paris for a lengthy parley with the president of the Republic, Louis Bonaparte, who on December 1 was to be proclaimed emperor under the name of Napoleon III. The outcome of the parley was an agreement on the unification of Italy and a common policy as regards the "Roman Question." Needless to say, the anticlericals in Europe were pressing Cavour to wage a holy war against the Pope.

In Piedmont the struggle against God's laws continued unabated. On July 5 [1852], the Chamber of Deputies passed a bill on civil marriage by a margin of 94 to 34. Innumerable petitions opposing this bill had poured into Parliament notwithstanding the obstructive tactics of the government, but they were ignored. In a counterattack measure, the clergy was even accused of using fraud, chicanery, and pressure to deceive the people as to the true intentions of the lawmakers. In the diocese of Ivrea three pastors were imprisoned and several laymen who had written pamphlets on the anti-Catholic nature of that bill were brought to trial and dismissed from office. Even though the Pope himself wrote to King Victor Emmanuel II restating the Catholic doctrine on marriage, and despite the fact

[1] *See* Chapters 6, 7, 10, 11. [Editor]

that the bishops of the Piedmontese provinces had voiced their opposition and threatened canonical penalties against those attempting a civil marriage, the bill was brought to the floor. But Our Lady of Consolation [the Madonna of Turin] did not permit the passage of such an impious law. On December 20 [1852], despite Count Camillo Cavour's vigorous support of the bill, the Senate rejected its first article by a margin of 39 to 28; on December 22, a royal decree shelved the bill. Grateful to their Madonna, the people of Turin expressed their thanks by rebuilding the façade of the shrine at a cost of sixty thousand lire.

Meanwhile, the Waldensians in Turin were continuing their proselytizing. Several times they also attempted to engage Don Bosco in debate, as he himself told us:

> In 1852, a well-known Waldensian minister came to the Oratory. After introducing himself, he showed me a book, saying: "Here the infamies of the Catholic Church are fully exposed." It was a book by [C. L.] Trivier abounding in lies and calumnies. When I asked him to cite me a few of the alleged infamies, he answered: "Isn't it an infamy for the Pope to demand worship as if he were God or even greater? Isn't it an infamy to adore saints and images? Isn't it an infamy to forbid people to read the Gospel?"
>
> On hearing these wild accusations, I calmly asked him to show me any decree of either Pope, bishop, council or Father of the Church wherein even a single phrase sanctioned any such abuse. After all, the burden of proof rested with him, the accuser.
>
> He turned over page after page, scanning the chapters and paragraphs, but he could not find what he wanted. Finally he said: "I'll come back with all the necessary proof and documentation."
>
> "Please do," I told him, "and take all the time you need. If you can prove what you assert, I shall believe you; otherwise. . . ."
>
> "Otherwise what?"
>
> "Otherwise I shall have every good reason to say that Waldensians are liars."
>
> The minister left. I waited for him to return, but I never saw him again.

However, Don Bosco was not satisfied with merely confounding someone in a dispute. Pondering over the unjust methods, slanders, and iniquitous distortions of demagogues, revolutionaries, and

Waldensians in their smear campaign against the teachings and the rights of the Catholic Church, he conceived new undertakings, even greater than those already launched, and whose wholesome influence would gradually amaze the world. "The path of the just is like shining light, that grows in brilliance till perfect day." [Prov. 4, 19]

As early as 1850, Don Bosco had planned to stem the rising tide of heretical publications with a series of popular booklets entitled *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings].[2] The idea was entirely his own, but as it was his habit not to undertake anything without first praying, consulting with persons in authority, and pondering the pros and cons of his projects, he had been slow in coming to a decision. Now, however, he definitively made up his mind; nothing would deter him from this task. Ever devoted and deferential toward his ordinary, he submitted the draft of a subscription plan to Archbishop Louis Fransoni [in exile] at Lyons. The archbishop not only approved the plan, but highly commended it.

The site of the headquarters of this new publication was to be in Turin. However, Don Bosco was not in a position to shoulder the burden and responsibilities of an enterprise of this magnitude all by himself; he had to find other people with similar interests in such a venture, and at the same time avert the possibility that they might jealously resent his leadership and only with reluctance resign themselves to the fact that his prestige would be enhanced at their expense. Under such circumstances Don Bosco had to efface himself and diplomatically submit a proposal as though emanating from someone else or deftly lead wealthy and influential people to adopt his own ideas and supporting arguments and vigorously promote them. In following this course of action, Don Bosco had to make an act of humility for the sake of God's glory, but the Lord rewarded him. In 1850 Don Bosco had already discussed with Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea this publishing venture whose aim was to openly counteract Waldensian propaganda. Bishop Moreno now approved Don Bosco's plan enthusiastically and became his most powerful and zealous ally.

Of course, such a publication meant additional work for Don

[2] *See* Vol. III, p. 380. [Editor]

Bosco. His zeal for the defense of the Faith gave him the strength to spend entire nights expounding in a simple, popular style the doctrines attacked by the Waldensians and refuting their errors by arguments easily understood even by the most uneducated people. His ability to find the time for such a bewildering number of tasks was due to a secret he had learned from Father Cafasso. In the following memorandum about his spiritual director, Don Bosco unwittingly painted his own portrait. He wrote:

Father Cafasso's first secret [for his prodigious activity] was his constant serenity. He had adopted as his own St. Teresa's motto: "Let nothing upset you!" With a gentleness characteristic of saintly souls he would briskly attend to wearisome, difficult, and thorny matters. No matter how many and how serious the problems, Father Cafasso, a truly great and noble spirit, was never flustered. His wonderful serenity of spirit enabled him to attend to a variety of matters calmly and efficiently.

His second secret was his great experience, acquired through many years of nurturing his patience and trust in God. This experience, coupled with his prudence and his constant study of human nature, had made him familiar with the knottiest problems. He had an answer to all doubts, difficulties, and baffling questions. If one put a query to him, he grasped it instantly; then, after momentarily raising his mind to God, he would give a prompt and clear-cut answer that not even a lengthy study could have improved upon.

Father Cafasso's third secret for being able to cope successfully with so many different activities was his meticulous and constant use of time. During the thirty and more years I knew him, I never recall seeing him once in what appeared to be an idle moment. As soon as one job was done, he turned to another. His schedule did not include recreation, leisure-time activities, or futile conversation. If he would occasionally take part in the pastimes of his student-priests, it was only in order to please them; for him such participation was nothing but a duty. When he felt tired, he sought relaxation in some other task: from preaching he switched to praying, from writing to visiting the sick or hearing confessions in the city jails or churches.

Another of his secrets was his temperance; perhaps a better description would be his spirit of penance. Even as a boy he had been sparing in his consumption of food and drink. Consequently, shortly after meals he could devote himself to intellectual tasks. When at times he was urged to pay more attention to his health, he would reply: "We shall rest in

heaven! Whenever I think of heaven, I no longer feel tired." Another favorite saying of his was: "Man's lot on this earth is truly wretched. If only he could do without food and sleep, then he could work full-time for heaven." One day he reproached a sacristan for having overslept. He told him: "One period of sleep is enough for a man dedicated to God's service. As soon as he wakes up, he should rise, no matter what the hour!" This must have been Father Cafasso's self-rule.

Without question, the days of Father Cafasso and of Don Bosco were crammed with sufficient work to keep five or ten hard-working and skillful men busy from morning to night. The ability to handle such a workload was the reward for a life of unceasing self-denial in the service of God's glory. Don Bosco never discussed the matter, but we find it in the biography of General Gaston de Sonis,[3] a man of God who experienced this great truth: "The Lord multiplies the time for those who serve Him."

Let us now resume our narrative. Don Bosco had placed his *Letture Cattoliche* under the protection of the Blessed Virgin. Recalling that he had a standing invitation [4] from the rector of the Oropa Shrine,[5] he went there in July, intending to remain awhile and complete some writings. However, he found a new administration in charge there, and the welcome was not as warm as he had reason to expect. The following incident probably occurred on that particular occasion. Don Bosco arrived there with Father [Felix] Golzio.[6] Eager to write a short history of the shrine, Don Bosco

[3] Louis-Gaston de Sonis was born at Pointe-à-Pitre (island of Guadeloupe) in 1825 and died in Paris in 1887. He served in the French army in Algeria, Italy, Morocco and Germany. When the French government ordered the expulsion of religious from their houses, he protested by resigning his post of commandant at Rennes, Châteauroux. His life of great faith and sincere dedication to God and Country is aptly summarized by the inscription on his tomb: *Miles Christi* (A Soldier of Christ). [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 185. [Editor]

[5] A famous and imposing Marian shrine in Piedmont, dating from 369. Eight miles from Biella, it is situated on a promontory that is about 4,260 feet high. According to legend, St. Eusebius, the first bishop of Vercelli, built the original chapel and enshrined in it Our Lady's statue carved by St. Luke. The twelve chapels, all richly decorated, illustrate the life of the Blessed Virgin. The shrine also has a valuable collection of works of art and ex-votoes. [Editor]

[6] This priest had been a former assistant to Father Louis Guala, the founder of the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, and to Father Cafasso, his successor. After the latter's death, Father Golzio became rector of the Convitto and Don Bosco's confessor. *See* Vol. XI, p. 109. [Editor]

asked Canon Bernardine Pezzia for a few documents, but the canon refused on the grounds that all information about it had already been published. Don Bosco then requested hospitality for himself and his companion. Instead of lodging them in the quarters reserved for the clergy, the official in charge of accommodations gave them rooms in the section assigned to lay pilgrims. Don Bosco and Father Golzio accepted this lack of courtesy without complaint and remained there a couple of days to increase their devotion. Don Bosco then went to St. Ignatius' Shrine, and from there he mailed the manuscript copy of *Il Cattolico Provveduto* [a prayerbook for adults] to Bishop Moreno for approval. The publication of *Letture Cattoliche* was indeed about to start. The bishop of Ivrea replied as follows:

Albiano, August 4, 1852

I received your very welcome letter at the shrine of Piova where I too was making my spiritual retreat. Many thanks for all the kind remarks in your letter. I am glad to hear that your church is already in such good shape, and I assure you that I shall be delighted to see it on my next visit to Turin.

I was very pleased to look over your manuscript, and I return it with some revisions and minor additions which I think might be introduced. None of them are of any great importance, and I leave it up to you entirely to make use of them or not. I would be very interested to know what changes you have in mind for our monthly *Letture Cattoliche.*

This project is very dear to my heart, and I urge you to give it your greatest care. I have already enlisted the aid of several zealous persons, and some have even given me signed blank checks to use for expenses. Please accept my thanks and also those of our lawyer and of Father Gallenga [7] for your very lovely poem to commemorate the blessing of your new church.

✠ Louis [Moreno], *Bishop of Ivrea*

A few days later the bishop again wrote to Don Bosco:

Ivrea, August 16, 1852

Mr. Matthew Rho, director of the Army Library and undersecretary at the War Ministry, wrote me on the 9th of this month to inform me that the book *Il Soldato Cristiano* [The Christian Soldier] would go to

[7] The bishop's secretary and a close friend of Don Bosco. [Editor]

press this week. Before replying to him and taking any action on the matter, I need to know if this is the same book whose translation Father [Francis] Valinotti sent me. I understand that this translation was started under your supervision.

The need for a good press is constantly increasing, so let us get started on our *Letture Cattoliche*. Please send me (through my messenger) information about the changes you hinted might be needed.

With the greatest esteem, etc.,

✠ Louis [Moreno], *Bishop of Ivrea*

Don Bosco sent word to the bishop that soon he would be going to Ivrea to seek his advice in regard to the subject matter, the selection of titles, and the publication schedule. But when he delayed the promised visit, he received another letter from the bishop.

Ivrea, September 4, 1852

I am impatiently waiting for your promised visit. I hope that we shall be able to reach a decision on this publication.

I shall say no more for the moment. If you would like—or perhaps I should say, if you would be able—to preach the spiritual retreat to the Sisters of Charity here at Ivrea, bring your manuscripts with you.

I remain, etc.,

✠ Louis [Moreno], *Bishop of Ivrea*

When he had finished preaching the spiritual retreat at Giaveno, Don Bosco went to Ivrea to see the bishop, receive his instructions, and come to a decision in regard to the launching of the *Letture Cattoliche*.

After making final decisions on those matters which he had reserved for himself, Bishop Moreno notified Don Bosco of them:

Ivrea, December 13, 1852

Everything is now ready to begin publication of the *Letture Cattoliche*. I therefore urge you to iron out details with Canon [Francis] Valinotti. Mail your decisions to me as soon as possible so that we may go to press and spread the booklets far and wide. It would be better still if either one of you could come up and inform me of them in person.

We must seek the help of a third party, lay or ecclesiastic. I assume

that you have completed your additions to your *Warnings to Catholics* [8] and that you have been able to speak with all the people with whom you wished to confer, since by now all of them should have returned from vacation. Unfortunately, Waldensian propaganda is growing bolder and bolder. Let us match it with Catholic propaganda.

I was very sorry to hear that part of your new building collapsed. I hope to have news from you soon, for I am afraid you must have had serious trouble as a result.

Pray for me and ask others to pray. With great esteem, I remain,

✠ Louis [Moreno], *Bishop of Ivrea*

Don Bosco sent him all the requested information. He then performed an act of obedience to the supreme authority of the Church as regards the reading of heretical books. He already was allowed to read and keep certain specified books, but this was a limited concession. Since he had to refute Protestant writers, he needed unlimited authorization, which he sought and obtained.[9] He also received the greatest possible consolation and reward from Rome that he could have possibly desired—the genuine signature of Pius IX at the foot of another petition by Don Bosco that would usually have been signed by a secretary. By this thoughtful gesture the Pope had wished to give him an extraordinary token of his affection. We cannot adequately express how greatly Don Bosco appreciated the Pope's personal signature on communications, and with what respect and joy he received them, as we ourselves witnessed on several occasions. Don Bosco's petition was as follows:

Most Holy Father:

The Rev. John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, humbly implores you to renew the authorization to administer Holy Communion at the Christmas Midnight Mass as he has been doing for several years. He assures Your Holiness that this favor would be of great spiritual benefit and encouragement to the boys attending the function. Humbly prostrate, he hopes that this favor may be granted.

The petitioner

[8] *See* pp. 157ff. [Editor]

[9] In this edition we have placed Don Bosco's petition and the Holy See's reply in Appendix 14. [Editor]

The petition was returned with the following addition:

Rome, December 16, 1852

Pro gratia ad triennium. [Granted as requested for three years.]

PIUS PP. IX

Thus ended the year 1852 with its joys and sorrows. It had been a memorable year, especially because of the faith of the people of Turin in their Madonna, Our Lady of Consolation.

CHAPTER 46

A New Undertaking (Continued)

As the year 1853 began, everything was ready for the publication of the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings]. Don Bosco had succeeded in forming a scholarly editorial staff of priests and laymen, and he was now quite busy announcing this new publication in villages and towns, meeting with influential people, establishing subscription centers, preparing and mailing promotional literature, and contracting with printers.

With the approval of the bishops of Piedmont he also mailed thousands of copies of a prospectus,[1] a copy of which he enclosed from then on in every outgoing piece of mail. On it he had written in his own hand: "Please, help with subscriptions." He also gave out copies wherever he went, making it a lifetime practice. He even enlisted the services of itinerant salesmen in order to spread these copies through the villages at a very low price—or even for free, if it was thought advisable.

Don Bosco's zeal became ever more intense as he grasped the potentialities for good of his new undertaking, but we do not know whether he envisioned its vast growth. From his pen alone there would flow about a hundred pamphlets dealing with faith and morals, defending and asserting Catholic beliefs under attack by Protestants in general and by the Waldensians in particular. His aim was to strengthen the people in their Faith, instill sound Catholic principles in the young, and imbue them all with love for the Church and for the Pope. Thanks to Don Bosco's *Letture Cattoliche* which blanketed the mainland and the adjacent islands, Protestants made little headway in Italy and never struck permanent roots.

[1] In this edition we have placed this prospectus in Appendix 15. [Editor]

According to the records, there were over nine thousand subscribers in the period of 1853-1860; in several cases a single subscription served several families who had jointly contributed to it. The subscribers rose to ten thousand in 1861; from 1870 on their number remained steady, somewhere between twelve and fourteen thousand. Eventually, the average monthly printing amounted to slightly over fifteen thousand copies. We must also mention that some five hundred other pamphlets, written by the editorial staff and by Don Bosco, went through several reprintings to satisfy an ever increasing reading public. Circulation figures of the *Letture Cattoliche* in the first fifty years reached the high mark of nine million two hundred thousand copies. Later the publication also appeared in French, Spanish, and Portuguese, with several thousand subscribers in each language. These foreign language editions started in Buenos Aires in 1883 and then spread to Niterói, Brazil (1889), Sarrià, Spain (1893), Marseille, France, and Bogotà, Colombia (1896). Vast indeed was the new undertaking that Don Bosco was assuming.

Meanwhile, Waldensian propaganda was reaching new heights in Piedmont. Large sums were spent in proselytizing, especially among the working class. Wily and effective tactics succeeded in leading astray several thousand Catholics. Lurid plays appealing to the lower instincts and undermining parental authority were staged with impunity in the Turin theaters. Anticlerical newspapers, books, and lectures kept up a steady smear campaign against the clergy. Spurious versions of the Bible were distributed on a large scale; libraries stocked with anti-Catholic literature were opened. The anticlericals became ever more brazen through the connivance of those who were duty-bound to check such activity. At a plenary meeting in the Turin City Hall to set up a relief committee to assist the poor, a Jewish rabbi and a Waldensian minister were elected to serve on it, but not one single Catholic priest. Present at the meeting were the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, and many other dignitaries.

Despite threats, dangers, and personal harm, the bishops had long fought these noxious, combined onslaughts with truly apostolic courage. Assisted by a loyal clergy, they had left no stone unturned to resist the evil. They preached, wrote pastoral letters, protested to the government, appealed to the king, and wrote books, but it

seemed as though the enemy would prevail. Catholics were sadly watching heresy spread among the people, undermining their Faith and morals, when to their surprise the third edition of *Warnings to Catholics* (which was to serve also as an introduction to the first issue of the *Letture Cattoliche*) appeared on the scene to challenge the enemy. Don Bosco had once remarked: "I am not afraid of the Protestants, and I would be happy to give my life for my Faith!" Some overly prudent persons had tried to dissuade him from launching the *Letture Cattoliche* as a countercharge, but Don Bosco, instead of backing out, resolved to affix his name to the pamphlets he himself would write.

Warnings to Catholics had a supplement entitled *Basic Tenets of the Catholic Church.* Its title page carried this legend: "Our Bishops Unite Us to the Pope; the Pope Unites Us to God." Don Bosco's authorship was clearly indicated. He had also included the following exhortations to the young:

1. Avoid as much as possible the company of those who indulge in lewd conversation or who deride our Faith.
2. If for reasons of study, business, or family life you must deal with such persons, never discuss religion; if they try to engage you in an argument, simply tell them: "For medical advice I go to a doctor, for legal matters I go to a lawyer, for medicines I go to a druggist, and for religious questions I go to a priest. He is my expert in these matters."
3. Never read irreligious books or newspapers. If they should be offered to you, spurn and reject them with the same horror with which you would reject poison. Should you, by chance, have such publications in your possession, burn them. It is better to burn a book or newspaper than to have your soul burn forever in the fires of hell!

The printing of *Letture Cattoliche* was done in Turin by the P. De Agostini Press in Via della Zecca, No. 25, on the main floor of the Birago building. Here also was located the editorial office of *L'Armonia,* whose issue of February 8, 1853, carried the following article:

The Letture Cattoliche

With the last issue of *L'Armonia,* our subscribers received a booklet which serves as an introduction to the *Letture Cattoliche.*

This booklet and the prospectus previously distributed to our readers

give adequate information about a project launched by a group of generous Catholics. This project will require many sacrifices on their part, but it will also bring great benefits to the faithful in Piedmont, providing booklets, written in a simple, popular style, that deal exclusively with the Catholic Faith. A booklet of 108 pages will be published monthly at the yearly subscription rate of only Lire 1.80 for a total of 1,296 pages. This publication will be a non-profit operation whose deficit the publishers are prepared to absorb. We strongly urge our fellow citizens to support it. Subscriptions may be sent to our editorial office, to the Marietti Press, or to the Ormea Press.

However, some changes were made in the size and frequency of the booklets, as suggested by Bishop Moreno of Ivrea. The prelate wanted two booklets per month instead of one, but with less pages in order to stay within the agreed number of pages per year. The bishop had also made other suggestions about the subject matter, but since he apparently did not insist, Don Bosco used his discretion and did what he thought was best under the circumstances. The bishop's letter follows:

Ivrea, February 10, 1853

Last Monday I wrote to Father Valinotti, instructing him to inform you that several people have suggested publishing booklets of only 24 to 36 pages each but with greater frequency, at the same yearly rate. I also have another idea of my own which you may pass on to your colleagues. A number of subscribers are not overly fond of polemics and much prefer edifying readings. Could we also satisfy their taste and include some such readings in each issue? I have found that a 36-page issue of the *Letture Cattoliche* would be sufficient for the abridged lives of the Saints of that month, as the Oratorians [2] have done. If it should be thought desirable to add maxims of the Saints and practices in their honor, we could first publish the lives of the Saints of the first half of the month. Since this 36-page booklet would contain no other material, subscribers could bind the two booklets into one. Besides the lives of the Saints published by the above-mentioned congregation, there is also the *Diario Cristiano* [Christian Chronicle] published by Marietti two years ago, if I remember correctly. To lighten your burden and that of your colleagues, I could have the manuscript prepared here. Talk it over with them, and let me know what you think of this suggestion.

[2] Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. [Editor]

Father Valinotti will inform you about the very favorable responses I have received. Now we'll have to live up to them.

I beg you to spare neither labor nor diligence with respect to the forthcoming publication. I assume that you have already contacted Canon [Joseph] Zappata and that he has agreed to edit the manuscripts very carefully. I would like to forestall any unfavorable criticism.

As I have already told you, you can send me whatever needs to be examined without delay.

I remain, etc.

✠ Louis, *Bishop of Ivrea*

Don Bosco received this letter while he was busy proofreading the second edition of his *Storia Sacra* [Bible History] as though he had nothing else to do. In this edition he made only slight revisions. It was an improvement, however, on the previous one, although it still lacked a biblical map. One notable new feature was that the dialogue form had been replaced by a narrative style. Here we should also remark how attentive Don Bosco was lest some indelicate word slip through. In each new edition he always found some expression susceptible of a double meaning, although previously it had seemed quite irreproachable. His love of purity could not bear the least impropriety lest it taint the character of his boys. In the words of the Psalmist, his discreet writing was "like tried silver freed from dross, seven times refined." [Ps. 11, 7]

The casual observer who did not know Don Bosco but was aware of the mounting number of his publications probably assumed that Don Bosco had a great deal of free time, and unless he had read them, he would also be likely to believe that they lacked thoroughness. The fact is that Don Bosco never began to write for publication without first studying the best authorities in the field. Afterward, he would write on that subject in his own hand or would dictate it. He would then go over it carefully and enrich it with accurate quotations. He even proofread the galleys with the most scrupulous diligence.

To find the answer as to how he managed to accomplish so much, it would be helpful to take a comprehensive look at several years of his life. Wherever he might be, at home or on a journey, every instant of his time was pressed into service. At home, where his day was taken up with other tasks, he devoted part of the night to writ-

ing. On his frequent preaching tours he brought along notebooks, galley proofs, and a supply of pencils. In the stagecoach, he would write as long as there was light; when dusk came, he would climb onto the box beside the coachman and strike up a conversation with him, gradually progressing from small talk to spiritual matters. During stopovers to change horses or coach, he would sit on a parapet or at a table in the inn and resume his writing, unmindful of the hustle and bustle around him. When he traveled on foot, if he was alone he would pass the time by thinking about his projects, pausing now and then to jot down some notes. When going by train, he would tranquilly settle down in his seat as though he were in his own room, lay out his manuscripts at his side, and go over them at leisure. He did the same in the waiting rooms of railroad stations or in the rectories between sermons. Thus, almost imperceptibly he would complete a pamphlet or a book, to his great joy and surprise.

Occasionally it would happen that it was time to go to press with the next issue of the *Letture Cattoliche* and the copy was not ready. When night came, Don Bosco would sit down at his desk and write all through the night; around noon of the following day, he would bring the manuscript to the printers, either completed or nearly so. Work was not a chore to Don Bosco; it was a passion.

Incidentally, writing booklets did not interfere with Don Bosco's voluminous correspondence. It would be practically impossible to give a count of the pieces of mail he received or sent. In any twenty-four hour period he would write or jot down quick answers to some two hundred and fifty letters on a variety of matters. They were all permeated with his spirit; all of them clearly indicated his humility, kindness, unselfishness, love of justice, wisdom, uprightness, charity, and submission to the will of God. He received letters from all over the world, and we can safely assume that his letters, from a few to very many, went to nearly every city in Europe. This aspect of his life closely resembles what he himself had written of St. Vincent de Paul.[3] He never neglected to answer any letter, whether from a prelate, a prince, a nobleman, a religious, a workman, a housewife, or a child. Unfortunately, only a fraction of them—about fifteen

[3] *See* Vol. III, pp. 268-74. [Editor]

hundred—have been preserved, but those still extant comprise a precious treasure that enables us to know Don Bosco more completely. As our narrative progresses, we shall realize that Don Bosco's epistolary activity deserves a study of its own.[4]

Out of this prodigious activity of Don Bosco there emerges yet another of God's gifts to him besides his fantastic memory and his untiring, meditative mind—namely, the ability to simultaneously pursue widely different tasks without the slightest confusion. While hearing confessions for days on end, he would at the same time mentally prepare a new issue of the *Letture Cattoliche,* think over a sermon to be given, mull over some new project, and formulate replies to various letters, all without detriment to the matter immediately at hand. Once, on a Sunday in 1869, he remarked to Father [Joachim] Berto [his secretary]: "This morning, while preaching on church history, I mapped out an entire issue of the *Letture Cattoliche* and also figured out a solution to a certain need of this house." His vast and sound erudition was amazing. As he put his knowledge to good use, his undertakings matched the multiplicity of his ideas. He could write or dictate as many as ten letters simultaneously and, if interrupted, he could resume now the one, now the other, without ever jumbling his thoughts, his arguments, or the details, recalling perfectly what he had already said in each letter and what he wished to say next.

But his one dominant thought, overshadowing all others as the sun outshines the other stars, was the welfare of his boys. On his desk, among the pamphlets, letters, and plans, there lay a draft of the *Regulations of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales* which he had begun in 1852 and would eventually complete in 1854. As we already know, when Don Bosco started a hospice at the Oratory [in 1847] he laid down no rules other than those which regulate mutual relations in any family.[5] He drafted the first house rules for each dormitory five years later.[6] They dealt specifically with the moral and religious conduct of the pupils, as well as with the work

[4] A four-volume work containing a total of 2,845 letters by Don Bosco, gathered and briefly annotated by Father Eugene Ceria, S.D.B., has been published between 1955 and 1959 by the Società Editrice Internazionale of Torino (Italy) under the title *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco.* [Editor]

[5] *See* Vol. III, pp. 145f, 247-67. [Editor]

[6] *See* pp. 233f. [Editor]

habits that were expected of them. Afterward, whenever he noticed the necessity of preventing this or that disorder, Don Bosco would make a note of it. It was from such notes that there evolved the complete set of regulations for the Oratory; these were later revised, improved or amplified, as experience dictated, or dropped as obsolete. These regulations first went into effect at the start of the school year 1854-55. They were publicly read with great solemnity at the opening of the school year and a chapter was reread every Sunday to the pupils. They did not go into print, however, until after further revisions. In the Appendix we shall record the regulations of 1852 because they are a historical document reflecting the spirit of our admirable founder.[7]

The fear of God was the basis of these regulations. There was no reference to punishments of any kind. As the representative of God, Don Bosco ruled in His name. This was sufficient reason for the boys to shun evil and to strive to do good, besides the fact that Don Bosco's affectionate supervision made it easy for them to carry out their duties. On the other hand, Don Bosco trained his helpers to practice charity toward the pupils, not only by setting an example for them, but also with a booklet entitled *Il Sistema Preventivo nell'Educazione della Gioventù* [The Preventive System in the Education of Youth]. These regulations and this method of education which were so effective in guiding thousands of boys without recourse to harsh discipline stemmed from the Law of God. In ancient times, God had reproached the priests for ruling over His sheep harshly and brutally. [Ezek. 34, 4] It was not to be so any longer. Through His prophet God said: "I Myself will pasture My sheep; I Myself will give them rest. . . . The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal." [Ezek. 34, 15-16]

[7] *See* Appendix 16. [Editor]

CHAPTER 47

Don Bosco on the Education of the Young

BY now our readers should have formed a reasonably accurate idea of Don Bosco's educational method. It was not repressive, as was the common practice at that time, but rather preventive and thus more in accord with reason and religion. Our religion, in fact, stresses charity as the means to help us overcome pride and selfishness in order to become considerate, grateful, and respectful toward one another and spontaneously obedient to those who have the right and duty to command us. Charity even confers a certain grace upon those who are least educated because it excludes all fear.

Experience has shown us that an educator gets nowhere if his efforts are not prompted by true love. A child's first happiness is to know that he is loved. Responding to this love, he will believe what the teacher says and will share his teacher's likes and dislikes. Throughout his future adult life the child will cling to the truths and values that his teacher instilled in him and will often feel a strong inclination to follow in his footsteps, even when the teacher is a priest or a religious. Above all, the child will love him as the father of his soul.

In Don Bosco's time the "Preventive System" had become a necessity. The aspirations of the people for a more democratic form of government and the sympathetic response of rulers to such hopes had created a climate wherein the young felt the need for a more affectionate and paternal attitude on the part of their superiors. The harsh and repressive educational method of past times would not only have been anachronistic, but would also have caused two very great evils. First, it would have driven the boys from the Ora-

tory; they had come there of their own free will and they were equally free to leave whenever they wished. Secondly, it would have convinced the boys that priests were true tyrants, the enemies of freedom and of the people that the anticlerical press and the theater alleged them to be.

Through his pedagogical system Don Bosco succeeded in preventing such vicious nonsense from affecting his boys, and to such an extent that their ever increasing number made it necessary to open other oratories. When some spiteful anticlericals maligned priests in the presence of any of these boys, they, mindful of Don Bosco's goodness, would quickly and effectively refute such slanderers. This they did frequently with fellow workers who were in the habit of disparaging priests. Some of these boys recall that the anticlericals, not knowing what else to say, would mutter: "If all priests were like your Don Bosco, you'd be right; but they're not." However, the boys knew better. Father [John] Borel, Father Chiaves, Father [Hyacinth] Carpano, Father [Robert] Murialdo, Father [John] Vola, Father [Francis] Marengo, and many other exemplary priests who helped Don Bosco and tried to imitate him in his love for boys and be like fathers to street urchins were no strangers to them. Thus the boys stuck to their convictions and contemptuously dismissed these anticlerical slanders, remaining devoted and loyal to their Church and her ministers whom they always greatly respected and revered. It is no vain boast to say that this was the result of the education given them by Don Bosco and his patient co-workers.

Don Bosco found this system so effective in ensuring the spiritual welfare of the boys that he fostered its practice among all his co-workers, and he discussed the merits of the system several times with Canon Eugene Galletti of Corpus Domini Church. Eventually, he wrote a short treatise on the repressive and the preventive systems of educating, giving reasons why the latter should be preferred to the former and demonstrating its application and its great advantages. This treatise was ultimately incorporated into the *Regulations for Salesian Houses*. We believe our readers will appreciate its inclusion here for their information and guidance.

There are two systems which have always been used in the education of youth: the preventive and the repressive. The "Repressive System" consists in making the laws known to the subjects and then watching to

discover the transgressors and inflicting, when necessary, the deserved punishment. In this system the words and looks of the superior must always be severe and rather menacing, and he himself must avoid all familiarity with his dependents.

In order to lend weight to his authority, the director must rarely be found among his subjects and as a rule only when it is a question of punishing or threatening. This system is easy, less bothersome, and is suitable especially in the army and in general among mature and judicious persons who ought of themselves to know and to remember what the laws and other prescriptions demand.

Different, and I might add, opposed to this is the "Preventive System." It consists in making the rules and regulations of an institute known, and then in being vigilant so that the pupils may always be under the watchful eye of the director and the assistants who, like loving fathers, talk with them, guide them in any difficulty, and give them advice and correction in a kind manner. In other words, this system places the pupils in the [moral] impossibility of committing faults.

This system is based entirely on reason, religion, and kindness. Therefore, it excludes all violent punishment and seeks to do away with even slight punishments. This system seems preferable for the following reasons:

1. The pupil, having been advised beforehand, does not become dejected by the faults he has committed, as happens when these faults are brought to the notice of the superior. Nor is he irritated by the correction he receives or by the punishment which is threatened or inflicted, because it is always accompanied by a friendly counsel that serves to guide him, appeals to his reason, and generally wins over his heart, so that he realizes the necessity of the punishment and almost desires it.

2. The primary reason for this system is the inconstancy of youth, who in a moment forget the rules of discipline and the punishments which they threaten. Thus a boy often becomes culpable and deserving of punishment which he had no thought of and did not remember at all when committing the fault. He certainly would have avoided it, had a friendly voice warned him.

3. The "Repressive System" may stop a disorder, but only with difficulty will it make the offenders better. Experience teaches that the young do not forget the punishments they have received and often foster bitter feelings with the desire of throwing off the yoke and even of revenging themselves. It sometimes appears that they do not mind these punishments, but one who follows them in their future life knows that the reminiscences of youth are terrible and that they easily forget the punish-

ments of their parents, but with great difficulty those of their educators. There are cases of some who in later years have taken brutal revenge for certain punishments justly deserved during the time of their education. The "Preventive System," on the contrary, makes a friend of the pupil, who recognizes the assistant as a benefactor that advises him, wishes to make him good and save him from trouble, punishment, and dishonor.

4. The "Preventive System" enables the pupil to take advice in such a manner that the educator can always speak to him in the language of the heart, not only during the time of his education, but even afterward. Having gained the heart of his pupil, the educator can exercise a great influence over him, warn him, counsel him, and also correct him, even when he will be employed in various professions, in civil positions, or in business. For these and many other reasons it seems that the "Preventive System" should be followed rather than the "Repressive."

The practice of this system is based entirely on these words of St. Paul: "Charity is patient, is kind . . . bears with all things, hopes all things, endures all things" [1 Cor. 13, 4. 7], as well as upon these other words addressed to parents: "Fathers, do not provoke your sons to anger, lest they lose courage." Hence only a Christian can apply the "Preventive System" with success. Reason and religion are the means which the educator ought constantly to employ, teach, and practice himself if he wishes to be obeyed and attain his end.

The main rules for applying this system are as follows:

1. The director must be dedicated wholly to the boys entrusted to him and never accept engagements which keep him away from his duties. Rather, he ought to be always with his pupils whenever they are not engaged in some particular occupation, unless they are properly assisted by others.

2. Teachers, craftsmasters, and assistants must be of acknowledged morality. They shall strive to avoid as a plague every kind of special affection or particular friendship for their pupils, and they shall remember that the wrongdoing of one may compromise an educational institute. Care should be taken that the pupils are never alone. As far as possible the assistants shall precede them to the place where they are to assemble. They shall remain with them until they are assisted by others. They shall never leave them unoccupied.

3. Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run, and shout as much as they please. Calisthenics, music, declamation, dramatics, and outings

are most effective means of obtaining discipline and promoting morality and health. But care must be taken that the entertainment, the persons who take part in it, and the words used be beyond reproach. "Do whatever you like," the great friend of youth, St. Philip Neri, used to say, "provided that you do not sin."

4. Frequent confession and Communion and daily Mass are the pillars which ought to support a system of education from which we wish to banish threats and the whip. Never oblige the boys to frequent the holy sacraments; but only encourage them and give them every opportunity to avail themselves of them. On the occasion of spiritual retreats, triduums, novenas, sermons, and catechism classes, bring out the beauty, the grandeur, and the holiness of that religion which offers in these holy sacraments means which are so easy and so useful for civil society, the attainment of peace of heart, and the salvation of one's soul. Thus the boys will readily come to desire these practices of piety and approach them willingly, with pleasure, and with fruit.

5. The greatest vigilance shall be exercised to prevent dangerous companions, bad books, or persons who indulge in bad conversation from entering the institute. A good doorkeeper is a treasure for a house of education.

6. Every evening after the usual prayers, before the pupils go to bed, the director, or someone in his stead, shall address a few kind words in public, giving advice or counsel about things to be done or to be avoided. He shall try to draw useful lessons from events which have happened during the day in the institute or outside. But his talk shall never be longer than two or three minutes. This is the key to morality, to the good running of the institute, and to success in education.

7. Avoid as a plague the opinion of those who would defer First Holy Communion to a rather advanced age when, very often, the devil has already gained possession of the boy's heart, with incalculable harm to his innocence. According to the discipline of the early Church, it was the custom to give little children the consecrated Hosts which remained after Communion. This serves to show us how much the Church desires that children be admitted to Holy Communion at an early age. When a boy can distinguish between Bread and bread and shows sufficient knowledge, give no further thought to his age, and let the Heavenly King come to reign in that happy soul.

8. All catechisms recommend frequent Communion. St. Philip Neri counseled that it be received every eight days and even more often. The Council of Trent clearly states that it greatly desires every faithful Christian to receive Holy Communion whenever he assists at Holy Mass.

This Communion, however, should not only be spiritual, but also sacramental, so that greater fruit may be gathered from this august and Divine Sacrifice. [Council of Trent, Session 22, Chapter 6]

The merits of such a method of education should be obvious to any judicious person. Yet Don Bosco, for the sake of emphasis, elaborates on this point:

Some will say that this system is difficult in practice. I reply that for the pupils it is much easier, more satisfactory, and more advantageous. To educators it does present some difficulties; however, these are lessened if the educator applies himself to his task with zeal. An educator is one who is dedicated to the welfare of his pupils and therefore ought to be ready to face every difficulty and every fatigue in order to attain his end, which is the civil, moral, and intellectual education of his pupils.

In addition to the advantages mentioned above, the following may be added:

1. The pupil will always be respectful toward his educators and will ever remember with pleasure the guidance he received. He will always consider his teachers and other superiors as fathers and brothers.

2. Whatever may be the character, disposition, and moral state of a pupil at the time of his acceptance, the parents can rest assured that their son will not become worse, and it can be held as certain that some improvement will always be made. Furthermore, certain boys who for a long time had been the scourge of their parents and had even been refused admittance to houses of correction, when trained according to these principles, have changed their disposition and character, have begun to live upright lives, presently occupy honorable positions in society, and thus have become the support of their families and a credit to the place where they live.

3. If it should happen that pupils who have contracted bad habits enter the institute, they would not be able to do any harm to their companions. Neither would the good boys derive any evil from them; there would be neither time nor place nor opportunity for it, since they are always under friendly supervision and protection.

Don Bosco concluded his little treatise with some reflection on punishment.

What rule should be followed in inflicting punishments? *If possible, never make use of punishments.* When necessity demands punishment, let the following be borne in mind:

1. Let the educator strive to make himself loved by his pupils if he wishes to make himself feared by them. When he succeeds in this, the omission of a token of kindness is a punishment which fosters emulation, gives courage, and never degrades.

2. With the young, punishment is whatever is meant as punishment. It is known that a stern look is more effective than a blow. Praise of what is well done and blame for culpable neglect are already a great reward or punishment.

3. Except in *very rare cases,* corrections and punishments are never to be given in public, but privately and apart from companions, and the greatest prudence and patience are to be used so that the pupil may realize his fault by the aid of reason and religion.

4. Name-calling, striking one in any way, making him kneel in a painful position, pulling his ears, and other similar punishments must be absolutely avoided, because they are forbidden by the civil laws, greatly irritate the boys, and degrade the educator.

5. The director shall see that the rules, as well as the rewards and punishments established by the rules of discipline are well known so that a pupil cannot excuse himself by saying that he did not know that a thing was commanded or forbidden.

6. Before inflicting any punishment whatsoever, the teacher must first find out how guilty the boy is. Where an admonition suffices, a reprimand should not be given; when a reprimand will do, no further action should be taken.

7. Punishment should never be administered when one is upset, or when the faults are due to thoughtlessness; neither should they be administered too frequently.

Thus reads the treatise of Don Bosco. This system which he himself followed and instructed his co-workers to adopt from the very beginning of the festive oratory and of the attached hospice is still in effect today in all the Salesian houses. It is an established fact that our houses prosper and do a greater amount of good in proportion as this system is better known and more faithfully applied.

In his talks to his co-workers Don Bosco used to dwell at length on the principles of this educational system. He often recalled the words of St. Francis de Sales: "More flies are caught by a spoonful of honey than by a barrel of vinegar." It grieved him whenever any of his helpers dealt harshly with the boys or with subordinates; his policy was to win them all by kindness. He constantly reminded

teachers and assistants: "Remember that boys break rules more through thoughtlessness than through malice, more through lack of proper supervision than through evil intent. Constantly look after them, discreetly keep an eye on them, take part in their games, and put up with their noisemaking and the unavoidable inconvenience that they cause you. Even under such circumstances, we should be mindful of Our Savior's words: 'Let the little children come to Me!' " [Mark 10, 13] In this regard he set the example by watching over them wherever they were. Frequently he visited them at study or at work. He would notice even the least infraction and promptly apply a remedy. He often conferred with other superiors about the boys' conduct and the best measures to be taken to maintain order and discipline. He introduced the custom of giving each pupil weekly marks for conduct and for diligence. He himself read them aloud to the assembled boys on Sunday evening, adding some words of praise for the better boys and of admonition for those who had not behaved too well.

Don Bosco was convinced that boys could usually be brought to recognize their faults and amend them if they could think things over. Therefore, he never tired of admonishing them and exhorting them with a truly heroic patience. If his fellow priests had some misgivings about accepting a boy, Don Bosco's suggestion was to also follow St. Paul's advice in this case: "Test all things; hold fast that which is good." [1 Thess. 5, 21] This was the end to which vigilance and proper advice were directed. If, at the beginning of the school year, he suspected that some new boy might have a bad influence on his companions, he would call the newcomer to him, and after admonishing him with a heavy heart, he would have him watched. Thus he was able to set right many boys who, as innocent victims of bad example, already were indulging in foul talk.

We find it difficult to describe Don Bosco's amazing talent in winning the hearts of boys and leading them to God. His natural and supernatural gifts were such that, in most cases, it was enough for him to whisper confidentially into a boy's ear for the boy to accept his fatherly advice or admonition, no matter how mischievous or rebellious he might be.

Don Bosco would have sacrificed his life a hundred times, if need be, for the salvation of souls. This explains why his words were so

effective and went straight to the boys' hearts. He frequently stressed to them that they should be sincere with their superiors in regard to spiritual matters. He pointed out the advantages of sincerity, calling it the key to inner peace, the most effective weapon against gloom, the surest secret for a happy life and a peaceful death, and the best means for advancing in perfection. All his exhortations had the purpose of preventing sin, or banishing it and its evil effects from the boys' souls.

He often used to say to his co-workers: "We must do all we can to keep this house free of sin; unless our boys regain the state of grace nothing will go well." Often he would add: "Remember that good confessions and good Communions are the first steps to a sound education." Frequent Holy Communion was the mainstay of Don Bosco's mission among the young. He saw to it that his pupils could approach the sacraments regularly, indeed very frequently. He himself exhorted them and had others exhort them, but he never permitted them to be pressured. Although he was available for confessions every morning, and nearly all wished to go to him—so much so that he could not satisfy them all—he nevertheless wanted other outside confessors to be on hand, especially on the eve of holy days and also on the feast day itself. He never made any remark, nor permitted others to remark, on whether anyone went to confession to him or to other priests. Many years later he gave this norm to one of his priests: "Be careful never to be partial to anyone because he goes to this or that confessor." Likewise, on days of general Communion, he never permitted the practice of having the boys file out to the altar rail pew by pew lest those who did not want to receive might feel constrained to do so to avoid attracting attention. In such a case his preference was for freedom, even if there was some attendant confusion in the process. Communions on ordinary weekdays were indeed so numerous that they resembled a general Communion; visitors more than once wondered whether some special feast was being observed.

Don Bosco did such a vast amount of good through the sacrament of Penance that we should rightly call him "the apostle of confession." He inspired such peace of soul and trust in God's infinite mercy that many boys found it difficult to accustom themselves to another confessor once they left the Oratory for good. To

strengthen his penitents' trust in their eternal salvation, he used to stress to them St. Philip Neri's maxim: "Sin and gloom, away from my room." Frequent reception of the sacraments gave his boys the strength to follow the path of obedience serenely and joyfully. A zestful, free, and easy manner, a lively participation in games, a fervent piety, a great love of purity, and a persevering diligence were characteristic traits of Oratory life. A large number of boys, true models to their companions, were a living demonstration of these traits. Hundreds of alumni, both priests and laymen, have declared that they could not recall any serious breach of conduct during their stay at the Oratory.

Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio wrote: "Don Bosco was able to instill in us a sound, deep, and fervent piety by his example, his sermons, and his exhortations to receive the sacraments frequently—a novelty in those days; his talks and his vivid edifying tales and stories were an effective brake to wrongdoing and a spur to doing good. They also accounted for our cheerfulness and contentment, the good order that reigned in the house, and our progress at study and work. Moreover, with the right word, hint, or look, he dispelled any gloomy thought or worry we might have, filled us with joy, and spurred us on to be virtuous, self-sacrificing, and obedient."

How we loved to hear him repeat expressions which were so familiar to him and which, as he uttered them, made his countenance radiate the faith that was in his heart:

"How good the Lord is never to let us want for anything! Let us serve Him with all our heart!"

"Let us love God; let us love Him because He is our Father."

"Everything shall pass; whatever is not eternal is nothing!"

Evidently the system of education that Don Bosco chose was a loving kindness wisely and gently applied to the needs of the young. We shall have occasion to refer to it again. How beneficial such a system would be if it were adopted in all Christian families and in public and private schools for boys and girls alike! How much easier it would be for young people to grow upright! A remedy would always be at hand at the first symptom of evil, protecting pure and innocent children against the bad example of corrupt companions. Then our youth would grow up high-principled and religious-minded, a credit to their families and a solid

bulwark for civil society. Many foreign educators, especially those from England, took this view of Don Bosco's method. After his death, many boarding schools for needy Catholic children in England took the Turin Oratory and its regulations as a model. Their founders studied Don Bosco's life and his effective educational system, and by following his example they vastly increased the number of ecclesiastical vocations. Today Don Bosco's portrait occupies a place of honor in such institutes, as well as in seminaries.

Don Bosco had imitators even among Protestants. On June 12, 1903, Father Juvenal Bonavia [1] wrote to us from London:

I enclose two non-Catholic periodicals which contain remarks on Don Bosco; these are publications of the Anglican High Church. The writer of the articles, Norman Potter, is, I believe, the same person whose acquaintance one of our priests made some months ago. He is the director of a hospice for boys not very far from us. In his reception room there hangs a portrait of Don Bosco with his motto: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* [Give me souls; away with the rest]. This gentleman has traveled in Italy and visited several of our houses there, including the Oratory in Turin. He imitates Don Bosco in every way he can. I believe that he even reads the *Bollettino Salesiano.*

In these two articles he gives a biographical sketch of Don Bosco's life. The first, published in 1900 in [the periodical] *Goodwill,* is the shorter of the two, and includes a picture of Don Bosco. The second, published this year in *Commonwealth,* is lengthier, and also contains an outline of the "Preventive System" taken from the regulations of our houses. Where mention is made of frequent confession and Communion and of daily Mass, he uses the word "Eucharist" instead of "Mass," perhaps because this word may jar many ears, even Anglican ones. He concludes both articles with the hope that the Lord may raise men with Don Bosco's spirit also here in England, where the need is so great.[2]

[1] Born in 1865, he entered the Oratory in October 1878. Three years later, he received the clerical habit from Don Bosco himself. He made his perpetual vows in the Salesian Society on October 7, 1882. After his ordination to the priesthood on May 26, 1888, he was assigned to the newly opened Salesian house at Battersea, London. He died there on January 23, 1904. [Editor]

[2] These two articles did not appear in the original Italian edition of the Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco. They are now available for the first time. *See* Appendix 17. [Editor]

CHAPTER 48

Don Bosco on Punishments

FATHER Ascanio Savio once made this observation: "Don Bosco so succeeded in controlling his fiery temperament that he seemed almost without passion. He habitually granted his pupils' requests if such were not prejudicial to their spiritual welfare. He made it a policy not to inflict punishments if at all possible, but when necessary he knew when and how to punish. He was eminently just, but since charity and gentleness guided his zeal, he punished only after preventive means had proved ineffective. He was always calm when he had to reprimand, for he adhered to the maxim: "The Lord is not in the wind" [3 Kings 19, 11]—that is, in passion. Likewise, he always reprimanded privately.

"I do not recall," said Joseph Buzzetti, "that Don Bosco ever reproved anyone unjustly. Whenever he corrected any of us, we always had to admit that Don Bosco was right."

A very effective punishment that he always resorted to first was to act somewhat coldly toward those boys who disobeyed or deliberately transgressed a rule or belittled warnings or admonitions. For example, he would exclude them from certain tokens of benevolence usually extended to the better-behaved boys, such as not favoring them with a friendly glance, or even pretending not to see them. Likewise, if they tried to pay him the customary mark of respect by kissing his priestly hand, he would quickly withdraw it, while smilingly letting others do so; if they greeted him, he would ignore their greeting. If the fault that prompted this deliberate coldness was not generally known, Don Bosco acted in such a way that only the culprit would notice it. The boys feared this cold-shoulder treatment more than anything else. Many would be so upset that

they would burst into tears and be miserable for hours or even throughout the night.

Once during the summer season (at which time Don Bosco took the boys on outings through the countryside) John Baptist Francesia had an older lad in his makeshift dormitory. The boy was shivering, biting his sheet, and sobbing.

"What's the matter?" Francesia asked him.

"Don Bosco looked at me!"

"What's so strange about that?"

"It's the way he did it!"

His sobbing continued intermittently throughout the night. The next morning Francesia, after telling Don Bosco about it, asked: "What could be the matter with him?"

"Oh, he knows!" Don Bosco replied.

One day Don Bosco spoke rather severely to a boy who had been disobedient. The lad withdrew pensively. That night he became feverish and went into a delirium that lasted until the evening of the following day. Between moans he kept lamenting: "Don Bosco doesn't like me anymore!" To comfort him Don Bosco had to visit him in the infirmary. At the sound of his voice the boy gradually calmed down. Don Bosco then assured him that they were still friends and would always be friends and that therefore he should get well quickly. At these words the boy was overjoyed and he quickly recovered. He was a little proud, but still quite unspoiled, and thus he remained always.

With very many of the boys, Don Bosco had to be very careful in dosing out reprimands. Very often faults which looked somewhat serious were not so in the intention of the offender who had acted thoughtlessly. Some boys were utterly distressed at the mere thought that perhaps they had seriously displeased Don Bosco. On the other hand, Don Bosco had to be alert in acknowledging their acts of deference or affection lest his oversight might lead them to think that they had in some way displeased him. Even though the boys might feel that they had not done anything wrong, they still would worry.

Most boys who deserved the cold-shoulder treatment invariably improved their conduct immediately. As soon as the culprit was chastened and promised to mend his ways, Don Bosco instantly

resumed his friendly way with him. It goes without saying that his concern for the boy had never ceased; in fact it was this concern that had inspired him to act coldly.

However, if a boy did not respond to this fatherly solicitude and persisted in his faults, Don Bosco was uncompromising; he allowed him to be slightly punished, privately if his transgression had been secret, in public and more drastically—although such occasions were rare—if the fault was serious enough to warrant it. In these cases, though, he never inflicted the punishment himself, but left it to the other superiors, reserving to himself the right of mitigating it in order to win over the boy's heart and thus be able to help him all the more. But he strictly forbade striking the boys, depriving them of sufficient food, punishing them in a humiliating or irritating manner, or insulting them. Indeed, he prescribed the greatest kindness in such situations, saying: "Do not humiliate them; rather, lead them to humiliate themselves."

Punishments generally consisted in giving a smaller portion of food to the lazy ones, in confining the disobedient ones to a certain spot in the playground during recreation periods and isolating them from their companions, and in forcing those who had left the premises without permission to eat their meals standing outside the dining room door. Such punishments were not very serious, but Don Bosco made them look serious and thus very effective.

He also instructed his teachers and assistants to mete out punishment gradually according to the transgression and within certain limits. "When you really must punish a boy," he used to tell them, "first, make him eat his meals standing at his place. If he remains stubborn, do not let him into the dining room until after the others are through; if further punishment is necessary, make him eat at a separate table in the middle of the dining room. However, do not deprive him of the main course except as a last measure, and then only rarely. In such cases tell the boy privately not to partake of it, even though it will be served to him. Generally, boys appreciate this face-saving gesture and will obey."

But even in such instances, Don Bosco, after admonishing the culprit, would usually suspend the punishment if the transgression had not been very serious and the pupil was sincerely contrite. However, he would not do so if the offender resorted to subterfuge or

lies or if he was slow in mending his conduct. But as soon as the lad repented, Don Bosco would comfort him and let bygones be bygones, a policy which he recommended to all superiors.

Despite his innate leniency, Don Bosco, in very exceptional cases, would abide by the dictum: "He who spares the rod hates his son" [Prov. 13, 24]; however, even then he took this measure only because it was just and spiritually beneficial and not prompted by anger.

Don Bosco considered the type of disobedience that bordered on rebellion as a most serious offense. One day one of the older boys publicly, obstinately, and even insolently refused to obey courteous and patient requests and exhortations and even explicit repeated orders. It was a case when Don Bosco clearly could not and should not yield. He could not permit such a scandal, but at the same time he grieved at the thought of hurting the boy by expulsion. After a moment of concentration and prayer, he slapped the boy's face. It was like a bolt out of the blue. The boys were horrified by the culprit's effrontery. Never had they seen Don Bosco do anything like that! Don Bosco, meanwhile, covered his face with both hands; the boy, stunned and hanging his head in shame, obeyed instantly and thereafter became one of the best-behaved pupils in the Oratory. Recalling this incident many years later, Don Bosco remarked: "It worked, but I would never suggest trying it."

Don Bosco also found it difficult to keep calm when he heard blasphemies that seemed inspired by Satan. Bishop Cagliero stated to us in writing: "One Sunday evening a nasty little brat uttered a vile blasphemy in front of Don Bosco out of sheer spite. Don Bosco, no longer his usual calm and gentle self, slapped him a few times in holy indignation, saying 'That's for your blasphemy, you whippersnapper. You'd better not do it again or you'll get far worse from God in due time.' I do not recall any other occasion that Don Bosco acted in this way either at the Oratory or elsewhere."

"Around the time I first began boarding at the Oratory," Father Michael Rua declared, "I saw him rap some snippy youngsters who had blasphemed. His face reflected all the horror he felt at such monstrous utterances. One day he told me: 'Even when I hear confessions, if a penitent accuses himself of having blasphemed, my heart sinks and I almost faint.' Aside from that, I must say that

throughout the thirty and more years I knew Don Bosco, I never saw him even perturbed. His virtues were truly remarkable, especially his self-restraint and fortitude."

Until now we have dwelt on individual punishments. What did Don Bosco do to restore order and punish offenders when an entire class or a large part of the student body was guilty of some misconduct? Let us first make it clear that at the Oratory nothing ever happened even remotely smacking of mass insubordination as has happened at some boarding schools. At worst, these group transgressions were nothing more than acts of thoughtlessness, but they nevertheless had to be stopped at the source—*principiis obsta* [as Ovid tells us].

In such cases Don Bosco, after listening attentively to the complaints of his assistants, would investigate the underlying causes of the disturbance. He would also urge the superiors to be just and impartial, to be careful not to allow their emotions to sway them one way or another, and above all to shun corporal punishments. He vetoed collective punishments, even if they affected only one dormitory, to avoid antagonizing those who were innocent. In such cases, he would take the matter into his own hands. The boys' offenses usually consisted in being negligent in their studies, talkative during periods of silence, quick-tempered, or heedless of admonitions.

In such instances Don Bosco resorted to a very effective means. He would begin by showing himself a little reserved and pensive while in their midst; he would deprive them of some interesting story he had already promised and to which they had been eagerly looking forward. More than once at night prayers, after mounting the rostrum for the "Good Night," instead of addressing his usual brief exhortation he would look about him gravely, and with that countenance which the boys always found so irresistible, he would comment: "I'm not satisfied with you!" Then, without allowing them to kiss his hand [a customary mark of respect to a priest] he would slowly walk away toward the stairs leading to his room without saying another word. Stifled sobs could be heard while tears ran down many faces as all went to bed sorrowful and pensive. To them, offending Don Bosco was the same as offending God. This demeanor of Don Bosco sufficed to restore perfect order in the

Oratory. Afterward, when he reappeared smiling again, the boys would be completely happy.

Don Bosco readily forgave repentant boys for violations of discipline, charity, obedience, and respect to superiors. He was lenient, patient, and hopeful even with those who were unruly unless they were a bad influence on others, but he was inflexible with those who stole or were gravely irreverent or immoral in speech or conduct. He simply could not tolerate such offenses against God. Yet even in these cases he was not hasty; he never took action without first hearing both sides. In most instances he did not need to resort to painful decisions because those who were deaf to the voice of conscience, to the fatherly admonitions of Don Bosco and the other superiors, or to the condemnation of their own peers generally left the Oratory of their own accord.

When the conduct of a boy aroused some fairly well-grounded suspicion, but only that, Don Bosco calmly looked for ways to ward off the feared evil. Among the many boys entering the Oratory, there would unavoidably be some who were corrupt, worldly-minded, unbridled, pleasure-loving, little inclined to piety, slothful, and even morally dangerous. The system that Don Bosco applied to such boys and constantly recommended to his directors was to try every means to reform them before considering expulsion. His first step was to isolate them from the younger and more naive boys and from those of similar bent or weak character and to surround them with dependable and sincere companions. The next step was to admonish them whenever they committed some fault. If staff members complained about the misconduct of some boy, Don Bosco's stock reply was: "Talk to them! Warn them! If they do wrong, send for them, even every day, even several times a day if necessary. Be kind but firm in demanding that they do their duty. If you do this, they will either change their conduct or they will get so tired of being admonished that they will leave the house of their own accord and spare us the trouble of taking severe measures against them. I consider it very important that no boy leave the Oratory with bitter feelings. Later in life they will know better, remember our kindness, and mend their ways. Recalling our admonitions and benevolence, they will realize that we were real friends to them. If, after many years of neglect of their spiritual duties, they should

decide to make a good confession, they will often do so in this very Oratory where they spent their boyhood. They will return here because they know that the decision to leave had been theirs, not ours. If, instead, the superior had hastily taken severe measures against them, the bitterness he could have kindled in some of them would sooner or later have borne dire consequences, and all the more so if a superior, in a moment of rage, might have struck them!"

If, however, some boys formed a clique which was potentially harmful unless promptly dissolved and clung to it even after Don Bosco had individually told them to break it up, he would resort to another means. He would call them all together to his room. After making them wait awhile outside to give them time to think, he would talk to them with his usual kindness: "I had others warn you and I have warned you myself. I hear this and that about you; am I to believe it? Why do you want to give me so much trouble? Why do you want to force me to take some very unpleasant step? Why don't you yourselves give me a chance to help you? You say that you are doing nothing bad! Is disobedience something good, then? Why don't you obey for once? Break it up! Steer clear of each other! Don't talk anymore about certain things. Do it for my sake. This is my last warning. Do something about it or, regretfully, I shall be forced to send you away. That's what's going to happen if you don't want to cooperate. Then you will be really sorry!" Occasionally, he spoke to them even more severely. In general, this approach succeeded, as he himself told us.

If someone gave scandal, Don Bosco would be fired with holy zeal. Whereas he was always calm and serene in the face of any material mishap, such news instantly saddened him. "Oh, what a disaster, what a disaster!" he would exclaim. Then quietly he would set about repairing the harm done, saying: "I prayed so fervently that this might never occur! May God's will be done in good and in evil!" Then he would act exactly as he had several times publicly said he would. "Look," he used to say to the boys, "Don Bosco is the most lenient man on earth, but, for heaven's sake, do not give scandal; if you lead a soul to evil, then Don Bosco will be inexorable!" Indeed, when he was certain that someone had given scandal, he would immediately dismiss him and his accomplices.

Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi told us how he still remembered a short talk that Don Bosco gave one evening when the canon was a boy at the Oratory. It was about an elderly man to whom Don Bosco had given hospitality in the Oratory and who had for a long time given every indication of being quite upright. But when it became evident that he was actually a wolf in lamb's clothing, Don Bosco made him leave the Oratory immediately. Since the matter had transpired, he prudently commented on the great harm done by scandal, but in so doing he could not hold back his tears.

Sometimes, when compelling circumstances made him suspend a decision, he would give one last warning to the offender and, if necessary, isolate him completely from the other boys and have him watched. If the boy fell back into his old habits, Don Bosco expelled him, regardless of the consequences. Once, when he discovered that a pupil was secretly in possession of some rather suggestive books, he sent for him and, after reprimanding him, ordered him to hand them over. When the fault was repeated, Don Bosco unhesitatingly expelled him, even though the boy was quite gifted.

Don Bosco had deep consideration and compassion for a victim of scandal. The thought that such a boy, if sent home, might do even worse things and perhaps give up the practice of his faith and lose his soul prompted Don Bosco to make any sacrifice to keep him at the Oratory. However, if he could not succeed in reforming him, he would dismiss him without further effort. "One bad apple can spoil a whole barrel of good ones and must be thrown away," he would say.

He was always eminently prudent in such delicate situations. Father Leonard Murialdo once asked him how he dealt with serious offenses against morals. Don Bosco replied: "In such instances, I send for the guilty boy and tell him that he is obliging me to speak of that which St. Paul says had best not be mentioned. Then I point out the gravity of his sin. If his presence is harmful to the rest of the boys, I quietly send him home. I do not inflict any punishment so that I may avoid yet greater evils, such as the conjectures it would naturally cause."

He was also careful to protect the reputation of the culprits. Now and then, someone would disappear from the Oratory without anyone—not even the clerics—paying any attention to it. No one

had any inkling as to the true reason for the departure, and it was generally shrugged off as being due to family circumstances or illness. When he had to take this sad step, Don Bosco could hardly hold back his tears, and he would always give the culprit a last admonition: "Remember that you have only one soul; if you save it, everything is safe; if you lose it, everything is lost forever!"

We shall close this chapter by quoting Bishop Cagliero. "I constantly noticed," he wrote, "that those boys who had been justly expelled never lost their great love for Don Bosco. They continued to look upon him as a father and benefactor and remained ever grateful to him."

CHAPTER 49

Publication of the Letture Cattoliche

DON BOSCO'S solicitude for Valdocco's boarders was not at the expense of its festive oratory boys. Nothing kept him from mingling with them and with urchins, street Arabs, and the poorest of the poor. He liked to be with boys, and the Lord's words were on his lips whenever he encountered them, not only in the Oratory but also in town. Father [Michael] Rua recalled: "Through the years I often accompanied him to town. As soon as youngsters spotted him, they ran to kiss his hand and ask for medals, usually surrounding him on all sides. When passers-by, intrigued by the sight, would linger to listen, Don Bosco would seize the opportunity and give a timely exhortation. At other times, meeting a group of boys at play, he would join in their games; minutes later, however, they would be standing around him, listening silently and attentively to his salutary advice." This object lesson inflamed the zeal of his young catechists, among whom was John Cagliero. As a young boy and later as a cleric, he was soon to test his apostolic mettle at Valdocco and the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories.

The feast of St. Francis de Sales had been marked by the usual large number of Communions. However, Don Bosco was deeply grieved at the absence of Father Michelangelo Chiatellino. In writing to him at the request of Don Bosco, Felix Reviglio, after conveying the greetings of Don Bosco, the cleric Danussi, Mamma Margaret, and the rest of the house, ended his letter with these words: "Let me put it in a nutshell: we were all greatly chagrined [at your absence]; you disappointed most of us."

As Lent drew near—in 1853 Ash Wednesday fell on February 9—Don Bosco prepared the boys for Lenten catechism instruction

by sanctifying the last days of carnival. During these days he sent Rua and other clerics to scour the neighborhood for boys and entice them to church with small gifts.

The festive oratory which most needed support was that of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova; it was the closest to the Waldensians and lacked vigorous direction. Father Peter Ponte had been succeeded by Father Felix Rossi, a zealous but sickly priest. Hence for a number of years, notwithstanding his load of confessions at Valdocco, Don Bosco willingly took on more at the St. Aloysius Oratory. Father Leonard Murialdo told us: "I remember that when we were preparing the boys for their Easter duty, we used to gather a number of them at the St. Aloysius Oratory and then march them across town to Valdocco for confession. They were mostly older boys, generally unruly and difficult, but Don Bosco had a special gift for attracting them to the sacraments and helping even the worst of them." Besides, he did not forget to visit them at their Oratory at Porta Nuova; he likewise called on the boys at Borgo Vanchiglia. Sometimes he would send word of his coming a week in advance, and his arrival always called for a celebration.

At the beginning of March of that year [1853]—while Don Bosco was busy conducting catechism classes—the first issue of *Letture Cattoliche* made its appearance. Printed by the De Agostini Press, it was entitled *The Well-Instructed Catholic: A Father's Timely Talks to His Children.* In these "talks" Attorney Louis Gallo of Genoa, a close friend of Don Bosco, assumed the role of a father. The book, divided into six parts and totaling 452 pages, was a complete treatise on the true Faith. Written in a popular style, it refuted the errors, impieties, and contradictions of the Waldensians, exposed their bad faith and sacrilegious alterations of biblical texts, and also described the unedifying lives of the leaders of the Reformation. But here Don Bosco was careful to point out that certain expressions which perhaps sounded too forceful to some readers actually referred only to the writings of these heretics and not to them as individuals. His treatise ended with a warm exhortation to Protestant ministers to heed the tremendous responsibility they were taking upon themselves before God by wresting sheep from His fold. He addressed them as follows:

I appeal to you as a brother who loves you, and loves you more than you believe, as a brother who is willing to sacrifice himself and all he has for your salvation. In fear and trembling for the salvation of your souls and those of your disciples, I raise my eyes and hands to heaven and invite you and all the faithful to pray to our merciful God. May He enlighten you with His heavenly grace so that you may return to the fold of Jesus Christ. By so doing you will cause great joy in heaven and gain peace for your own souls and a well-founded hope of salvation for all.

The six parts of this issue were published between March and August, along with other titles. Bound into a single volume, the supply was exhausted in record time. Revised and enlarged, the works were published again, with the first part of the title changed to *The Catholic in the World.* Reading this precious volume, we can understand why Don Bosco was appropriately called "The Hammer of the Protestants."

The April issue of *Letture Cattoliche* featured the lives of St. Zita, a housemaid, and St. Isidore, a farmer, with an appendix containing three edifying tales.

In reference to the Protestants the following point was brought out:

One of the many arguments proving the sanctity of the Catholic Church is that all her members are called to sanctity and many of them have actually distinguished themselves by their outstanding virtues and miracles. Other religions, on the contrary, had their origin in sin. Their very beginnings must be traced not to men of virtue and holiness, but to libertines or apostates. The virtues that may be found among their disciples either spring from the sentiments which God instilled into the hearts of men when He endowed them with reason, or they are remnants of their former Catholic Faith.

We challenge Calvinists, Lutherans, Waldensians, Anglicans, and any other Protestant sect to produce evidence of a single person whose virtuous life has achieved the heroic degree demanded by the Church of Rome from her children before elevating them to the honors of the altars. . . . Have they ever been able to point to a miracle that can be attributed to the intercession of their founders or any of their disciples? Never! On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church has been marked by genuine miracles; the apostolic processes concerning them are open

to any examiner. Miracles prove beyond doubt the truth and sanctity of religion. God cannot permit them to bolster any Church other than the one founded by Him to be the sole font of truth and sanctity; otherwise He Himself would lead us into error. The saints and miracles within the Roman Catholic Church indisputably prove that she is the true Church founded by God, the source of all holiness and of all miracles.

Such clear language, even though inspired by Our Lord's injunction to preach from the rooftops, greatly worried the chancery, which was fully aware of the ruthless methods of the Protestant sects. Don Bosco had dutifully submitted his work for ecclesiastical imprimatur, but strangely enough the declaration "With Ecclesiastical Approval" on his six booklets bore no signature. None of the chancery officials would go on record as official censor because in those days it was dangerous to attack the Protestants and Freemasons openly. They feared that the latter would ruthlessly avenge themselves, and to prove their point they recalled the assassinations of Count Pellegrino Rossi,[1] Msgr. Palma,[2] Father Ximenes, editor of the Roman newspaper *Il Labaro,* and many other defenders of truth who had recently been the victims of attacks. Subsequent events proved their fears to be justified. The fate of the dauntless editor of *L'Armonia,* Father James Margotti, in Turin itself, was an indication of what a Catholic journalist could expect from certain sectaries.[3] At Don Bosco's insistence, Canon Joseph Zappata had agreed to act as ecclesiastical revisor, but after barely reading half a booklet he became alarmed and sent for Don Bosco. "Take your manuscript," he told him. "You are openly challenging the enemy. I'll have nothing to do with it. I will not sign my name because I can't risk my life."

Don Bosco did not know where to turn. On the advice of the vicar general [Canon Philip Ravina], he apprised Archbishop Fransoni of the situation. The prelate, who had continued to give him every possible assistance even from his exile,[4] sent him a letter to be forwarded to Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea. In this letter he

[1] Minister of the Interior under Pius IX. He was assassinated on the steps of the House of Assembly on November 15, 1848. [Editor]

[2] Pius IX's secretary. *See* Vol. III, p. 324. [Editor]

[3] *See* Appendix 18. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. III, p. 224. [Editor]

requested the bishop to assume responsibility for the ecclesiastical revision of *Letture Cattoliche*. Bishop Moreno graciously obliged by appointing his vicar general, Canon [Angelo] Pinoli, to serve as revisor; however, he did not require him to put his name to the imprimatur.

It was obvious that Don Bosco was not going to give up the fight. Father Rua declared to us: "Don Bosco was threatened by letter and orally, but, trusting in God, he did not desist. He was strongly encouraged by the realization that *Letture Cattoliche* had satisfied the subscribers' expectations."

The April and June issues formed a booklet entitled *A Good Mother: Moral Talks in a Popular Style*. The "good mother" was a housewife who explained the Apostles' Creed and added some moral exhortations to neighbors whom she had invited to her home. The "anonymous" author addressed his readers with the following words:

> Every period of history has produced its enemies of spirituality, but nowadays they are legion; never was there anything like this. Unprincipled men, intolerant of truth and motivated by the basest and most selfish interests, are not ashamed to attack and smear that same holy Faith in which, by God's mercy, they were born and raised. Under the pretext of enlightening the people and promoting their spiritual welfare, they spread the most perverse false teachings among uneducated people in towns and villages. Through irreligious publications they strenuously promote unbelief and [religious] indifferentism—the worst of evils. They subvert morals by pandering to the lower instincts, seduce and corrupt unwary and gullible people, and lead them into those vices which subtly ensnare and destroy civil society. . . .
>
> My fellow Christians, while storms rage about you and enemies renew their assaults, take heart! In *The Well-Instructed Catholic* you will find the basic tenets of our holy religion; firmly cling to them! This booklet, *A Good Mother,* will show you how to act in keeping with your Faith in all circumstances. Moreover, it will explain your Faith to you and give you sound reasons for believing.

Notwithstanding Don Bosco's strenuous opposition, heresy became ever more self-assertive. On Constitution Day,[5] May 8 [1853],

[5] *See* Vol. III, p. 213. [Editor]

the new Waldensian temple was lavishly illuminated through the night. Serried ranks of students, led by their professors and followed by many of the workers' societies which had been schooled in principles of freedom by *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* staged a thunderous demonstration before the Siccardi [6] monument to affront the ecclesiastical authorities. Afterward they marched to the Waldensian church, responding vigorously to their leaders' shouts of "Long live freedom of worship! Long live freedom of conscience!"

The May issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* authored by Don Bosco, was entitled *A Factual Account of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament in Turin on June 6, 1453, with a Brief Description of the Quadricentennial Celebrations.* The Foreword read as follows:

> All good Catholics are rejoicing on the occasion of the solemn quadricentennial celebration of the "Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament" wrought by God in our city. I trust that a brief history of this event will prove welcome. Its purpose is to instruct those who have neither the education nor the time to read the many books that have been published about this glorious event. Those desiring more information about this miracle may consult the authors listed at the end of this pamphlet; they are our sources. My narration is based on historical facts. I have added a brief description of the forthcoming celebration, as well as a dialogue on miracles.
>
> May the Lord bless the people of Turin and preserve all Catholics in our Holy Faith, the only one that can confirm its truth by miracles.
>
> Father John Bosco

Stupendous indeed was the miracle which the people of Turin were about to commemorate. On the evening of June 6, 1453, a man was passing through the city, leading a mule laden with merchandise. He came from Exilles, a village near Susa, which had been sacked during military operations. On the mule's back, among other things, was a monstrance containing a consecrated Host. The mule suddenly halted before St. Sylvester's Church, staggered, and lay down. As the man tried desperately but in vain to get the beast on its feet, the ropes holding the mule's pack became loosened, and the sacred monstrance rose into the air, shining resplendently in full view of all. Informed of this prodigious event, Bishop Ludwig

[6] *See* p. 42. [Editor]

Romagnano, priests, and throngs of people flocked to the spot. In their presence the monstrance fell to the ground, but the Host remained aloft, shining brilliantly. Then, as the people prayed "Remain with us, O Lord," the Host slowly descended into a chalice held by the bishop and was solemnly borne into the cathedral. On the site of the miracle the Corpus Domini Church was later built. The singular devotion of the people of Turin to the Blessed Sacrament is traceable to this miracle, in itself a splendid proof of the real and permanent presence of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

In his pamphlet, Don Bosco thoughtfully quoted excerpts from a pastoral letter of Archbishop Fransoni to the clergy and the faithful from his place of exile in Lyons on the occasion of the quadricentennial celebrations. Alluding to the grave dangers that the proselytizing efforts of the Waldensians posed to his flock, the archbishop reminded the faithful that their most powerful defense against error lay in "binding themselves firmly to the infallible teaching authority of the Church, particularly as represented in her visible head, the Pope, the successor of St. Peter." A schedule of the services in Corpus Domini Church, including a triduum and a solemn octave, was also given in this pamphlet which soon was sold out completely.

About this time, Don Bosco, accompanied by Michael Rua, now a cleric, was returning one day to the Oratory from Father Matthew Picco's villa, where he often secluded himself for a few days to do some writing. As they were passing through a section called "Borgo dei Santi Bino ed Evasio" behind the church of La Gran Madre di Dio, Don Bosco brought the conversation around to the centennial celebration and the popularity of his booklet on the miracle of the Blessed Sacrament. Then, looking ahead with his intuitive sense of the shape of things to come, he remarked to Rua who was serving as his secretary: "In 1903, when another golden jubilee of this miracle will be celebrated, I shall not be around, but you will. Therefore, I am instructing you now to follow my wishes and reprint this booklet at that time."

"I'll do so gladly!" Rua replied. "It will be a very welcome task! But what if death catches up with me before that time?"

"Don't worry about that. Death will not play any unexpected trick on you, and you will be able to do what I have just asked you."

In view of Don Bosco's assuredness, Rua saved a copy of the booklet. Through the years he was afflicted by several serious illnesses but he always recovered. In 1903 he reprinted Don Bosco's booklet as he had been instructed.

The quadricentennial celebrations were a huge success. From all over Piedmont confraternities and large contingents of the faithful flocked to the magnificently restored Corpus Domini Church to receive Communion. On the solemn feast day itself King Victor Emmanuel II and his family came in full regalia to attend Mass. Twelve archbishops and bishops presided at the triduum and solemn octave, and the city was illuminated for two consecutive nights. That year probably marked the last time that City Hall, the Senate, and the Academy of Science were lit up in honor of a religious festivity. Only the Chamber of Deputies, the Jewish ghetto, and the still unfinished Waldensian church were enveloped in utter darkness. On June 6, and again on June 8, a triumphant procession started out with thunderous salvos of the artillery and joyous tolling of all the church bells, but on both occasions it was disrupted by a violent rainstorm. Don Bosco twice returned to the Oratory thoroughly and pitifully drenched. The anticlericals, enraged by this well-planned manifestation of faith, vented their anger by their hoots and catcalls, forcing the procession to break up. But perhaps their outburst of spiteful satisfaction deserved some sympathy. They had believed that Protestantism was making headway in Turin and instead discovered that Turin remained staunchly Catholic. True to their colors, during those days *La Gazzetta del Popolo* and the liberal press indulged in unbridled anticlericalism and irreligion.

While busy with weightier matters, Don Bosco did not neglect lesser ones. He was anxious to give a token of his gratitude to Father Michelangelo Chiatellino, teacher of methodology at Carignano, who had so often helped him at the Oratory. One day, when he met him in town, he asked him quizzically: "Will you treat me to a cup of coffee?" Father Chiatellino looked at his friend in surprise. It was a strange and unexpected request from Don Bosco. "Gladly," he answered. While sipping his coffee, Don Bosco told him that the school at Borgo Cornalense was without a teacher; that position, in his opinion, would be ideal for one who loved peace and quiet, as Father Chiatellino did. Don Bosco added that Father

Chiatellino could also act as private chaplain to the duchess of Montmorency. She owned the school and resided in her palace in town. The idea appealed to Father Chiatellino, but he suggested that Don Bosco first consult Father Cafasso. The following two letters deal with this subject.

Turin, June 16, 1853

Dear Father Chiatellino,

I have mentioned the matter to Father Cafasso without disclosing that you already knew about it. He immediately said that it would be fine with him and that I should write to you at once to get your opinion. As you see, there are no difficulties at this end. Think it over, and if you are favorably disposed, we shall set a date and pay a visit to the duchess.

Excuse my hurry.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr. John Bosco

Turin, June 21, 1853

Dear Father Chiatellino,

Yesterday Duchess Laval Montmorency came to the city, and we reached an agreement regarding your appointment to this teaching post. Now she would like to see you in order to discuss details pertaining to the school, your living quarters, meals, and the like. There is an apartment for you and a room for a housekeeper, preferably one of your sisters. However, the duchess wants to make it clear that your sister should be there to wait on you and not the other way around. But these are matters of minor importance which can easily be settled. If possible, pay her a visit on Thursday, the 23rd of this month; the duchess is expecting you. I shall not be able to join you there, but you had better go. It might be well for Father Appendini to accompany you. Besides, *aetatem habes, interroga et videbis.* I haven't time to add more now. Remember me to your parents and to all my other friends. Love me in the Lord.

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

Father Chiatellino remained at Borgo Cornalense until the duchess' death, edifying his pupils, the people of the village, and her household with his saintly demeanor and diligence in fulfilling

his duties. His pupils loved him as a father and learned from him how to conduct themselves in their family life and how to deal with others. From time to time he came to visit the boys in Valdocco to their great joy because they considered him their dear friend. Don Bosco availed himself of his services during the summer months, especially on the occasion of spiritual retreats. Father Chiatellino always obliged. For many years the privilege of conducting the novena in preparation for the feast of the Holy Rosary at Becchi was reserved to him. His words, prompted by love for souls, were always effective in bringing many of them to God.

CHAPTER 50

Don Bosco's Spiritual Guide

AS soon as the weather permitted, Don Bosco had the rubble [1] removed to start reconstruction. His loss was estimated at 10,000 lire. The contractor fared much worse since the city building commission ordered him to rebuild at his own expense. Don Bosco compassionately promised him financial aid. Meanwhile, perhaps as an aftermath of this mishap, the joint rights which Fathers Borel, Murialdo, Cafasso, and Don Bosco had on the Pinardi property [2] were now consolidated in Don Bosco and Father Joseph Cafasso. The deed, drawn up by the notary Turvano, was signed on January 26, 1853. Thus the debt owed to Father Rosmini [3] became the joint responsibility of Don Bosco and Father Cafasso.

Since we have mentioned Father Cafasso, we would like at this point to pay special tribute to this exemplary priest who for almost a quarter of a century was Don Bosco's spiritual guide and assisted him materially and morally. Saintly was the teacher and saintly the disciple who went to him weekly for confession and guidance. Father Cafasso's confessional in St. Francis of Assisi Church stood by a painting of Our Lady of Grace and was always crowded. Don Bosco would examine his conscience kneeling on the bare floor near a pillar in front of the confessional. As soon as Father Cafasso noticed him waiting there, he would signal to him by raising the curtain. Don Bosco, with his head bowed, would then approach and make his confession kneeling in front of Father Cafasso, to the great edification of the bystanders. As long as he stayed at the

[1] *See* pp. 353ff. [Editor]
[2] *See* p. 172. [Editor]
[3] *See* p. 171. [Editor]

Oratory, the cleric James Bellìa always accompanied him; later, other clerics also did so and were greatly edified by Don Bosco's humble and inspiring demeanor.

Don Bosco loved and revered Father Cafasso with filial affection, and Father Cafasso reciprocated as a loving father. Almost daily Don Bosco called at the Convitto Ecclesiastico,[4] and whenever possible he attended the moral theology lectures. He often went in the morning; later he switched to the afternoon from four to nine, spending most of his time in the library where he could study undisturbed and write so effectively in defense of the Faith. He never passed up an opportunity to visit Father Cafasso, whose confidence he fully enjoyed. There were weeks when he was so exhausted from overwork that he could hardly catch his breath, but a word, a glance, a smile, or a gesture from Father Cafasso was enough to restore his strength and inspire him to continue his mission with ever greater courage. Don Bosco totally relied on him and sought his guidance in matters of conscience and in the fulfillment of his mission. Throughout Father Cafasso's life, Don Bosco obeyed him unreservedly. He often held long private conversations with this holy priest; during one of them, at the beginning of 1851, in reply to a query by Father Cafasso, he answered: "You have but ten years to live." His prediction was completely accurate.

Father Ascanio Savio wrote: "It was in Father Cafasso's room that Don Bosco discussed the purchase of the Pinardi property, the building of St. Francis de Sales Church (now called the "old church"), the purchase of additional land for future expansion, the establishment of a printshop and other workshops, and the publication of *Letture Cattoliche*. Upon returning to the Oratory, while conversing with the boys, he sometimes unwittingly gave a hint of these new plans; at the time they sounded like daydreams, but they are now a reality." It could not have been otherwise because they were God-inspired. Teacher and disciple were in complete agreement about their goals, their views, and their beliefs.

Once Don Bosco told a prominent person: "There was only one

[4] An ecclesiastical college specializing in pastoral theology. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff. Don Bosco began attending it right after his ordination. It was here that he started his work for boys. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-61. [Editor]

point about which Father Cafasso and I seemed to disagree, and we discussed it at length while pacing back and forth on the esplanade facing St. Ignatius' Shrine. He claimed that any good act ought to be done well, whereas I maintained that sometimes it sufficed to do it as best as one could depending on circumstances." Basically, they were both right—one theoretically, the other practically. Whenever Don Bosco realized that things could not be done to perfection, he was satisfied to do them in the best possible manner rather than do nothing at all.

But this difference of opinion in no way impaired their warm relationship. Father Cafasso always defended his disciple if someone attempted to criticize him. Some distinguished and scholarly priests once complained to Father Cafasso that Don Bosco did not accept advice that ran counter to his own plans or views. Father Cafasso's reply sheds special light on Don Bosco's priestly life: "Do *you* really know Don Bosco? As for me, the more I study him, the less I understand him! He is simple, but extraordinary; humble, but great; poor, but at the same time engaged in seemingly unrealizable projects of vast proportions. He is sorely tried—I might even say that he could be considered unsuited to his tasks—and yet he succeeds splendidly in everything he undertakes. He is a real mystery to me! I am convinced, however, that he works for God's glory and that God alone is his guide, his sole goal!"

Father Cafasso's conviction that God was guiding Don Bosco along new and extraordinary paths prompted him to help him generously. Don Bosco rarely left Father Cafasso's room empty-handed, as he himself declared. Often when he had no money for the monthly bread bill of two or three hundred lire, Father Cafasso would take care of it. Don Bosco always assured him that next month he would manage to pay the bread bill himself, but he would soon be back with an engaging air to give Father Cafasso the baker's bill. Father Cafasso would then tease him: "Don Bosco, you are not keeping your word as a gentleman. You make promises every month, but I always have to pay. You'd better put your conscience in order!" But as he spoke, he would hand him the money.

On one of these occasions Don Bosco was able to witness Father Cafasso's supernatural gifts. After listening to Don Bosco's request

for help to meet a pressing debt, Father Cafasso replied that regretfully he was in no position to do so. After a moment's reflection, however, he added: "Go toward Piazza San Carlo. Someone will call you by name. Follow him." Don Bosco obeyed. As he reached the square, a servant stopped him and asked: "Are you Don Bosco?" When he answered affirmatively, the man told him that his employer wished to speak to him. Don Bosco followed the servant to the bedroom of an ailing rich lady who, after asking how the Oratory was getting along, gave him a large donation. He himself related this incident to the cleric James Bellìa.

Don Bosco was so convinced that his saintly master's counsels were inspired by God that he often sent his boys to him for advice on their vocation. For example, in 1853 he sent John Cagliero and Angelo Savio. "After questioning us," Bishop Cagliero wrote, "Father Cafasso talked to us about the priestly vocation in a manner that was both very exalted and down-to-earth; he convinced us of the loftiness and grandeur of the priestly ministry. In urging us to follow it, he added enthusiastically: 'I became a priest only once. Yet, if necessary, I would do so a hundred times over!' "

On another occasion Don Bosco sent [two other boys], Massaia and [Bartholomew] Fusero. On their way they began to argue over some scholastic or religious matter. As soon as they met Father Cafasso, before they could even open their mouths, he told them: "As for what you were discussing on your way here, this is how it stands: you were right and you were wrong. In the matter of your vocation, do whatever Don Bosco tells you." This is a striking reply and a clear indication that he was enlightened from above about Don Bosco's competence on the prudent choice of one's vocation.

Upon returning to the Oratory, the two boys told Don Bosco what had happened; in turn, he confirmed the generally held opinion that Father Cafasso was a very holy priest. According to Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, Don Bosco would often speak of what Father Cafasso did or said, or about his heroic virtues and generosity. He would recount to them Father Cafasso's exhortation that had proved so effective in promoting Christian self-denial: "Rid yourselves even of habits that are of themselves indifferent; our only habit must be that of doing good. Our body is insatiable;

the more we give it, the more it demands; the less we give it, the less it demands."

Don Bosco constantly urged his boys to work hard and long and not to desire amusement or leisure, adding: "Do you know what Father Cafasso answered when he was told to relax and enjoy himself? His reply was: 'I have other things to do far more important than that! I'll relax and have fun when I have nothing pressing to do.' When asked when that day would be, he said: 'When we shall be in heaven.' "

Don Bosco also proposed him as an example of zeal for the salvation of souls. He recounted Father Cafasso's missions in rural parishes as well as his untiring work at the Convitto, in the city jails and hospitals, and in other fields of the priestly ministry. He also revealed this incident:

> In 1856 Father Cafasso learned that in Vercelli a man who had been condemned to death had fallen into despair and stubbornly refused the sacraments. Father Cafasso at once set out to visit him with a member of the Confraternity of Mercy, around four o'clock in the afternoon. He managed to soothe the condemned man, administer the sacraments, and accompany him to his execution. Then after a quick repast at an inn, he immediately returned to Turin. He arrived at the Convitto about 6:30, just in time for his regular lecture, which he gave without pausing for rest or refreshments. If invited to slow down for a little rest, his stock reply was: "We shall rest in our grave. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence." [Cf. Matt. 11, 12]

The Oratory boys were especially interested in Don Bosco's stories about Father Cafasso's interest in poor boys and their religious instruction: how he provided them with decent clothes to wear to church, and how he helped young people to find work, often paying their apprenticeship expenses or giving them food until they became self-supporting. "I know many boys," Don Bosco added, "who could not get an education either because they were born poor or because their families had suffered serious financial setbacks. Today many of them are pastors, curates, teachers, notaries, attorneys, physicians, druggists, and lawyers; others are brokers, shopkeepers, and businessmen. They all owe their good fortune to Father Cafasso."

Moreover, Don Bosco constantly told the Oratory boys that they should be grateful to Father Cafasso and pray for him. Bishop Cagliero wrote:

I recall how Don Bosco often said to us: "It was in obedience to Father Cafasso that I remained in Turin; it was on his advice and under his guidance that I began to gather urchins from the streets on Sundays to teach them catechism; thanks to his help and support, I first began to take homeless boys into the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in order to rescue them from moral danger and give them a Christian education. Remember that Father Cafasso was the first catechist of our Oratory and that he still is our constant friend and benefactor."

Our love and veneration for our beloved father Don Bosco is felt in equal measure for Father Cafasso.

CHAPTER 51

Trust in Divine Providence

RECONSTRUCTION of the collapsed building was resumed as soon as spring arrived. However, Don Bosco's funds were non-existent, and he was burdened with debts. Undismayed, he did not waver in his trust in God. Unbounded, indeed, must have been his faith, because his incessant material needs were further aggravated in his lifetime by the many calamities afflicting Italy and other nations. Actually at this time [1853] his difficulties were only beginning. As they became greater and at times almost insurmountable, he in turn rose to the challenge and successfully coped with them. A favorite saying of his was: "We shall take things in stride and do our best under the circumstances."

Don Bosco's life is a continuous demonstration of the fulfillment of Our Lord's promises to those who pray with a lively faith. That same Divine Providence which had inspired his benefactors to be generous when he first began to build was again prompting them to help him rebuild. Among these benefactors we should mention Duchess [Laval] Montmorency, Marquis and Marchioness Fassati, and Count [Charles] Cays—a steady Sunday catechist at the Oratory—who that year gave another tangible proof of his generosity. Among Don Bosco's many debts there was one to the baker for 1,200 lire. Unless the bill was promptly paid, deliveries were to be cut off. Count Cays immediately settled the debt and the boys did not go hungry. King Victor Emmanuel II also sent Don Bosco a subsidy [from the funds of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus].[1]

Since these contributions hardly met his needs, Don Bosco had recourse to other means. The first of these was the following

[1] *See* Appendix 19. [Editor]

announcement by *L'Armonia* in its issue of Tuesday, April 12, 1853:

A steel safe and its secret contents will be raffled on behalf of the boy's Oratory in Valdocco on May 31. Authorization was granted by the Finance Office on March 2, 1853.

The safe will be on display at the Caffé della Borsa in Via di Porta Nuova near Piazza San Carlo.

Tickets are one lira each or five for three lire.

There was a generous response from the clergymen even though [as a result of recent legislation] their revenues were dwindling. On April 28, 1853, taxes on personal property and income for pastors and beneficed priests had become effective; moreover, in September of that same year a royal decree revised downward the parish prebends established by papal brief in 1828. Thus all ecclesiastical property was quietly being confiscated.

In the meantime, while reconstruction of the building was in progress, an order from City Hall forced all work to come to a halt.[2] Don Bosco complied, but not without first interceding on behalf of the contractor. To be sure, the contractor did not merit the trust placed in him. The building costs of the St. Francis de Sales Church had been excessive because of his greed and the kickbacks of suppliers. Nevertheless, Don Bosco had not cancelled the contract. He abhorred court litigations and was extremely reluctant to ascribe evil intentions to others even when the loss was his own. Once he had put his trust in someone after duly inquiring about him, he could hardly believe that this person would defraud him. In this respect his charity obscured his ordinarily acute perspicacity. In material matters he was always ready to accept excuses and explanations, as indeed was the case on many occasions. On the other hand, he never permitted waste, no matter how insignificant, for that would not have been right. Fortunately, he had a heavenly treasurer who was ever dependable and ever ready to help him. Occasional losses, even quite substantial ones, were permitted only to make it exceedingly clear that the success of Don Bosco's undertakings was not attributable to men but to Divine Providence.

[2] *See* Appendix 20. [Editor]

Don Bosco's trust in the Blessed Virgin so freed him from anxiety that even when weighed down by very thorny business matters he tranquilly would go to the suburbs of Turin to preach on the occasion of the feast of their patron saints, conduct the Forty Hours' devotion, hear confessions, or play the organ; often he took along his choirboys. For example, on May 16 [1853] he went to San Vito where the elementary school pupils of Turin had journeyed to celebrate the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

Meanwhile, construction had again been resumed and Don Bosco and his benefactors were now turning their attention to providing the furnishings for the St. Francis de Sales Church. Chevalier [Joseph] Duprè donated a marble altar rail for the St. Aloysius altar; Marquis Fassati did likewise for Our Lady's altar and also contributed a set of bronzed copper candlesticks. Count [Charles] Cays, on being elected prior of the St. Aloysius Sodality for the second time, secured a new bell for the church tower. For many years its tolling summoned the boys to the festive oratory. A great number of people were invited to the very solemn blessing and hoisting of this bell. The ceremony was performed by Father [Augustine] Gattino, pastor of SS. Simon and Jude in Borga Dora, whom Archbishop Fransoni at Don Bosco's request had delegated for this task.[3] Father Gattino delivered a splendid sermon befitting the occasion, explaining the origin and the three principal functions of the church bell, as expressed in the verse *Laudo Deum verum, voco plebem, congrego clerum* [I praise the true God, call the faithful, and assemble the clergy]. Afterward, a humorous skit concluded the ceremonies.

Count Cays also presented to the church a canopy with a pendant and other draperies and carpets, and in addition he loaned eight magnificent chandeliers which had once served as decor at the wedding of Queen Maria Adelaide. Thus the new church was now furnished with the necessary appurtenances for the Forty Hours' devotion and the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during the next three days. An extraordinary number of boys and other people flocked to the services. To enhance such religious fervor and make it more convenient for all to satisfy their devotion, spe-

[3] A footnote reporting the routine official authorization for the blessing of the church bell has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

cial services with sermons were held in the evening during the next eight days; the result was an unprecedented number of confessions and Communions as though there had been a spiritual retreat or a mission. This unparalleled religious fervor led to the decision to continue holding the Forty Hours' devotion with sermons and other practices every year.

But the spiritual consolations of the Oratory did not lessen Don Bosco's sympathetic interest in the tribulations of a revered friend, Bishop Philip Artico of Asti, who had been relentlessly attacked by anticlerical publications. Don Bosco did his best to comfort him. The prelate came to the Oratory several times and spent a few days there. On one of these occasions, [John Baptist] Francesia and [Charles] Tomatis performed a skit by Don Bosco entitled *The Chimney Sweep;* this presentation so delighted the bishop that with Don Bosco's permission he made a gift of a new suit of clothes to each of the actors.

While preparations for the feasts of St. Aloysius and St. John the Baptist were in progress in Valdocco, Don Bosco invited Bishop Artico to participate in the solemn festivities in honor of St. Aloysius, the patron saint of the Porta Nuova festive oratory. The bishop accepted. A letter that he later wrote to Don Bosco sheds light on the part he played in the celebrations, on the vicious abuse that the anticlerical newspapers relentlessly heaped on him, on the evil intent with which they spied on his every movement, and on their slanderous insinuations. It also shows how such persecution was driving the prelate to physical and spiritual exhaustion and how Don Bosco's comforting letters and visits tempered his sorrow.

Camerano, July 9, 1853

My dear and revered Father John,

Your welcome letter helped to mitigate at the right moment the bitterness that came over me after perusing that rag of a paper, *L'Operaio di Asti.* The kind words of the wise comfort me more than the insults of the wicked offend me. It was indeed a great consolation for me to read your affectionate letter.

Throughout these seven years I have been the target of persecutors, but Our Merciful Lord has tempered insults with comfort and satanic letters or articles with angelic letters or visits. Until now I have been

silent, entrusting my cause to God. The canticle of Zachary inspires me to hope that God will grant me "salvation from our enemies." [Cf. Luke 1, 71]

The article in *L'Operaio di Asti* that you read to me in Turin and the one published last Sunday offer you an opportunity, dear Don Bosco, to write to the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* and state what your modesty would otherwise never have permitted you to say. In the issue of July 3 [1853], No. 40, page 4, column one of *L'Operaio di Asti,* a Turin correspondent dared to state—as you can see for yourself—that I was not allowed to preach. Since they lied so impudently and brought in your name—so highly respected in Turin and elsewhere—mentioning also your Oratory, I think it necessary that you unmask and refute this mendacious correspondent in whatever way you think best by stating what you and hundreds of other people saw and heard. God knows that I did not in the least desire to officiate or preach at the ceremony. You know very well, dear Don Bosco, that what with the racking cough tormenting me and the sweltering heat, I was in no mood to extemporize.

I declined many other invitations and accepted to participate in your festivities only out of affection for you and your dear boys. I went there as an invited guest and not as an intruder. Since you yourself volunteered to protest to *L'Operaio di Asti* if it should dare make any comments about me in connection with the feast of the titular at the St. Aloysius Oratory, and since Attorney Torelli and others have asked you to do so, I think it now becomes your duty to refute the lies and false accusations of my implacable enemies (few though they be) by stating what actually happened. But please make no mention of the breakfast or the lottery, lest they think that I bribed your boys. At the most, you might say that when I left—as is indeed the truth—I wished to leave a little remembrance of me at the St. Aloysius Oratory where, upon arriving unexpectedly and incognito on Sunday, June 26 last, I was welcomed and greeted by spontaneous "vivas." In short, while *L'Operaio di Asti* was crucifying me, Don Bosco's spiritual sons in Turin were filling the air with *hosannas,* notwithstanding my efforts to stop them.

I think that you—also on behalf of the boys—should protest against *L'Operaio di Asti* and its slanderous Turin correspondent who, I am told, is a professor named Gatti. Challenge him to reveal his name and denounce him to the public as a defamer and liar. The letter that you sent me yesterday—dated July 6 and received on the 8th—would in itself be enough to shut the mouths of some people, but I will not and must not release it to the press.

In confuting *L'Operaio's* sundry and despicable lies—particularly the statement that I was not received by the cabinet ministers—it might be opportune to have Father Granetti sign the article too, since he was an eyewitness to the welcome they gave me. I also think that Father Granetti, in his role as secretary or pro-secretary to Bishop Renaldi, should protest the slander against the bishop and myself. It appeared on the front page of *L'Operaio di Asti,* herein enclosed, and reported the bishop as saying something he never said. Father Granetti should declare instead that Bishop Renaldi greeted me warmly like a brother, conversed with me for about three hours, and—far from telling me "to resign"—urged me instead to. . . . Bishop Renaldi might not appreciate this suggestion, but he would do me a great favor if he agreed to write a few lines in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale,* such as: "I declare everything printed in *L'Operaio di Asti* (July 3, No. 40) regarding the meeting between myself and Bishop Artico of Asti to be untrue and slanderous," or words to this effect.

I think it might even be better if Father Granetti would write a separate article for the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* narrating what he himself saw with his own eyes and refuting the slander regarding Gioberti, since he has read the letters written to me (which you may do too, if you wish).

As regards the article you will write, I think that it should be signed by you, by the director of the St. Aloysius Oratory, by Count [Charles] Cays, and by Count Casimiro Radicati of Brozolo. I leave it all to your discretion. There is "a time to be silent and a time to speak." [Eccles. 3, 7] "Let there be light." [Gen. 1, 3] "False witnesses have risen up against me." [Ps. 26, 12]

Give my best to your clerics and your boys. I recommend myself to their prayers and yours, dear Don Bosco. Please read and deliver the enclosed note to Father Granetti.

✠ Philip, *Bishop of Asti*

As long as they lived, Bishop [Philip] Artico and Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni were the most vilified and persecuted bishops of the Church.

CHAPTER 52

An Important Acquisition

WHILE the joyful atmosphere of Don Bosco's oratories attracted thousands of boys, an even greater number received a sound moral education from the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Unfortunately, one sad day, this teaching order received a distressing communication from the government. A circular from the Ministry of War informed these religious that the exemption from military service granted to them by King Charles Albert was abrogated. Their indefatigable activity, zeal, dedication, and outstanding merits in educating the children of the common people were brushed aside and a hard blow dealt to their schools. Gradually the young people of Turin would suffer the loss of many catechists.

Fortunately, almost as if to offset the unavoidable harm that would result from this edict, Count Louis Cibrario, Minister of Education, on August 21, 1853 issued an "Instruction" for the implementation of the elementary school programs. We reproduce here extracts dealing with the teaching of catechism and bible history, but we cannot help deploring the total exclusion of ecclesiastical authority from public education. At the same time we do acknowledge the great importance that a minister of education in those times still attributed to religious instruction.

Article 3: *Grade School Catechism Program*

Grade school catechisms vary in the different dioceses. Therefore, in order to clear up doubts and maintain a uniform curriculum, the following subject matter will be taught: Morning and Night Prayers; the *Pater Noster* and the *Angelus,* both in Latin; the Unity and Trinity of God; the Incarnation of the Son of God; the Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the End of the World; the Particular and Universal Judgment.

In order to teach catechism competently and fruitfully, the teacher must bear in mind what follows:

1. He should teach this subject with the same care and respect used in the teaching of prayer. He should therefore diligently prepare his lessons lest he say anything not befitting this delicate subject. Should he have doubts on some points, he should resolve them by consulting learned priests; he must strive to grasp thoroughly every truth or precept contained in the catechism.

2. He should not start his catechism lessons until he has covered elementary bible history, such as the Creation of the World, the Fall of Adam, the Promise of the Redeemer, etc. These preliminary instructions will greatly help to illustrate the fundamental truths of our Faith. Bible history and catechism should complement each other.

3. The teacher should not have the children memorize questions and answers until he has first explained them in simple and clear terms and has checked whether or not the pupils have understood them.

4. A good practice, recommended by competent persons, is to link together several answers and have the pupils recite them. This will accustom them to interrelate what they have learned and go from one point to another without having to depend on the questions.

Article 4: *Bible History*

(The teacher should narrate a few important episodes of the Old and New Testaments and have the pupils repeat them.)

The teaching of bible history and of catechism must go hand in hand. The tender minds of first-grade children should not be overburdened with minute details and long series of names and dates. The teacher should therefore limit himself to a very clear and simple discussion of the following subjects: the Creation of the World and of Man; the Fall of Adam and the Promise of a Redeemer; the Death of Abel; the Flood; the Spread of Mankind over All the Earth; Abraham's Mission; the Sacrifice of Isaac; the Bondage of the Jews in Egypt and Their Liberation by Moses; the Birth of the Savior.

In the course of his instruction:

1. The teacher shall follow only "approved authors" and make his lessons consist of brief, simple, and clear stories. He shall explain difficult words in a manner suited to the children's age.

2. He shall question the pupils in such a way as to lead them to break up the story into its various components. He will then add timely reflections, draw practical moral conclusions, and make use of whatever else

may help prove the truthfulness of our Faith. Finally, he shall reconstruct the story and have one or more pupils repeat it in its entirety.

The rest of the catechism should be divided between the second and third grades. As regards bible history, the second grade should study the patriarchs up to the division of the kingdom of Juda, and the third grade should proceed from there to the coming of the Redeemer.

At the beginning of the scholastic year teachers in these two grades were expected to repeat and amplify the subject matter of the previous year. With regard to catechism the "Instruction" added:

The second-grade teacher may also train the pupils to question each other on what they have already been taught in order that they may become familiar with the questions, grasp the connection between them, and be able to discuss readily and in a knowledgeable manner the contents of each chapter.

The fourth-grade religion curriculum is as follows:

A. *Catechism.* Parts 3 and 4 of the large diocesan catechism—namely, the Commandments of God, the Precepts of the Church, and the Sacraments.

B. *Bible History.* The New Testament.

We do not know who expertly advised Count [Louis] Cibrario in drawing up such a fine religion curriculum and prescribing that the bible history textbooks be by "approved authors"—approved, that is, by the proper ecclesiastical authority. We do know, however —and so did all the boys—that in that same year Count Cibrario was a frequent visitor to Valdocco and that he held lengthy and serious conversations with Don Bosco who, obviously, was not wasting his time talking about politics.

While Count Cibrario gave directives for the religious education of school children, Don Bosco had to take equally important measures of his own for the welfare of his own Oratory. He had finally come to the decision that the problem of the neighboring Albergo della Giardiniera on the Bellezza premises had to be resolved. Only a low wall separated it from the Oratory playground. As we have previously remarked,[1] it was the Sunday hangout of

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 336, 401, 421f. [Editor]

gamblers, tipsters, and people of similar bent—questionable and unwholesome characters, including some bribed converts of the Waldensians. Barrel organs, fifes, clarinets, guitars, violins, bass, and contrabass followed one another in noisemaking; then, from time to time during the Oratory afternoon church services, the players would all get together for impromptu concerts, thus drowning out the choirboys' voices. Truly the children of the world stood against the children of light, the city of Satan against the city of God.

To eradicate any unwholesome impression from the minds of his boys, Don Bosco often reminded them of the words of the Gospel: "The world shall rejoice and you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." [John 16, 20] But he had to put a stop to such a disorder once and for all. The example that these people gave to the Oratory boys was bad, but he was also aware of the risks he would incur if he tried to stop it. However, fearless when it was a question of doing what was right, Don Bosco set about this task energetically. At first he tried to buy the house, but the owner, Mrs. Teresa Bellezza, refused to sell. He then attempted to rent it, but the innkeeper alleged extravagant losses and demanded an outrageous indemnity if the deal went through. Accustomed to trusting in Divine Providence and in the charity of benefactors, Don Bosco was not frightened off by this financial problem. It became a lot easier, however, when just at this time the innkeeper died. His wife took over and, although of a better moral character than her husband, she continued to keep the place open.

Don Bosco began to cultivate her good will, first by greeting her, then by borrowing some kitchen utensils, and lastly by ordering meals from her, especially on feast days. Little by little she began to feel a great respect for Don Bosco. Finally, he had the opportunity of tactfully asking her whether she intended to spend the rest of her days running a tavern, and whether she was giving any thought to the fact that daily she was preparing fuel for her torments in hell.

"Yes, I know," she replied, "but how could I make a living otherwise?"

"I can suggest something."

"Let's hear it. I'd only be too glad to give up this life."

"Sell your tavern to me."

"Will the landlady agree to that?"

"Let me worry about it. I'm sure she will."

"That would be fine, but what could I do with the glassware, chinaware, kitchen utensils, and all the other things?"

"I'll buy it all, lock, stock, and barrel. Let's choose two appraisers. I'll pay whatever they say it's worth."

"But I am several months behind in my rent!"

"I'll pay that too!"

"Very well, then. It's a deal!"

Don Bosco promptly paid the price set by the appraisers. When Mamma Margaret saw hundreds of empty bottles of all sizes and shapes carried into her house with liters, half-liters, vats, benches, and other items which then and there she had no use for, she exclaimed:

"What are we to do with all these things?"

"Don't worry, Mamma," Don Bosco assured her; "in due time it will all come handy. I have done this for a very good reason."

Meanwhile, the innkeeper continued to occupy some rooms on the premises, substantiating Don Bosco's fear that she might change her mind and withdraw from the merely verbal agreement. Therefore, he had some person she trusted suggest to her that instead of blindly believing Don Bosco's promise of a substantial indemnity she should demand it in writing. Thus a contract was signed with the condition that she completely vacate the premises.

The customers were furious at this new development and filled the woman's ears with slanders against priests. Terribly upset and in tears, she came to Don Bosco a few days later saying that she had been tricked. "I don't know where to go!" she sobbed. "Let's tear up the contract."

"There's no need to be so upset," Don Bosco replied. "You can find another place to live." What follows was narrated to us by John Cagliero.

By chance I came into the rear of the sacristy and there found Don Bosco, Buzzetti, and an old woman whom we used to call "La Giardiniera." She was angry at Don Bosco because he had given her notice

to vacate her former premises. Don Bosco was trying to make her understand that he needed that space for classrooms, which was true. At this point the woman became hysterical and screamed: "You're a liar!"

"Wretched woman! How could you dare call a priest a liar?" Don Bosco replied. "Buzzetti! Buzzetti! Take this woman away!" I immediately got Don Bosco a chair because he had grown pale and seemed about to faint, so strenuous had been his effort to control himself and stay calm.

After the woman had composed herself a bit, Don Bosco managed to convince her that there was nothing injurious to her interests in the contract, and he urged her to find an apartment in Turin, offering to pay her rent for the first three months. The woman went away pacified and Don Bosco kept his word. He then immediately called on the landlady and told her all that had taken place. The good woman approved.

Don Bosco now was in control of half of that building; blasphemies and scandalous songs would no longer be heard. At once Don Bosco leased the premises to quiet, God-fearing people, but despite endless promises they turned out to be either unable or unwilling to pay the rent. Obviously they were taking advantage of his goodness, certain that he would never take them to court.

The former tavern premises were now quieter, but the other half of the house continued to be a den of iniquity. Don Bosco therefore made overtures to the landlady about renting that part of the building. The lady hesitated, fearing that if she leased it to a single tenant, she might later have the whole house empty on her hands all at once. It was her policy to rent each room by the month. Don Bosco then suggested a lease of several years, and she readily accepted. In the contract the premises are described as follows:

A basement with two cellars facing south; a main floor with three rooms facing south, one opening into a corridor, and two facing north; a second floor with three rooms facing south and three others facing north. Also, two large arbors, both in good condition, supported by posts, likewise in good condition, and a long hedge on the north side.

The lease was to run from October 1, 1853 to September 30, 1856, at the yearly rent of 950 lire. On October 1, 1856 the lease was renewed for another three years, through September 30, 1859,

at the yearly rent of 800 lire, but with the proviso that the lease could be dissolved from year to year if notice thereto was given three months prior to expiration.

As soon as Don Bosco had the entire house for himself, he gave notice to the tenants to vacate. Some of them, persuaded by Don Bosco's generous monetary gifts, complied, but others refused and gave him a hard time. It also cost him money because they refused to pay their rent. Moreover, some insulted and threatened him and, as we shall recount later, even made attempts on his life. On his part Don Bosco willingly accepted these sacrifices rather than give up his efforts to safeguard his charges.

Once the rooms were vacated, Don Bosco provided for a general cleanup and overall repairs, notwithstanding the expense entailed.[2] He then sublet them to reliable tenants. Understandably, he wanted some income to meet his expenses, but since he did not wish to become involved in arguments over rent, he turned the entire matter over to an agent whom we shall call "M." This man was to collect the rents punctually and keep ten percent of the receipts for his service. Instead, he collected and pocketed all the money for himself. In vain Don Bosco asked him to hand over the money received; the agent always stalled with one excuse or another. This went on for over four years without Don Bosco collecting a single centesimo. When he finally cornered the dishonest agent—who occupied a room in the same building—and resolutely demanded the rent money, all he got was the reply: "If you don't like it, I'll quit!" So saying, he handed in his keys and left without refunding any of the money. Don Bosco still had to pay his entire rent to Mrs. Bellezza. All told, getting rid of the Albergo della Giardiniera cost Don Bosco over 20,000 lire. Yet, with no money of his own, he always managed to find what he needed in some truly providential way.

At long last the landlady solved his rent-collecting problem by moving into that house herself. Because of her rather pretentious character, Don Bosco was involved in a few lawsuits with her and received several summonses, but all this was insignificant when compared with the troubles caused by the former tenants. He continued

[2] A footnote on this matter has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

his efforts to buy the house, but the landlady would not hear of it. After her death, however, her children welcomed the idea and sold it to Don Bosco on February 22, 1884 for 110,000 lire. He thus became the sole owner of the house and adjoining land, almost doubling the Oratory's area.

At long last Don Bosco had eliminated another outpost of the devil so close to the house of the Lord, eradicated a den of iniquity, and literally taken over the enemy camp. On the site where God had once been so frequently offended, now there would resound prayers and hymns of praise to His everlasting glory.

CHAPTER 53

Obscure Threats

WHILE Don Bosco was busy taking the necessary steps to close down the Albergo della Giardiniera, Divine Providence rewarded him in the way he appreciated most.

Living in Turin at that time was a man to whom we shall refer as Mr. "L". He was a prosperous businessman who was blessed with a very good wife, a dutiful daughter, and a handsome and obedient 14-year-old son named Louis. However, this man was addicted to drink and had the habit of bringing home unwholesome characters, much to the chagrin of his wife. He spent his time gambling, eating, and drinking. When he had money, he would get drunk; when he was without resources, he would become enraged and beat up his family. His business, of course, suffered terribly; he contracted many debts and was soon reduced to poverty. One of his friends advised him to appeal for assistance to his pastor or to charitable institutions, but he indignantly refused. He had never approached priests before as a matter of principle, and now he rebelled at the mere thought of being reduced to the degrading position of having to beg.

Finally, a false friend told him that he could obtain generous assistance from the Waldensians without loss to his dignity. All he had to do was to attend their sermons and enroll as a member. The wretched man was so desperate that he followed his suggestion. From that time on his family never lacked for anything. But one day the Waldensian minister sent for him and said: "My friend, I must tell you something. We cannot continue to subsidize any member of our church unless his family also belongs to it. I shall have to discontinue your weekly payments until your whole family joins us."

The man agreed to do what the minister asked. Quite sure that his wife would not raise any difficulty, he went home, called the family together, and made his proposal. The wife was indignant. She called her husband an apostate, a traitor to his Faith, and declared that she would sooner die than become a Waldensian. He, in turn, became furious, shouting his determination that the whole family would join the "holy reformed church" and making clear that he would tolerate no opposition.

"Nonsense!" his wife cried. "A church which seeks to have you as a member could hardly be holy and reformed. More likely it is as evil as you."

The poor woman had spoken too boldly. Her husband grabbed a stick and beat her unconscious. At the sight of his mother on the floor, his son cried out: "Papa! Papa! What are you doing? Do you want to kill mom?" In reply the brute gave him a kick that sent him flying out of the room. The man was in a state of absolute fury for the rest of the day. When his wife regained consciousness, she was as determined as ever not to renounce her Faith; however, she also was determined to endure her husband's brutality as long as she could. Terrible quarrels raged between them day after day. Once he came home drunk well after midnight—his family that day had had nothing but bread to eat—and brought along some cronies, one of whom had a barrel organ. "Get up, all of you," he shouted; "it's time to dance." The wife protested that it was late, that she was not feeling well, and that such antics would only make their neighbors laugh at them, but her words were ignored. She and the children had to get up and dance. As a result of this and similar ludicrous incidents, and fearing the ever present threats of harsh beatings, and even death, if they refused to become Waldensians, the woman and her daughter left him and found positions as housemaids. They preferred to endure any hardship rather than risk their honor and their Faith.

Now left alone with his son Louis, this man began taking him every week to the Waldensian church. At first Louis refused and cried as he was dragged along, but gradually he calmed down and even seemed to be enjoying it. Finally his father asked him if he was now willing to become a Waldensian, pointing out that in this way he would be earning his keep. Louis replied simply by smiling. Interpreting this smile as a sign of consent, his father told the

Waldensian minister that on the following day his son would formally join their church. But Louis, following the sound advice of his mother and Don Bosco, had other plans. When his father came to take him to the Waldensian minister, Louis had disappeared, leaving behind this brief note: "I'd sooner die than be an apostate." We can imagine his father's wrath at being so tricked. Afraid to be laughed at by his cronies, he searched everywhere for his son, but in vain.

Louis meanwhile had found a safe refuge at the Oratory with Don Bosco. During the first few weeks he maintained a discreet silence about the circumstances that brought him there, but later, as he began to mingle with the other boys, he leaked out some information. Lest the boy's father might hear of it, Don Bosco warned him to be more cautious and asked his companions not to talk about it. When he was informed later that the father was still hunting for the boy, Don Bosco sent him away into safe hiding until all danger was past.

Shortly afterward some boys brought a 17-year-old lad to Don Bosco. He had been born a Waldensian, was very intelligent, and had done very well in school and bible history classes. He had also read many books hostile to the Catholic Church and absorbed their bias. However, blessed with a noble and generous disposition, he felt greatly attracted by Don Bosco's amiability. After several talks with him, the lad no longer felt any aversion to the Catholic Church. With the doubts that still lingered in his mind erased and the serious obstacles put in his way by his parents overcome, he became a Catholic. His parents angrily drove him from the house, but he clung steadfastly to his new Faith. Don Bosco accepted him at the Oratory where he learned a trade and soon became self-supporting.

An even greater setback awaited the Waldensians as they subtly attempted to inject their poisonous teachings into the minds of Catholic school children. The committee which had to approve the textbooks to be used in public schools had found that the translation of Canon von Schmid's [1] *Bible Stories for Children* then in use was rather poor and had ordered another version published in Genoa. But in this edition all the scriptural quotations were taken

[1] Christoph von Schmid (1768-1854), writer of children's stories. His *Bible Stories for Children* became very popular far beyond the confines of his native Bavaria. [Editor]

from the translation made by Diodati.[2] As soon as the bishops discovered this fraud, they alerted the faithful while [Giovanni] Lanza, the Minister of Public Education, banned that edition from the schools.

Meanwhile Don Bosco—who always arranged for his boys to make a spiritual retreat every year—went to St. Ignatius' Shrine for his own spiritual retreat. Mr. Pasquale Spinardi [one of the retreatants] sent us his recollections:

[In 1853] I made my spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine near Lanzo. In the dining room I sat at a table presided over by Don Bosco. During those ten days of holiness Don Bosco was our *Lumen Christi.* In the afternoon we had our periods of recreation in the meadow below the shrine but were not allowed to go beyond the three houses that bordered it. We would all sit down in a circle on the fresh grass and listen to Don Bosco as he entertained us with edifying tales and wise maxims.

Whenever he was away, Don Bosco kept a constant watch over the Oratory. Both the boys and the clerics were convinced that he frequently "visited" them during his absence and, though not present, could see everything happening there. Messages would be received from him in which he would express his disappointment about some transgression, as, for example, that several boys had sneaked away to some secret hideaway to play instead of joining their companions at night prayers. The brief period of time between this occurrence and the delivery of Don Bosco's note clearly made it impossible for him to have been informed about it from Turin.

On his return to the city, his new pamphlet, entitled *Fatti Contemporanei Esposti in Forma di Dialogo* [Contemporary Events Presented in Dialogue Form], was sent to subscribers as the August issue of *Letture Cattoliche.* The Foreword read as follows:

The contents of this pamphlet are true incidents; I either witnessed them personally or they were reported to me by other eyewitnesses. I have not altered them in any way except to present them in dialogue form.

For obvious reasons I have thought it advisable not to disclose the identity of several people mentioned therein.

I urge parents to have their children read this pamphlet; they should

[2] Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649), a Protestant theologian. [Editor]

also explain the incidents to them for their guidance and protection in these times so dangerous to our youth.

There were seven dialogues in all:

1. A Waldensian minister bribes a Catholic to abandon his faith.
2. An apostate reveals the causes of his defection to a close friend.
3. A repentant sinner explains that his return to the Catholic Church was effected mainly through reading [Don Bosco's] *Warnings to Catholics* and a holy priest's instruction on the sacrament of Penance.
4. A sick man, after unsuccessfully begging his minister for religious assistance in order to die peacefully, sends for the priest who was once his confessor.
5. A dying man, gripped by remorse, implores a Waldensian minister to summon a Catholic priest, but his pleas are ignored; cruelly forsaken, he dies without the Last Sacraments.
6. A mother speaks to a priest of her sorrow that her son has fallen away from the Church.
7. After losing his Faith through the reading of impious books and joining an irreligious workers' society, a boy meets a priest, once his boyhood friend, and joyfully returns to the Catholic Church.

After finishing his work on the September issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* Don Bosco sent this short letter to his former professor, Father [John Baptist] Appendini in Villastellone:

Letture Cattoliche
Office of the Editor

Turin, August 21, 1853

My dear Father:

Could I impose on your kindness and stay with you a few days? I shall arrive tomorrow morning on the 10 o'clock train. I'm taking along a young cleric as my secretary. I'm coming for two reasons: to get some sleep and do some writing. I am overloaded with work and utterly exhausted.

Please accept this inconvenience *in nomine Domini* and the Lord will reward you. My warmest greetings to you.

Your most grateful pupil,

Fr. John Bosco

Leader of the Little Rascals

P.S. My regards to your sister.

Don Bosco really needed a few days of quiet. He had already completed twelve issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* with a total sale of about 120,000 copies. The Waldensians regarded each issue as a deadly weapon and were furious about the whole situation. They tried to launch counterattacks in their newspapers and in their periodical *Letture Evangeliche* [Evangelical Readings], but it was difficult to compete against the truth and Don Bosco's incomparably simple and lucid style. As a result, they made little headway.

Hoping to eventually silence him, they tried to debate him privately, believing themselves capable of either making him accept their position or shaming him into silence. Even their converts, overwhelmed by pride and ignorance, believed that no Catholic priest could withstand their arguments. Therefore, they began to call at the Oratory in groups of two or more in order to engage Don Bosco in a debate about religion. In general, their idea of debating consisted in shouting at the top of their voices and in skipping from one subject to another without ever coming to any conclusion. As for Don Bosco, he never gave any sign of being bored by their visits. He always received them courteously, listened to their objections and blunders calmly and patiently, and then answered them so cogently and clearly that they were cornered, so to speak. He was ever alert not to let them digress—as was their habit when arguing with Catholics—but forced them to exhaust every facet of the point under discussion and acknowledge either its truth or its falsity. The honest ones among them recanted, but the others, at a loss for an answer and unwilling to concede defeat, resorted to verbal abuse. To the latter Don Bosco would merely say: "My dear friends, shouts and insults are not proofs." With these words he would send them away crestfallen. He often urged them to explain their difficulties to their own ministers and then let him know what solution they had offered.

At one of these debates a man named Pugno, after admitting that he was no match for Don Bosco, then added: "We don't know how to answer you because we aren't educated enough. If only our minister were here! He's a scholar and can silence any priest with just a couple of words." Don Bosco replied: "If that's the case, ask him to come with you next time; I'd be delighted to meet him." The message was delivered, and eventually their minister, [G. P.]

Meille, called at the Oratory, accompanied by two leading Waldensians of Turin. After a few courteous introductions, they began a debate which lasted from eleven in the morning until six in the evening. Obviously, it would take too long to report their conversation in detail, but one incident is worthy of mention. After discussing Holy Scripture and Tradition, the primacy of St. Peter and his successors, and the sacrament of Penance, they moved on to the dogma of purgatory. Don Bosco proved this article of Faith with arguments drawn from reason, history, and Holy Scripture, using both the Latin and the Italian versions. (Later he wrote down this debate and published it in *Letture Cattoliche* during the first years of its existence.) "Well now," one of his opponents said, unwilling to acknowledge defeat, "the Latin and Italian versions aren't enough; we should check the original Greek text." Thereupon Don Bosco pulled out a Greek Bible, saying: "Here it is! Check it. You'll see that both the Latin and the Italian versions are accurate." His opponent knew Greek even less than he knew Chinese, but he did not have the courage to admit it. He took the book with a haughty air and began turning over the pages as if he were searching for corroborative evidence. Unfortunately, he was holding the book upside down. Don Bosco noticed this, but first he let him leaf through the volume for a while. Finally he said to him: "May I help you?" and turned the book right side up. The man's face turned as red as a boiled lobster. Flinging the book on the table, he walked out. That ended the debate. Amadeus Bert was another [Waldensian minister] who came to see Don Bosco in an attempt to dissuade him from holding and then publishing these debates which had enraged the Waldensians to the limits of their endurance, but he did not succeed.

These and similar experiences convinced the Waldensians that the means they had been employing would never suffice to silence Don Bosco. They decided therefore to resort to other measures which perhaps would be more effective—bribes and threats. One Sunday in August, 1853, around eleven in the morning, two men called at the Oratory to speak with Don Bosco. Although he was tired, having just finished saying Mass and preaching, Don Bosco invited them to his room. However, the two strangers had aroused the suspicion of some of the older boys—including Joseph Buzzetti

—and they remained outside the door in case they should be needed. After the usual courteous introductions, one of the two visitors, perhaps a Waldensian minister, began:

Minister: You, Father, have received an extraordinary gift from nature—the ability to express yourself simply and clearly. We have therefore come to ask you to employ this precious talent in the service of science, art, and commerce.

Don Bosco: I've already done something along that line within my limitations. I have published a bible history and a church history, a pamphlet on the metric system, and a few other modest works. Judging by the welcome reception they have had, I do not think they were altogether useless. Now I am busy with *Letture Cattoliche* to which I intend to dedicate all my energies, since I think this publication can greatly benefit young people and the general public.

Minister: Why don't you prepare some textbook on ancient history, physics, or geometry instead? That would be a far more valuable contribution than *Letture Cattoliche.*

Don Bosco: What makes you think so?

Minister: Well, many other writers have already covered the subject matter of *Letture Cattoliche.*

Don Bosco: That is true; others have written on those topics, but they have done so in a scholarly manner, far beyond the comprehension of uneducated people. *Letture Cattoliche* is a publication specifically designed for such people.

Minister: But this publication brings you no profit. Why not accept our suggestion which would also benefit the marvelous institution that Divine Providence has entrusted to you? Take this. (So saying, he handed Don Bosco four bills of 1,000 lire each.) This is merely an advance; there will be other payments that will be far more substantial.

Don Bosco: Why are you offering me so much money?

Minister: To get you started on the books we have suggested, and also to help your most deserving Oratory.

Don Bosco: Please forgive me, but I cannot accept your offer. At the moment I am unable to take on any other commitments besides *Letture Cattoliche.*

Minister: But that's such a useless work!

Don Bosco: Why should you worry about it? If it is so useless, why are you offering me so much money to stop it?

Minister: You don't know what you're doing. By refusing this money you are hurting your own Oratory and risking danger to yourself.

Don Bosco: Gentlemen, I get your message clearly, but let me tell you quite frankly that when truth is at stake I fear no one. I became a priest to serve my Church and save souls, particularly the souls of the young. I started *Letture Cattoliche* for this very reason, and I intend to continue this publication and do everything in my power to enhance its popularity.

Minister: You are making a terrible mistake.

This thought was echoed by his friend as they both stood up; the facade of their fine manners had now disappeared. "Yes, a terrible mistake," the minister repeated. "Your refusal is an insult. Aren't you afraid of what could happen to you? When you leave this room, can you count on returning?"

These words were uttered in such threatening tones that the boys on guard outside, fearing for Don Bosco's safety, rattled the doorknob to make it perfectly clear that there were people around. In no way alarmed, Don Bosco replied: "Obviously you gentlemen do not know Catholic priests too well. You might as well learn this now. As long as we live, we priests are happy to work for God. If we should die while carrying out our duties, we would regard such a death as our greatest fortune and glory. Spare yourselves the trouble of threatening me. Don't make yourselves ridiculous."

These courageous words so enraged the two visitors that they moved threateningly toward him. Don Bosco then grabbed his chair and added: "If I cared to use force, I could make you pay dearly, but I won't; a priest shows his strength in being patient and forgiving. You have said enough. You'd better go now!" As he spoke, he moved toward the door and opened it, still holding the chair partly in front of him like a shield. Joseph Buzzetti was standing by. "Please show these two gentlemen to the gate," he said. "They don't know their way too well!"

The two men exchanged glances and then muttered: "We'll see you again at a more propitious time." Flustered and indignant they

hurriedly left. But no less indignant were the young boarders who little by little had gathered close to Don Bosco's room and had heard the threats. Eager to demonstrate their love for their spiritual father, they would have felt completely justified in taking action if the visitors had been bold enough to attempt violence against Don Bosco.

Their threats could not be passed off lightly since the Oratory stood isolated in the midst of fields and during the day was almost deserted; moreover, the students and the young artisans regularly had to journey to the town for their classes and work. Don Bosco, realizing that the threats would soon materialize, began to give more serious thought to the advisability of having some neighbors whose mere presence might act as a deterrent to his enemies. His main hope was for a religious community. The only congregation which in those troublesome years seemed to be firmly established and able to serve his purpose was that of the Rosminian Fathers. He had previously discussed this plan with Father [Antonio] Rosmini, and they had agreed in principle. Father Rosmini was to purchase a piece of land near the Oratory and there erect a large building for his religious. These priests would be made available to Don Bosco to hear confessions, preach, and promote the growth of the Oratory.

Further consideration of the plan and a note which he received prompted Don Bosco to write the following letter:

Letture Cattoliche
Office of the Editor

Turin, August 29, 1853

My dear Father Gilardi:

I received your letter about a piece of land that I have for sale. I am very glad indeed that your superior general is coming to Turin since I hope to have the pleasure of meeting him. Several potential buyers have shown interest in part of this land, and therefore I need to know, at least approximately, when Father Rosmini expects to be in Turin. I would not want to close any deal before his arrival.

Please let me know. May [our patron] St. Francis de Sales look after you with particular care. Love me in the Lord and believe me, as always, to be

Your affectionate servant,
Fr. John Bosco *(A Little Rascal)*

Father Rosmini came to Turin shortly thereafter. Hoping to reap great spiritual advantages from this project, he made an agreement with Don Bosco before returning to Stresa. He also gave him 3,000 lire on a short-term loan. He had noticed Don Bosco's straitened circumstances and was eager to help him as much as he could, as the following exchange of letters clearly indicates:

Letture Cattoliche
Office of the Editor

To the Very Reverend
Father Antonio Rosmini
Stresa

Turin, October 15, 1853

Very Reverend and dear Father:

The land sales I counted on fell through; the prospective customers failed to show up again.

For this reason I must request a four-month extension of the loan you graciously granted me on your last visit to Turin. Naturally, I will pay you the legal interest. However, should you yourself need the money immediately, I shall promptly send it wherever you might indicate.

I trust you will grant me this favor. Grateful for your constant goodness toward me, I wish you the Lord's blessing. Please remember me in your prayers.

Yours most gratefully,

Fr. John Bosco

Father Rosmini's reply [through his secretary] was prompt.

Stresa, October 18, 1853

Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

In immediate reply to your letter of the 15th, my superior, Father Antonio Rosmini, has instructed me to tell you that he willingly grants you a four-month extension on the 3,000 lire loan as requested in your letter. He wants you to know, however, that at such time he is counting on the money being paid.

With this letter he sends you his best regards and commends himself to your prayers. With great esteem and veneration, I am honored to remain,

Your humble and devoted servant,

Fr. Charles Gilardi

CHAPTER 54

A New Publication

IN Piedmont the school children's summer vacation lasted four months. Don Bosco could not bear to see his boys idle for so long a period of time, and therefore he tried to find ways to keep them busy and happy. He arranged refresher courses for them or made them take accessory subjects taught by friendly fellow priests or by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Three times a week, [John] Cagliero, [John Baptist] Francesia, and [John] Turchi climbed to Father [Matthew] Picco's villa nestled in the hills for an hour's refresher course. The round trip necessitated a healthy two and a half hours' walk.

This summer program changed every year and revolved around elementary Greek or French, ancient and modern history, arithmetic, drawing, elementary astronomy, and mapping. Frequently Don Bosco would also coach them in letter writing which he considered important and not too easy a skill to master. He also urged them to strive for simplicity of style, pointing out to them, however, that such simplicity would be achieved only after a diligent study of the classics, some of which he would particularly point out to them. He also passed on to them the advice that Silvio Pellico had given to him [1]—namely, to keep a dictionary at hand and consult it constantly to learn the correct meaning of certain words or phrases and also to avoid inaccuracies and gallicisms. He assured them that by so doing they would develop a clear style; this would be a great asset if they should be called to the priesthood because then the faithful would understand and long remember their sermons.

[1] *See* Vol. III, p. 222. [Editor]

He was more exacting with the clerics than with the boys about using time fruitfully. The clerics' final examinations ended on the vigil of the feast of St. John the Baptist. Don Bosco allowed them to relax on the feast day itself, but the next day he began to call them one by one and tell them: "Well, now we're on vacation. How about reading Rohrbacher,[2] Salzano,[3] or Bercastel?[4] You could learn a lot from them!" He continued this practice even after they had obtained college degrees, taught Latin at the Oratory, and taken the prescribed examinations in theology at the diocesan seminary.

Not satisfied with this, he constantly urged them to study the Latin Christian classics. During the summer vacations of 1851 and 1852 he had already given some lectures with great competence to Michael Rua and several other pupils on excerpts from these sacred authors, especially from St. Jerome's letters. These he urged them to translate, memorize, and comment on.

He tried to inspire others with his own enthusiasm and was deeply grieved when he discovered that several distinguished professors scoffed at the Latin of the Fathers of the Church, contemptuously referring to it as "sacristy Latin." He contended that those who despised the language of the Church revealed their own ignorance because the Christian classics formed a substantial and splendid part of the Latin literature of several centuries, often equal to the pagan classics in style and as superior to them in concepts as heaven is superior to earth, virtue to vice, and God to man. Indeed, according to Don Bosco, the elegant style, charming language, and vigorous and lofty concepts in some of these Christian authors surpassed even the authors of the great Augustan age. Furthermore, he would prove his assertions with quotations and comparisons.

He often debated this theory with outstanding professors of literature; he did this discreetly and amiably but so persuasively as to win them over to his point of view. He also had an argument

[2] Réné François Rohrbacher (1789-1856), author of *Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise Catholique.* [Editor]

[3] Tommaso Michele Salzano (1807-1890), a Dominican Father and later an archbishop. He authored books on Canon Law and church history and took part in the First Vatican Council in 1869-70. [Editor]

[4] Antoine-Henry Berault-Bercastel (1720-1794), author of *Histoire de l'Eglise,* a most popular work at that time. [Editor]

all his own. He would say: "It is a crime to despise the Latin of the Church Fathers. Aren't we Christians a true, glorious, holy, and divine society? Are not these Christian authors our own? Are they not our glory? Why should we belittle what belongs to us and search for the beautiful only in the pagan writings of our enemies? Is this loyalty to one's own flag, to the Church, and to the Pope?" He did not spare even [Thomas] Vallauri [5] who had published some adverse comments on the Latin of the Fathers of the Church. Don Bosco proved that he had seriously erred in deliberately ignoring the beauty of their writings.

In 1855 Pius IX resolved the dispute between Bishop Dupanloup [6] and Father Gaume [7] with an encyclical recommending that the study of the pagan classics be blended with that of the Christian ones in order to clothe Christian concepts in pure and elegant Latin. The encyclical also established guidelines for this procedure. On this occasion Don Bosco asserted that he was perfectly in accord with what the Holy Father had written.

Don Bosco did not despise the pagan Latin classics. On the contrary, he had studied them, knew long passages from their texts by heart, and commented on them in a masterly fashion, but he also realized how dangerous they could be if not balanced by Christian teachings. "The French Revolution," he said, "by adopting the maxims of pagan authors, raised a generation of murderers. Pagan principles led to the deplorable results with which we are all familiar. Nationalism, hatred of foreigners, glorification of violence, praise of vengeance, pride, deification of the state, aggrandizement—these are the concepts that pervert the tender minds of the young and make them look upon Christian meekness as cowardice."

The first two months of the summer of 1853 were spent in this setting of instruction, occupation, and study. The booklet that Don Bosco published as the September issue of *Letture Cattoliche* was an anonymous work in two parts. Entitled *Examples of Christian Virtue—Selections from Various Authors,* it marked a temporary

[5] A contemporary lexicographer and a prominent man of letters. [Editor]

[6] Bishop Félix-Antoine Dupanloup of Orléans (1802-1878), a great theologian, writer, and educator. [Editor]

[7] Father Jean-Joseph Gaume (1802-1879), a French theologian and author. [Editor]

respite in Don Bosco's struggle against the Waldensians. However, the latter never passed up any opportunity to attack the Catholic Church. Every year, on September 8, it was traditional in Turin to carry the statue of Our Lady of Consolation in a solemn procession; this custom was observed to fulfill a vow made in thanksgiving for the liberation of the city from a mighty siege in 1706. A charming wooden statue had been designated to replace the original one of solid silver; the latter, weighing three hundred and eight pounds, had been stolen on April 18 and had not yet been recovered. But this year the armed forces were conspicuous by their absence. Thanks to a vigorous campaign by *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* the National Guard and the regular troops neither graced the procession with their colorful presence nor maintained order. Consesequently the mob had a free hand. Incited by Waldensian propaganda, young toughs repeatedly disrupted the procession and showed their contempt by zigzagging through it with their hats on, shouting obscenities, and ridiculing the priests and the sacred rites. This wooden statue of the Virgin—a target of those vile insults—was later purchased by Marquis [Dominic] Fassati when a new silver-plated statue replaced it. The marquis then donated it to our own church of St. Francis de Sales where it is still venerated.

Meanwhile Pius IX had regretfully acceded to a petition of King Victor Emmanuel II on behalf of his subjects. The king had requested a reduction of the number of holy days in Piedmont so that with more working days men could better provide for their families. Since he could legitimately consent to this petition and thereby reduce the number of potential occasions of breaking a Church law, the Pope on September 6, 1853 decreed that the feasts of the Circumcision, St. Maurice, the Purification, the Annunciation, St. Joseph, Easter Monday, the Monday after Pentecost, and St. Stephen would no longer be days of obligation. However, they were to retain their liturgical rank.

Don Bosco regretted the downgrading of the feast of St. Maurice and the martyrs of the Theban legion. To offset its effects he had a picture of this glorious saint—the titular of many charitable institutions in Piedmont—printed by the Doyen Press for distribution on the feast day of the martyr, September 22. He was convinced

that the intercession of St. Maurice and his fellow martyrs had on many occasions obtained heavenly protection for the Oratory.[8]

Don Bosco also wanted to manifest his devotion to the Blessed Virgin in a special way. He therefore petitioned the chancery as follows:

[September, 1853]

Very Reverend Vicar General:

For the last three years the Rev. John Bosco [with due permission] has conducted a novena and celebrated the feast of the Holy Rosary in a private chapel of his [9] in the hamlet of Morialdo in the parish of Castelnuovo d'Asti. The novena services have consisted of a brief sermon and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Permission to impart Benediction was also granted for other feasts of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph. All the above services were always held at hours not conflicting with scheduled parish functions and with the full consent of the local pastor.

The petitioner requests Your Reverence to renew this permission for three more years in order that the villagers may continue to be blessed with the spiritual advantages they have heretofore derived (i.e., a plenary indulgence on the feast of the Holy Rosary and an indulgence of three hundred days for each day of the novena, as granted by our reigning Pontiff). The petitioner hopes that this request will be granted.

Rev. John Bosco

The Vicar General replied:

Turin, September 20, 1853

Permission is herewith granted for one year. Authorization for a longer period will be given if the request is submitted in good time.

Philip Ravina, *Vicar General*

Meanwhile, the October issue of *Letture Cattoliche* was ready for distribution. It was an anonymous booklet entitled *Family Discussions on the Precepts of the Church*. The locale was set in the workshop of a tailor whose son had absorbed impious notions during a stay in the capital. A priest answered the boy's objections and proved that the Church had the right to make laws. He also pointed

[8] *See* Vol. II, pp. 233, 268. [Editor]
[9] *See* Vol. III, pp. 313f. [Editor]

out the great advantages that civil society derived from the precepts of the Church.

After completing this task, Don Bosco took the boys to the usual autumn outing toward the end of September. Just as he was alighting from the coach at Chieri with [John Baptist] Francesia and several others, he encountered a gentleman who greeted him and then asked if he remembered him. Don Bosco looked at him and answered: "Yes, we met seven or eight years ago in Turin on the bridge over the Po." The gentleman was amazed because this was exactly what had happened. Don Bosco's memory was always prodigious, indeed almost miraculous in its scope. In fact, for years he could remember not only the names and features of the boys who had already left the Oratory, but also those of their relatives. His memory never grew dim.

As soon as he arrived at Becchi where his brother Joseph and his mother were waiting for him, Don Bosco began the novena of Our Lady of the Rosary; this gave him an opportunity to hear many confessions. Other boys arrived with the Oratory choir. Everywhere en route they had delightedly heard Don Bosco's praises and listened to stories of his boyhood. In Chieri they heard how mothers used to tell their children: "You may go with Don Bosco, but absolutely with no one else," while to Don Bosco himself they said: "Make my boys as good as you are."

Even as a boy, Don Bosco had been outstanding in all virtues, but especially in the virtue of chastity. He had carefully avoided any companions or acquaintances who were careless in their speech and other habits. Mr. Charles Bertinetti of Chieri often took great pleasure in telling young Angelo Savio [10] of Don Bosco's diligence and piety which had so distinguished him among his schoolmates.

Father [Charles] Allora, Father Luzerna, and Father Francis Oddenino [11] told the boys that Don Bosco had been so exemplary as a seminarian that his fellow students regarded him as a saint and so called him. They recounted how he used to seek the friendship of those fellow seminarians whose conduct was something less than edifying in order to give them good advice, and how his

[10] He became a Salesian priest and filled important positions in the Salesian Society. He died in 1893. [Editor]

[11] Fellow seminarians of Don Bosco. [Editor]

superiors held him up as a model of piety and temperance. They also recalled that he never tried to get money for himself and that he always generously assisted his companions in their studies.

In Castelnuovo people still remembered the day when he had donned the clerical habit, the day of his first Mass, his edifying demeanor at the altar, his extraordinary devotion, and the crowds of boys who would surround him. The villagers fondly recalled the virtues that marked his boyhood, his reserved manner, his modest speech, and how parents had encouraged their children to seek his company, so great was their belief in his upright and sterling character. He was known to shun those who used immodest speech. At Becchi his brother Joseph, in response to their questions, would delight them with details of Don Bosco's boyhood. "Even before he donned the cassock," he told them, "Don Bosco seized every opportunity to talk about religion and piety with his young friends and tell them stories about the saints. He prayed often, even when working in the fields, and mothers would point him out to their children as a model to imitate. He received the sacraments very frequently. As he grew older, his desire to love God and make others love Him grew even stronger. He loved to go to catechism classes and sermons in order to be able to repeat what he had heard to his companions and their families. Even as a young boy he was strongly drawn to the virtue of purity; he was beyond reproach in every act and very reserved even in his games. He never uttered a single word that even remotely could allude to anything in the least unseemly. No one ever saw him play with the little girls who lived in the neighborhood." Joseph's testimony was also confirmed by Father [Anthony] Cinzano, the pastor.

The boys loved to hear Don Bosco's praises and enjoyed his company immensely. It was remarkable how everything could give him some inspiration to talk about God. The tiny flowers in the meadows, the harvest lying in the fields, the juicy fruits hanging in clusters from trees or vines, the discoveries made in the depths of the earth—all served him as points of departure to talk about God's goodness and Providence. Sometimes at night he would stand in the yard before his small house and contemplate the starry sky; forgetting his fatigue from having heard so many confessions, he would talk to the boys of the immensity, omnipotence, and wisdom

of God. In all circumstances, he would raise his soul and that of others to the contemplation of God and His infinite mercy so that, as Father [Michael] Rua said, it often happened that his pupils felt like the disciples at Emmaus: "Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking on the road?" [Luke 24, 32]

Don Bosco's teaching and example also had a wholesome effect on the villagers in that area. They too began to approach the sacraments more frequently, led by the example of the Oratory boys who, while full of life and joy when playing, also knew how to pray fervently and devoutly. Don Bosco often led them in bringing a festive note and an example of piety to some neighboring parish or in adding solemnity to some feast day with their singing. Many of the villagers—particularly young boys—would gather around Don Bosco. Even along the road he would give them some good advice or persuasively recommend some act of devotion. These excursions also served to make the Oratory known and to draw more boys to its sheltering care.

On the feast of the Holy Rosary, Don Bosco invested John Baptist Francesia with the clerical habit. Like Michael Rua and Joseph Buzzetti, Francesia had decided to devote his life to the service of his spiritual father. Don Bosco had great expectations for them, and also for John Germano, [Joseph] Marchisio, and [John] Ferrero, three other boys who had finished their Latin studies. However, only one of them donned the cassock a few weeks later, while the other two changed their minds for various reasons.

An incident occurred around this time which further enhanced Don Bosco's reputation. We shall report it here in Father John Turchi's own words:

During the summer of 1853 my companions and I used to go to Father Matthew Picco for a course in rhetoric at his villa on the hills. On one occasion, soaked with perspiration, we imprudently rested under the cool shade of the trees. As a result, I caught a severe cold, lost my appetite, and began to lose a great deal of weight. Don Bosco then sent me home to recover. The local doctor bled me five times. I got rid of my cold, but I was so weak that I had to lie in bed. In this condition I probably would have ended up with consumption if Don Bosco had not come to Castelnuovo a few weeks later for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. He paid me a visit, and when he saw the state I was in,

he cheered me up and gave me his blessing, telling me that I should get well quickly and return to the Oratory. I do not recall now whether or not I got up the next day, but I certainly did get up very soon, and after a brief period of convalescence I returned to the Oratory.

Thank God, I have not been sick since that time. I attribute my recovery to Don Bosco's blessing, particularly since I did not take any medicine whatsoever after I received it.

Meanwhile the boys' joyous vacation at Becchi was drawing to a close. Don Bosco was kept busy giving the last touches to an almanac. A year before he had sadly noticed that the Waldensians were making inroads with low-income families and were unobtrusively but effectively proselytizing through an almanac entitled *The Family Friend.* It was a friend in name only because it was filled with doctrinal and moral errors and thus sowed the seeds of the greatest evils on earth—irreligion and impiety. The Waldensians gave a free copy to everyone they encountered. They left it on doorsteps or threw it inside the house if a window had been left open; they handed it out in the streets, stores, and workshops. Uneducated people read it unsuspectingly; some even thought it was a pious book. There was frequent mention of God, conversions, and the sinner's need of resignation and confidence in the fruits of Redemption, but not a single word was devoted to the topics of confession, Holy Communion, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The subtle undermining of the Faith went undetected in most cases or was discovered too late. To counteract this undercover activity in Turin and the whole of Piedmont and thereby unmask this false "friend," Don Bosco decided to use a similar weapon and compile an attractive almanac.

At the beginning of that year [1853] he outlined his plan to several persons who had offered to help him in writing and distributing *Letture Cattoliche.* They were immensely pleased with the idea, and all enthusiastically exclaimed: "Excellent! Excellent!"

"Do you have any suggestions for a title?" asked Don Bosco. "It should be something catchy. Lots of people are influenced to read a book just because it has a fancy title."

There were several ideas proposed. Someone suggested that it be called *The True Family Friend,* but Don Bosco instantly pointed out that this would be indirect advertising of the Waldensian

almanac. "Our title," he said, "should be something altogether different." Titles such as *The People's Almanac, The Young People's Almanac, The Workers' Almanac,* and many others were proposed. Don Bosco listened to all their ideas, and then told them that he also had one to offer. All immediately grew silent to hear what he had to say. After praising the various titles suggested, he added that, notwithstanding their merit, they should be passed over in favor of *Il Galantuomo;* furthermore, he proposed that the almanac be sent as a New Year's gift to subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche.*

The suggestion received unanimous approval. Since it was important to beat the Waldensians at their own game and be a jump ahead of them, Don Bosco devoted himself energetically to this project, and by October [1853] the almanac was ready. Its official title was *Il Galantuomo—National Almanac for the Year 1854 and Other Useful Information.*

After the Foreword there followed a listing of the members of the royal family, the dates of eclipses, and brief directions for watches operating on mean solar time such as used on the railroads. The almanac proper listed the national and international fairs with all the relevant information about them, the rates of exchange for foreign currency, cooking recipes, moral and religious reflections, interesting facts and ancedotes designed to enhance the people's appreciation of the priesthood, the confutation of certain Waldensian ideas, and some Italian and Piedmontese poems.

The almanac was a New Year's gift to subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche* and became an annual publication, starting with 16,000 copies but increasing year by year.[2] Commenting on this, Father Michael Rua remarked: "We cannot help wondering how Don Bosco could sustain singlehandedly for many years the burdens entailed by a publication exposing Waldensian errors, and then continue it until his death with the help of other zealous writers."

As if compiling *Il Galantuomo* was not enough, when he returned to Turin in the fall, Don Bosco edited a brief elementary Greek grammar and had the Marietti Press print two thousand copies. We still have the invoice for this grammar; it is dated February 10, 1854.

[2] This almanac is still published. In 1955 its title was changed to *Almanacco per Tutti* (The People's Almanac). [Editor]

CHAPTER 55

Heroic Humility

THE two issues of *Letture Cattoliche* for the second half of October and the first half of November were entitled *Henry Buche: A Christian Workman.* This anonymous biography in two parts was printed by the De Agostini Press and dedicated to workmen in general. Buche was born of poor parents at the close of the 16th century in the little town of Erlon in the duchy of Luxembourg. Even as a child he distinguished himself by diligently attending the parochial catechetical instructions and by frequently receiving the sacraments. He became a skilled shoemaker at an early age. He chose SS. Crispin and Crispinian [1] as his patron saints and, following their example, dedicated himself to the eternal salvation of workers. He left Erlon, and after living for many years in Luxembourg, he finally went to Paris. The object of his search was always to find employers who were truly Christian. Wherever he went, the spiritual welfare of workmen was his primary concern, and by dint of personal initiatives, heroic sacrifices, and almsgiving, he was able to persuade a great number of them to reform their lives and become good Christians. When he himself became foreman of a shop, he proved himself to be even more than a father to his young fellow workers. With seven of the more spiritual-minded among them, at the age of fifty he formed a religious community within his own home. With the approval of the archbishop of Paris, he drew up a Rule and started the Pious Brotherhood of Shoemakers which soon began to flourish in Paris and to spread to all parts of France and over the border into Italy. Henry was elected superior of this new

[1] Shoemakers by trade, they suffered martyrdom in 287 under Diocletian in Soissons, France. They are the recognized patron saints of shoemakers and are often portrayed with the tools of their trade. [Editor]

religious congregation which had no habit, vows, or enclosure; its members were bound only by charity and love for their work. Although free to withdraw from the congregation at will, the members persevered, notwithstanding other attractions and persecutions. The perfect and zealous observance of their Rule was such as to befit truly fervent religious. They said prayers in common every day, attended Mass, recited the rosary, read the life of the saint of the day, and sang sacred hymns at certain intervals while at work. On Sundays they went to confession, and after Mass they helped their superior to convert sinners by visiting migrant workers, the sick, and the imprisoned. Henry Buche also founded the Pious Brotherhood of Tailors—modeled on that of the shoemakers—which enriched France with saintly workmen. These two brotherhoods provided employment and clothing, free apprenticeship for orphans, and assistance for young workers, the old, and the sick.

Henry Buche's most outstanding achievement, however, was his effective contribution to the downfall of an impious secret society called "The Workmen's Brotherhood." Every Sunday this group held services with religious trappings to mask its true purpose. Afterward it held "brotherly banquets" during which the members abandoned themselves to all kinds of revelry, impiety, licentiousness, and sacrilege against the consecrated Host. These secret gatherings took place all over France and abroad without anyone suspecting their true purpose. Finally, the civil and ecclesiastic authorities became aware of what was happening and took action against them. It was then that Henry Buche, notwithstanding insults, calumnies, and threats to his own life, succeeded in retrieving large numbers of workmen from this infamous and hypocritical society, thus earning the gratitude of the Paris clergy. The Workmen's Brotherhood completely disappeared within a few years.

Hale and hearty even at the age of 90 years, Henry Buche still journeyed many miles on foot to visit his numerous houses. Ever devoted to the Blessed Virgin, he died in 1696, still working at his trade, and humble as only a saint can be.

This biography was admirably suited to the times, and Don Bosco distributed it to his boys to strengthen them in their Faith. Moreover, *Letture Cattoliche,* while ever more clearly showing his vast sacred erudition and his zeal for souls, also confirmed the wide-

spread opinion that Don Bosco was truly a holy man. The issue for the latter part of November was entitled *Unhappiness of a Recent Apostate*. It consisted of three conversations in which the apostate told a Catholic friend that he had lost peace of mind, peace of heart, and also his reputation. This work, too, was anonymous, but the galley proofs in our possession, with many corrections in Don Bosco's handwriting, clearly attest to his patience and diligence.

Civiltà Cattolica [2] appraised *Letture Cattoliche* as follows:

> Many zealous priests spare neither effort nor expense in combating heresy. Among these there is Don Bosco, a humble but highly commendable priest whom we have already had occasion to mention in this periodical. He is the founder and publisher of *Letture Cattoliche,* a monthly publication in defense of our Faith. Its fifth issue deals with Islamism, the Greek schism, and the Waldensian sect whose true origin and bad faith are exposed. The greatest merit of these booklets is that they are doctrinally sound, written in a popular style, and very timely.
>
> Don Bosco truly deserves our praise. We exhort parents to take a deep interest in the Faith of their children and to avail themselves of *Letture Cattoliche* in order to instill into their minds the seeds of an up-to-date religious education.

Don Bosco's sole purpose in writing was to do good. He did not seek the praise of men. "My goal in preaching and writing," he said, "was always and solely that of making myself understood by using a simple style and vocabulary." He strove for simplicity both in speaking and in writing. To ensure the achievement of that goal, he made it a practice to ask uneducated people to read his manuscripts and then tell him what they had read. For example, one day Don Bosco read aloud to his mother a sermon in honor of St. Peter in which he called St. Peter "clavigero" [key bearer]. Mamma Margaret interrupted him. "Clavigero? What does that mean?" Don Bosco immediately discarded that word.

He deliberately avoided elegant or poetical expressions out of humility. Bishop [John] Cagliero recalled: "During our friendly conversations he would recite eloquent passages from Horace, Virgil, Ovid, and other Latin and Italian authors in order to encourage us to study. Yet he never paraded his knowledge of the classics or

[2] Fourth Year, Second Series, Volume III, 1853, p. 112.

even hinted at it in his books by quoting them. Anyone who did not know him very well, even though living under the same roof, would never have suspected his vast classical erudition in Italian, Latin, and Greek. 'Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of the fool is imminent ruin.' " (Prov. 10, 14)

Despite his knowledge of history, geography, and literature, Don Bosco always submitted his manuscripts—even those of secondary importance—to people well versed in literature and science, such as Silvio Pellico, Father Amadeus Peyron, and Father Matthew Picco. He wanted them to express their opinion and make any necessary correction. He was always grateful for their observations, and even years later he would speak about them to his pupils with gratitude. "At times," Bishop Cagliero told us, "he even humbled himself by submitting his manuscripts or letters for benefactors to us [young Salesians]. When some of his Salesians later received degrees in literature, he asked them to go over his manuscripts, humbly and gratefully accepting their corrections even when they were untimely, unjustified, not in accordance with the opinions of leading authors, or even unsolicited. Indeed, if they failed to make any corrections, he would complain that they did so only to spare his feelings. He did not take offense even when his critics were hostile. He defended his point of view calmly and courteously only when the correct interpretation of some Catholic doctrine or the edification of his neighbors required it.[3]

In October 1853, about forty priests of Turin—most of them extremely interested in the Christian education of youth—met in the residence of Father Masucco, chaplain of the Istituto delle Orfanelle, to discuss various trends of the day in relation to the Church and the welfare of souls. They had chosen this meeting place so as not to attract the attention of the anticlericals and the Waldensians. Father Leonard Murialdo was among those present. Father Amadeus Peyron, a great scholar who held the post of professor of Oriental languages at the Royal University of Turin, was chairman. Don Bosco sat beside him. After various matters had been discussed, someone suggested that popular educational publications should be spread far and wide. Father Peyron concurred.

[3] A scriptural quotation (Prov. 10, 8) has been omitted because it is no longer apropos in the new Confraternity version. [Editor]

At this point Don Bosco asked for permission to speak, and he urged the audience to help him propagate *Letture Cattoliche,* pointing out to them that this was one of the most effective means with which to counteract the false teachings of the Waldensians.

When Don Bosco had finished speaking, Father Peyron took the floor. "That is all very true," he said. "However, I made it a point to read those pamphlets carefully, and I must say that if you want results you must strive to improve their grammar, vocabulary, and style. They should be more diligently corrected." Such criticism from so renowned an authority struck all those present as harsh and caustic, even if motivated by honest zeal. Father Murialdo felt sorry for his friend Don Bosco and wondered how he would react to these adverse remarks that were all the more cutting and scathing because not all of the priests present were at that time well disposed toward him. But Don Bosco gave no indication of having been in any way offended, and he replied calmly and humbly: "It is for this very reason that I entreat you to help and advise me in this matter. I beg you to point out to me whatever needs correcting, and I'll gladly cooperate. I would indeed be very happy if someone in this group would agree to edit the manuscripts of *Letture Cattoliche.*" When Father [Leonard] Murialdo disclosed this to us in 1890, he remarked that he had never forgotten that scene, for from that moment he believed that Don Bosco was truly a saint! It is natural to be sensitive to criticism about one's intellectual abilities, especially when one has authored some particular work. With that in mind, we can appreciate Don Bosco's heroic virtue in humbly accepting that berating. There was a certain justification for the criticism inasmuch as some pamphlets, either anonymous or translated from the French, had not been presented in smooth and polished Italian. Not even Don Bosco's painstaking care could completely eliminate their original imperfections. Yet he offered no excuse or said anything in his own defense; however, without losing heart, he continued to write.

He well deserved the following praise that Father Murialdo bestowed on him: "Ever since I became a close friend of Don Bosco, I never detected the least imperfection that could detract from his virtues. Everything about his demeanor and speech evinced his humility. If he mentioned his great undertakings, it was only to

justify his frequent appeals to public charity. This was in keeping with the teaching of the Gospel: '. . . that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven.' " [Matt. 5, 16]

Father Reviglio testified:

If at times Don Bosco spoke of matters redounding somewhat to his honor, it was obvious that he did so only for our instruction and edification. He was never in the least affected by the extraordinary tokens of respect shown him in the midst of what one may well call his triumphs; he permitted certain enthusiastic manifestations of homage and love on our part to train us to fulfill our duties of gratitude and filial piety and to have the opportunity to whisper some timely salutary advice. His manner and speech, his care to shun unnecessary honors, and his habitual and sincere conviction of his own nothingness afforded us a splendid lesson in the virtue of humility.

Bishop John Cagliero gave us this evaluation:

Don Bosco practiced humility to a heroic degree by speaking humbly of himself and readily accepting every kind of humiliation. He would tell us of the humble condition of his parents, of his struggles to make a living, and of the help he had received from charitable people—particularly Father Cafasso—that enabled him to complete his studies for the priesthood. He delighted in telling us these things, and he gloried in the poverty of his family, thus instilling in us a great love for this virtue which Our Lord himself had practiced and praised.

In his sermons and talks Don Bosco would remind us that the kingdom of God was for the poor in spirit, and that his mission was to help the young whom Jesus so dearly loved, especially those who were poor and derelict. His words were particularly effective because we could see that they were matched by facts. When he used to call himself the leader of the little rascals of Turin, he did so not as a boast, but merely as a means to win the boys over and inspire them to be good. He enjoyed being with us; occasionally, after returning from some visit to a noble or prominent family, he would tell us: "I feel much more at home with you; this is really where I belong."

Father Turchi remarked:

Humble as he was, he acted amiably with both rich and poor. He refrained from giving orders even to his boys. His usual approach was: "Would you please do this or that?" He was so nice about it that he

obtained far more in this way than he would have by an order. He was most appreciative of even the least thing done for him, as though he felt he was not deserving of it. I once saw him come out of his room as though in need of something. I went to him and asked him what he wanted. "I am terribly thirsty," he answered.

"Will some water and sugar do?" I inquired. "That's all I have."

"Oh, that would be fine!" he replied.

I brought it to him and he thanked me profusely as though I had actually done him a great favor.

We shall close this chapter by quoting Father Michael Rua:

Don Bosco could have attained high Church positions; as a matter of fact, several times they were offered to him, but he always declined. In those days he could have easily obtained a teacher's certificate or diploma just by saying the word, but he never said it. Now and then former pupils of the Oratory, after receiving academic degrees, would return to pay him a visit. He would congratulate them and then add charmingly that he himself could not even boast of a grammar school teacher's diploma. When anyone asked him if he had some civil or ecclesiastical title, he would answer: "I'm just Don Bosco; nothing else!" He was equally indifferent to honors or contempt. He thought of himself as a mere instrument of God. He never used such expressions as "I did" or "I want." Instead he used the third person: "Don Bosco said" or "Don Bosco wishes" or "Don Bosco recommends." He often stressed his inadequacies, saying again and again that if it had not been for God's assistance, the most he could have become would have been a pastor in some mountain village. He attributed everything he did to God, saying: "With God's grace we were able to do this. If God wishes, we shall do that. God sent us His help. Thanks be to God for everything." To God alone he gave glory for all his undertakings. He also considered himself an inept instrument in the hands of the Lord, and he attributed the good he had done and was doing to the priests and to the former pupils of the Oratory, even though they had by now long since departed. If he met with any setback which affected the whole Oratory, he would say: "Perhaps we did something wrong and the Lord is punishing us. Let us do better and He will bless us." Therefore he accepted all kinds of afflictions with resignation, and he exhorted his boys to do likewise.

I recall that one day the revered prior of the Dominicans came to the Oratory. Don Bosco, who never passed up an opportunity to practice virtue, asked him to suggest some spiritual thought suitable for the

whole community. The prior obliged by quoting St. Augustine: *Prima virtus est humilitas; secunda, humilitas; tertia, humilitas.* [The first virtue you should strive for is humility; the second is humility, and the third is still humility.] That made us understand more than ever before why Don Bosco insisted so much on this virtue. He often said that if we would give him a little piece of our head—meaning our will—he would make saints of us all. Almost every day he reminded us of St. Augustine's advice: "Do you want to be great? Start by being humble. Do you plan a great structure? First make sure that it is founded on humility."

CHAPTER 56

First Workshops at the Oratory

THE reconstruction of the new building which had collapsed proceeded so rapidly that by October half of it—including the porticoes so necessary in bad weather—was ready for occupancy. Classrooms, dining room, and dormitories were immediately relocated there; the old chapel became a large study hall. Within a short time, the boarders numbered sixty-five. For his own quarters Don Bosco chose the last three rooms on the third floor of the wing facing the new church. The first room, located at the juncture of this wing with the main building, was assigned to two or three boys who were to be at Don Bosco's beck and call; the second room served a double function as library and secretary's office—at that time the cleric Rua fulfilled this duty—and the third, which had a window facing south, became Don Bosco's room [until 1861] and is now [1904] used as a waiting room. The furniture, which was never replaced or refurbished, consisted of a small iron bed, odds and ends donated by benefactors, several very plain chairs, a small bare desk without drawers, an old dilapidated sofa, a wobbly shelf, a simple kneeler for hearing confessions, a crucifix, and a few holy pictures. For a long time [1853 to 1861] this one room served as bedroom, reception room, and office.

When Don Bosco moved in, the room was so damp that every morning its furnishings were dripping wet; if a pair of shoes remained under the bed for even two days, they became completely moldy. The wallpaper that hopefully was to mask this flaw quickly rotted, turned black, and peeled off completely. However, the urgent need for space had made it imperative to move some of the boys into the new building even though it was still damp. To forestall any complaints and make the boys accept the changeover cheerfully,

Don Bosco kindled their enthusiasm by emphasizing the advantages of the new building and moving in himself. The boys followed suit eagerly. True, it was a potentially risky decision from a human point of view on account of the health hazards involved, but the fact is that neither Don Bosco nor the boys suffered any ill effect, as he had publicly assured them beforehand. He knew that Divine Providence would not desert him in this regard.

After everyone was settled, Don Bosco immediately proceeded with his plans to carry out a long-cherished project—namely, the opening of workshops in the Oratory itself, regardless of the costs involved. To send the boys to town every day for work, even after a careful selection and supervision of the shops, was at least morally dangerous, if not actually harmful, to discipline and character formation. Irreligion and immorality were unfortunately on the rise. Don Bosco was aware that on many occasions his boys had been the target of ridicule and that this could undermine their moral and religious education.

Even the streets through which the boys had to pass on their way to work were crowded with newsstands peddling irreligion and immorality. In the windows of bookstores and other shops, indecent pictures, lewd statuettes, scandalous novels, and heretical books were prominently displayed. All these things conspired to undermine their Faith, notwithstanding Don Bosco's various directives and admonitions, and particularly his "Good Nights" at which he made it a point to explain doctrinal or moral truths that might have been attacked in the boys' presence while they were at their jobs. He also forewarned the boys constantly, both publicly and privately, about the Waldensian errors and their dangerous consequences.

In his eagerness to protect as many boys as he could from spiritual dangers, Don Bosco, with the help of some benefactors, purchased a few work benches and tools and started a shoe repair shop in a small corridor of the Pinardi house near the church tower. At the same time he selected several boys to learn the tailor's trade after converting the old kitchen into a shop. (The kitchen was now located on the main floor of the new building at the far end of what today is the winter reception room overlooking the garden.) In both workshops the crucifix and the statue of the Blessed Virgin were given a place of honor.

Immediately thereafter a significant material and spiritual improvement became noticeable in the boys. Don Bosco himself—who had learned something about the art of tailoring when he was a boy [1]—taught the young tailors. Likewise, while the Oratory students were attending school in town, Don Bosco would occasionally sit at the cobbler's bench to teach the boys how to handle their tools. The operation of these two shops also reduced expenses somewhat, inasmuch as the boys' clothing and shoes did not wear out so quickly. As new needs arose, Don Bosco established new workshops to meet them. Father Ascanio Savio recalled: "I visited these shops when they were opened in 1853. Don Bosco realized that the Oratory could not fully achieve its goals until it had its own workshops and thus became a self-sufficient and fully developed organic unit." To run the shoe repair shop, Don Bosco appointed Dominic Goffi, who also doubled as doorkeeper; a man named Papino was put in charge of the tailor shop. The craftsmasters were responsible for instruction, order, and discipline. In order to more efficiently secure the achievement of these goals, Don Bosco drafted regulations for the workshops.[2] In this draft no mention was made of the "assistant" because at that time Don Bosco personally supervised the shops. The following year [1854] the office of prefect was established.

Don Bosco's wish was to have all his young artisans continually within his sight, but insufficient facilities still forced him to send a certain number of them to town. Therefore, he felt constrained to visit them more frequently in their shops and insist that their employers watch over them solicitiously. Unfortunately, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find employers who had any concern about the religious welfare of their workers. Preoccupied only with the material and financial aspects, many of them refused to even consider the possibility that such responsibility was truly theirs and that they would be accountable to God for their failure in this respect. On the other hand, the employees, when deprived of this guidance, grew careless in the development of their spiritual life, felt no need to sanctify their work, forgot their immortal destiny, and, lacking the help provided by good example or by an authority

[1] *See* Vol. I, p. 174. [Editor]
[2] *See* Appendix 21. [Editor]

that would compel observance of God's laws on the more unruly among them, easily fell prey to evil propaganda.

In one of the first issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* Don Bosco described this situation in the following manner:

> When I enter a factory or a large workshop, seldom does much time pass before I hear the adorable name of Jesus Christ uttered irreverently amid angry imprecations and blasphemies that make the place sound like hell itself. As I pass by some apprentices I shudder at their brazenly obscene conversation. Elsewhere in the factory or shop a mature man can be heard deriding the Church and her ministers; another is cursing Divine Providence; still another, a shameless and irreligious old man, sets himself up as the teacher of impiety and corruption to a crowd of curious apprentices who thoughtlessly drink in his poison.
>
> This, unfortunately, is the tragic spectacle which we observe today in quite a few factories and workshops. If one were to ask these men why they work so hard and wear themselves out from morning until night, they will answer: "To earn our living." "Good! That suffices for the needs of the body, but what about your soul? Do you ever give any thought to that?" The only answer is laughter! "Poor people, aren't you afraid that this will lead you to eternal damnation?" "The only things we're afraid of are becoming sick, losing our job, and having a hard time in our old age." "And when you are dead?" Again they laugh. Their only concern is for this life.

Worried mothers often came to Don Bosco seeking ways to get their sons out of the corruptive environment of factories and shops and to place them where they could learn a craft or trade without losing their souls. Don Bosco did his utmost to help them—sometimes even with jobs outside Turin through his many connections—but he was determined not to rest until he could provide for the training of hundreds of young artisans in the Oratory under his direct supervision.

But this was not all. His perceptive mind saw the dangers threatening all nations, and he realized how necessary it was to find a Christian solution to the pressing problems besetting the working class. Socialism was on the move in several neighboring countries and now was also threatening Italy. Agitators and leaders of secret societies became convinced that the future lay in the hands of those

who would be able to control the minds of the labor force. They therefore began to degrade them morally with a truly satanic zeal in order to condition them for every excess and thus be able to use them as a stepping stone to power. On his part Don Bosco had resolved to prevent such a disaster through the young workers themselves. He would lead them back to the practice of religion, for religion alone would make them happy with their station in life by leading them to the path of charity and sacrifice. He explained to them that Our Lord Himself had honored and glorified manual labor during His mortal life by choosing to be a simple workman the same as they. In addition, he often described to them their eventual triumphal entry into heaven when they would reap an everlasting reward for the pains and hardships of this world.

However, Don Bosco realized that he would not be able by himself to carry out his plans for Christian workshops, oases of peace and joyous and blessed activity from which his pupils would one day go forth to all parts of this earth bravely facing the trials of life and unswervingly following the path God had traced for them. In his overall concept, they were to function as soldiers defending both the Church and civil society in Catholic workmen's associations. But long experience had taught him that individual enterprises generally fade away after the death of the very men who had created them. That is why he never gave up his dream of founding a religious congregation designed to achieve this specific purpose. It was Divine Providence who was inspiring him in this regard, just as it had inspired hundreds of his contemporaries, both men and women, to found societies that would assist workers in all their needs. The powerful and wholesome influence of these associations is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the relentless opposition they encountered at that time and continue to encounter even to this day.

Thus in 1853, without the fanfare that seems to be the fashion nowadays even for trivial ventures, Don Bosco began another vast undertaking, but on so modest a scale that it seemed to be merely a trial project, even though it was not. It seemed as though a voice had said to him: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; on your own intelligence rely not; in all your ways be mindful of Him and He will make straight your path." (Prov. 3, 5)

This undertaking was indeed destined to become one of world-

wide proportions. In the course of fifty years, more than 300,000 young workers left Don Bosco's trade schools and settled all over the world. Today thousands of boys who otherwise would roam the streets and become blind instruments of revolution are instead steadily molded into useful and upright citizens.

CHAPTER 57

Two Admirable Teachers

THE increase in the number of artisans boarding at the Oratory was matched by a similar increase of students. The establishment of this new section was truly providential and, in our opinion, divinely inspired. Many of the boys recommended to Don Bosco by government officials, municipal authorities, pastors, parents, and relatives came from families who had suffered financial reverses. Having been raised in comfortable circumstances, many of these boys did not always adapt easily to vocational training, for which they were not especially suited. Others were so gifted that it seemed a shameful waste of their talents to train them for inferior occupations instead of giving them a more advanced education to the greater advantage of society. In such cases, therefore, Don Bosco—who as far as possible took into consideration the needs, circumstances, and aptitudes of the boys—would assign them to studies. Thus, whereas in 1850 the students had numbered only 12, in 1853 there were as many students as artisans.

This new section enabled the Oratory to aid a greater number of poor families by educating gifted boys who otherwise, because of financial difficulties, would not have had the opportunity to make the most of their talents. From that time on the Oratory provided society not only with able craftsmen but also with well-educated office workers; more important still, it became an institution which nurtured priestly and religious vocations for the diocese and for the Oratory itself. With these new recruits Don Bosco was eventually able to give a civil and moral education to thousands of poor boys in both hemispheres.

We have already mentioned that during the scholastic year 1851-52 Don Bosco, lacking the time to teach Latin himself, had

begun to send all his students to the private schools of Professor Joseph Bonzanino and Father Matthew Picco for their junior and senior high school classical courses. These two top educators willingly accepted Don Bosco's students gratis, thus earning the everlasting gratitude of the Oratory. Since both of them were personable, learned, and revered gentlemen, their schools enjoyed an excellent reputation. Prosperous families eagerly entrusted their sons to them, and these boys greatly benefited from the education they received.

Don Bosco sent his boys to these classes in two groups, since Father Picco's school was located near St. Augustine's Church and Professor Bonzanino's near St. Francis of Assisi's. Junior high school students formed one group, while those taking courses in the humanities and rhetoric comprised the other. On their way to and from school both groups had to follow a strictly laid out itinerary. This made their journey substantially longer, but the boys obeyed instructions unquestioningly. If at times they asked the reason, Don Bosco would reply: "Evil companionships corrupt good morals." [1 Cor. 15, 33] When they grew older they understood why he had given them such instructions. The cleric Rua—who himself went to philosophy classes taught by the seminary professors Father [Joseph] Mottura and Father [Lawrence] Farina [1]—was in charge of both groups. Canon [August] Berta always delighted in recalling how he had given Michael Rua a refresher course in those subjects.

At these two private schools the Oratory students rubbed elbows with the children of the most prominent families in Turin. We cannot but admire the wisdom of Divine Providence in leading them to a school where they could form close ties with boys who one day would fill important positions in the local and national governments. These officials, fondly remembering their school days, generally were delighted to help their former companions in whatever ways they could. Moreover, the good conduct, intelligence, and diligence of the Oratory boys soon became known to actual and potential benefactors. Amazingly, none of the patrician families withdrew their sons from these two schools which had enrolled paupers, nor did they even make a single complaint; on the contrary, they seemed quite pleased, even though those days could hardly be considered the age of democracy.

[1] *See* Vol. III, p. 429. [Editor]

In justice we should now give due praise to Father [Matthew] Picco and Professor [Joseph] Bonzanino for their Christian and, we may add, heroic charity in risking a boycott of their schools by the wealthy families of Turin and the loss of their own livelihood. To place poorly clad boys of humble station side by side with finely dressed young gentlemen who were fully conscious of their higher social standing was quite a risk. The only basic precaution that Professor Bonzanino took was to meet the Oratory boys at the door and instruct them to remove their army surplus overcoats. These coats protected the boys against inclement weather, but they were moth-eaten and so poorly tailored that those who wore them appeared ludicrous or suspicious, as [Charles] Tomatis found out one day while on his way to art school. As he sat down on a public bench along one of the avenues, he was instantly approached by two policemen who asked to see his identification papers. Tomatis innocently replied that the only kind of paper he had was drawing paper, which he then took out of his pocket. He also gave his name, address, and occupation. When the policemen asked how Don Bosco managed to house and feed so many boys, Tomatis answered simply: "Divine Providence!"

"You don't say!" replied the policemen in a derisive tone.

"That's right," Tomatis added, "the same Divine Providence that keeps you in good health and provided me with this overcoat." After asking a few more questions, the policemen left him in peace.

In the beginning this army surplus apparel resulted in some gibes and taunts, but soon the novelty wore off and Don Bosco's boys were no longer ridiculed throughout the many years during which they wore those overcoats. Nevertheless, Professor Bonzanino was justified in regarding them as unsuitable apparel to be worn in the presence of rich young boys who all too often were prone to have fun at the expense of others.

As we have said, only a few of Don Bosco's students attended the classes of Father Picco and Professor Bonzanino during that first year [1851-52]. However, their number gradually increased up to a hundred and almost swamped the facilities of these two private schools from whose tuition the two professors earned their livelihood. Don Bosco saw to it that the parents, relatives, or guardians of his boys paid regular monthly fees whenever possible. On his

part, he contributed a yearly fee of fifty lire and gradually increased that amount according to his means.

Father Picco and Professor Bonzanino never refused to accept any boy recommended by Don Bosco. His manner of asking their cooperation was so persuasive that they could not refuse, as we can see from the following letter to Professor Bonzanino:

Turin, December 28, 1853

My dear professor,

I have two more boys to send you. The first one, named Carossi, is in the fourth grade and would like to start Latin. He can afford to pay. I think he should be assigned to Mr. Pasquale's class. The second is a boy named Anfossi, and I think he belongs in junior high. He was recommended to me by the sister and sister-in-law of Bishop [John] Losana of Biella. I believe they will pay the fees.

I hope you can tuck the two boys into some little corner where they can listen to your invaluable lessons. First look them over, and then decide *in Domino* what you think best.

May the Lord bless you and all your students. My thanks for everything you do on behalf of my poor boys. You may count on me for any help I might be able to give you.

Most gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

Both boys were admitted. One of them, John Baptist Anfossi, had been brought to Turin as a boy of 13 on December 22 [1853] by Bishop Losana's sister. Everyone in Turin now knows him as Father Anfossi, honorary canon of the collegiate church of the Holy Trinity, doctor in literature and philosophy, and knight of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus. Around 1900, Father Anfossi told us of the great esteem he had felt for Don Bosco from the first moment of his arrival at the Oratory:

When I came to the Oratory in 1853, everyone there was convinced that Don Bosco had performed miracles. The older boys told me so, and all of us—a total of fifty-one, not including the clerics—were unshaken in our belief that he had raised the dead [2] and multiplied hosts [3]

[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 349ff. [Editor]
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 311f. [Editor]

and chestnuts.[4] They also told me about the multiplication of bread. According to Oratory custom, when there was a general Communion, all the boys received a bun and something else to go with it for breakfast. On these occasions, hundreds of day boys came, but there was no sure way to foresee even the approximate number. Nevertheless, even though at times there was not enough bread in the house, somehow everyone got his share.

I knew Mamma Margaret too. I admired her spirit of sacrifice and her total dedication to the welfare of the boys. Whenever we needed anything, we would go to her; if she could, she always helped us, and she encouraged us to pray and to be good. She was revered by everyone, even by high-ranking visitors.

Don Bosco often visited Father Picco and Professor Bonzanino to discuss the Latin classics. He also urged the two professors to correct all the Latin homework of his boys and point out the errors to them. He considered this the most effective way to help them learn languages. He constantly repeated this advice later on to the Oratory teachers. When the Oratory students presented themselves for their examinations in private or public schools, Don Bosco did not abandon them. He would call on their examiners, and they obligingly would allow him to see his pupils' written tests. He would read them carefully, check the corrections, and defend his charges if they had been unjustly faulted. He did this with faultless competence, and the examiners never failed to be amazed at his deep and vast knowledge of Latin literature.

Don Bosco also repaid the generosity of Father Picco and Professor Bonzanino by solicitously looking after the spiritual welfare of all their pupils. Since these two private schools offered only academic subjects, Don Bosco began in 1853 to teach religion there every Saturday, and he continued to do so for many years. He taught both the boarders and the day students one hour a week. He would usually dwell on some incident of church history, a parable, or a moral tale that would encourage them to confess frequently. He also gave them catechism lessons, and each month he heard their confessions at the Oratory. In every respect he exercised a salutary influence over them and over other boys of the most noble families of Turin. Canon John Baptist Anfossi recently

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 404ff. [Editor]

told us: "I frequently hear prominent people and members of the aristocracy—former schoolmates of mine—talk gratefully about Don Bosco's religious instruction and about the joy they experienced in going to confession to him."

Don Bosco enjoyed the confidence of the parents as well as of the boys, and very often he was able to restore peace in their families if some friction developed through misunderstanding or the misbehavior of one of their sons. A certain boy, whose name began with "C" and who had previously frequented the festive oratory at Valdocco, one day [in 1853] ran away from home after a sharp reprimand from his father and sought refuge at the Oratory. Don Bosco agreed to let him stay there and calmed him down; then he informed the father of the boy's whereabouts and prepared the lad to make a good confession. After a month he escorted him back home where he was received with open arms. The boy grew into a fine upright citizen, studied law, and became the counselor to the Court of Appeals.

Don Bosco was also an intimate friend of the boys' teachers, and they in turn held him in great esteem. In this connection we shall relate a noteworthy incident. Don Bosco generally spent Father [Matthew] Picco's name day, September 21, in the latter's summer home, within which there was also a chapel. Therefore, on September 20, 1853, Don Bosco set out in the late afternoon with young John Francesia. The lad was carrying a supply of firecrackers for the celebration, and he was also to read a poem in honor of Father Picco at the close of the name day dinner. They left the city through the Casale gate and then took a road at the foot of the hill of Superga. Walking through St. Martin's valley they began the ascent to the professor's summer house, a white landmark atop one of the hills.

In Don Bosco's company there was never an idle moment. He always had something interesting to say or propose that was both delightful and useful. After a while, they reached a spot named after SS. Bino and Evasius. As Don Bosco was telling Francesia the wonderful life story of these two saints, a group of young boys appeared from behind a clump of trees and began to pelt Don Bosco with stones. This was their usual pastime when anyone—especially a priest—ventured that way. Don Bosco turned around and calmly

walked toward them, but they immediately began to run away. He then shouted to them to stop and come back, promising that he would not hit or scold them. At his words the boys halted.

"I have something to give you!" Don Bosco went on. As he said this, he took some medals out and held them up for their inspection. The bolder lads drew nearer, saying: "We didn't throw the stones. It was the boys over there hiding behind those mulberry trees!"

"You boys come over here too!" said Don Bosco. "Let's be friends! I know you did it only for fun." The boys came out of hiding and ran to him.

"How about some cherries?" Don Bosco continued.

"We could eat a whole bushel of them," they chorused. (Don Bosco told us that this kind of approach always worked and that by spending a few soldi on fruit he was able to make friends with almost any boy.)

"Pits and all?"

"Yes, pits and all."

"Now tell me one thing. Do you go to Mass and catechism class on Sundays?"

"Yes, Father!"

"Where?"

"To our parish church," some answered, while others replied: "We go to Don Bosco's Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia. On important feast days we get a free breakfast."

With a smile, Don Bosco said: "What! You go to Don Bosco's Oratory, and then you throw stones at him?"

"Are you Don Bosco?"

"That's who I am."

"Oh, Father, we're sorry."

Meanwhile their parents had come there to see what was happening, and when they overheard the conversation, they scolded their children and offered their profuse apologies to Don Bosco.

"Let's just forget the whole thing," Don Bosco replied. "Don't scold these good boys; they didn't mean any harm." He was well aware that such an approach would win over both the parents and the boys, whereas harsh words would only alienate everyone.

However, as he took his leave, he urged the parents to exercise

great care in the character development of their children and to see to it that they were faithful in the observance of their Christian duties. He also urged them to instill in their children respect for priests and religious, pointing out that children brought up in this manner would also respect their parents and help them in their old age.

It was now getting dark. Tipping his hat to all present, Don Bosco took his leave and continued on his way while the people gathered in small groups and commented favorably on his words. His recommendations had their effect. From that time Father Picco, who had often been pelted with stones on that road and who usually suggested another route to his visitors, was never shown the slightest sign of disrespect. When he learned the reason, he remarked repeatedly: "No wonder! It was Don Bosco. Only he could have brought this change about."

Father Picco, Professor Bonzanino, and other teachers, especially if they were priests, derived great spiritual benefit merely by talking with Don Bosco. Without even realizing it, they gradually dropped their worldly habits, became more spiritual, and managed to overcome some of their annoying habits. Don Bosco's demeanor and his prudent conversation invariably had wholesome effects. We could cite many instances to substantiate this statement, but we shall limit ourselves to the following report of Father [John Baptist] Francesia:

I knew a good priest who was also a capable teacher. As was the custom with some priests many years ago, he wore a habit that reached only to the knees, whereas the priests who were more careful about the exact observance of regulations wore it longer, almost to their ankles. As soon as this priest became acquainted with Don Bosco, almost at once, without anyone suggesting it to him, he began to lengthen his habit by a few inches every year until there was no difference between his cassock and that of other priests.

This priest was very quick-tempered. On some days, despite his efforts at self-control, he would put the whole household on edge, and woe to anyone who got on his nerves on such occasions. Once I was with him when his sister brought him a cup of coffee, not realizing that she had forgotten the teaspoon. Ordinarily that would have triggered a stormy tirade. However, to the astonishment of everyone present,

he turned to her with a smile and, shaping his hand into a scoop, remarked: "How about a little something for the sugar?" His sister could hardly believe his gentle manner, for he had never acted so courteously before then. Later she told me confidentially: "We have to thank Don Bosco for this! Before he met Don Bosco, a mere trifle like forgetting a teaspoon would have ruined the day for everyone in the house. But nowadays he is constantly cheerful and everyone is happy!"

Like their spiritual father, the Oratory students were greatly admired by their companions for their exemplary conduct. They were very fond of Father Picco and Professor Bonzanino, and their affection was thoroughly reciprocated. We might justly call these two professors the patriarchs of Salesian teachers because they trained a goodly number of those who were destined by the Lord to work with Don Bosco in educating the young. They considered themselves blessed to have had such pupils as [Michael] Rua,[5] [John] Cagliero,[6] [John Baptist] Francesia,[7] [Francis] Cerruti,[8] and many others who were consistent models of attentiveness, diligence, and achievement, and whose example inspired their friends who came from prosperous families to be more responsive to their teachers. In their declining years these two professors often fondly recalled how their success with the Oratory boys had amply compensated for the troubles and disappointments they had experienced with the other pupils.

Don Bosco's boys were greatly loved by their companions, and thus the greatest harmony reigned at these two schools. Special feast days were often observed by a joint celebration. Just as their schoolmates often flocked to the Oratory, Don Bosco's boys joined their well-to-do companions in honoring St. Aloysius Gonzaga with great solemnity in the Regia Basilica Magistrale.[9] At that time

[5] The first successor of St. John Bosco as Superior General of the Salesian Society. [Editor]

[6] The first Salesian bishop and cardinal. [Editor]

[7] A poet and writer, he also filled important positions in the Salesian Society. [Editor]

[8] A member of the Superior Chapter of the Salesian Society. [Editor]

[9] Constructed in 1679 on the site of the former St. Paul's Church as the seat of the Confraternity of the Holy Cross, in 1728 by decree of King Victor Amadeus II it became the titular church of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus. Its official title was "Basilica of the Equestrian Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus." [Editor]

religion was still the inspiring and dominating factor in education, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga was the official patron and model of students. On this occasion the Oratory boys used to vie with their schoolmates in composing and reciting sonnets expressing their devotion to this saint who was an angel in human flesh. Don Bosco particularly treasured those composed in 1854.

CHAPTER 58

Spirituality at the Oratory

AT this point it would be fitting to describe the day-to-day Oratory routine. Until 1858 Don Bosco ran the Oratory as a large family; the boys really felt as if they had never left their homes. There was no marching in file from one place to another, the supervision was not stern, and the rules were few and based on common sense. For example, in the morning, as the boys went to Mass, each of them moved a small wooden peg to a hole next to his own name on a board at the church entrance. If any boy was still in bed, it thus was immediately noticeable. This system worked because conscience was their guide.

During the daily Mass the boys said their morning prayers and the rosary; afterward there was a period of fifteen minutes devoted to spiritual reading. Although a certain number of boys went to daily Communion, the majority received once a week.

At noon both the students and the artisans returned for lunch; then they engaged in an hour's recreation before resuming their classes or jobs in town. At four in the afternoon, the students returned to the Oratory for a snack and recreation while the artisans took their snack at their jobs.

Don Bosco loved his boys liked a father, and he patiently studied their characters while joining in their games and songs. It was an edifying and heartwarming sight to see them vying with one another to get closer to him and enjoy his interesting and pleasant conversation. This meant a lot to them because they not only loved him but revered him as a saint. On his part, Don Bosco entertained them with amusing or edifying stories, while also taking advantage of the opportunity to deliver some timely admonition or correction. His words were received as inspired by God.

The students went to the study hall at five and stayed there until supper time. Since two and a half hours of mental work would have been excessive, during the last twenty minutes they could relax listening to some instructive and edifying story read aloud by a boy. After supper all practiced singing.

At nine o'clock they said night prayers—on the porticoes in the summer and in the old Pinardi shed in the winter, since Don Bosco did not want to give his friendly little talk after night prayers in church lest it might seem to the boys like another sermon. This arrangement gave him a welcome opportunity to comment on or rectify some minor breach of discipline in his gentle persuasive way or—occasionally—with a most effective fatherly severity. The boys said their night prayers kneeling on the bare floor with Don Bosco in their midst. Afterward he would mount a chair or rostrum to give the usual "Good Night."

Don Bosco had a wonderful gift for inspiring love of God and the Blessed Virgin in his young charges, for encouraging them to practice a particular virtue, and for pointing out ways to progress spiritually. At times he filled them with a horror for sacrilegious Communion or moved them deeply by commending himself very humbly to their prayers, voicing St. Paul's sentiments: "Lest perhaps after preaching to others, I myself should be rejected." [1 Cor. 9, 27] However, his "Good Nights" did not always deal with weighty matters. Unless he had something to suggest that would enable the Oratory to function more smoothly, he would explain the name and symbolism of sacred vestments such as the dalmatic, the amice, and the chasuble, or the meaning of expressions like *Dominus vobiscum, Kyrie eleison, Hallelujah,* and *Amen.* He also spoke of contemporary technical achievements, but in doing so he always managed to draw those moral reflections that were dearest to his heart. He did not neglect to relate to them the history of the various feasts in honor of the Mother of God, and frequently he gave them a brief synopsis of the life of the saint whose feast was to be observed on the following day. His first pupils still remember how he vividly described Saint Isidore, the farmer who prayed as he ploughed his fields while two angels helped him with two other ploughs. They also recalled his description of the boyhood of Saint Cyril of Caesarea in Cappadocia who because of his Faith was

ridiculed by his schoolmates, driven from his father's house, and imprisoned. The judges then vainly tried to frighten him by pretending that he was to be thrown into the fire; finally, he proved worthy to receive the crown of martydrom. His parting words were: "Rejoice in my triumph. You have no idea of the glory and happiness that await me!"

After his short talk, Don Bosco would remain to whisper a confidential word to those who approached to bid him good night and seek some advice. He had their spiritual welfare so much at heart that he would have stayed up all night if necessary. Finally, all the boys would retire to their dormitories, mulling over the holy things they had heard. As they went to bed one of the boys would read aloud from a spiritual book. Thus the whole day's program aimed at improving them spiritually, morally, and mentally.

Their solid piety was the result of their firm belief in their Faith. In his Sunday instructions Don Bosco used to expound to them events from church history and the lives of the Popes, drawing timely moral lessons for their daily life. The boys found his sermons so interesting that they truly looked forward to them. Frequent reception of Communion nourished their spiritual life. As for confessions, Don Bosco enjoyed the unlimited confidence of practically all of them, and he willingly heard them at any time. To safeguard their sense of security and freedom, however, he saw to it that Father [Francis] Marengo and other priests were available every Saturday evening even as late as eleven o'clock.

The boys were always conscious of the presence of God. All over the Oratory, large inscriptions proclaimed: "God sees you." With this constant reminder Don Bosco was able to teach them recollection when at prayer, stressing that prayer was a very effective personal colloquy with God. Consequently, the boys recited very devoutly even the short prayers before and after study, work, and meals. His own example was most effective. Everyone could see that he was diligent in his practice of piety and in his daily meditation and prayers; all were edified by his devout demeanor in church or when reading his breviary, even when it was gravely inconvenient for him to do so. The spirit of piety of many of the Oratory boys was truly admirable and caused them to be regarded as models of virtue. Don Bosco thought so highly of them that

when he met with serious difficulties, he would ask them to say special prayers so that he might obtain what he needed.

Priests in charge of boys' boarding schools frequently came to inquire about the practices of piety at the Oratory. Once a priest began to chide Don Bosco about what he considered excessive prayer, but Don Bosco replied: "I do not ask any more prayers of them than one would ask from any good Christian, but I do strive to teach them to pray devoutly."

The boys' sincere piety was particularly evident on the first Thursday of every month when they made the Exercise for a Happy Death. Don Bosco attached great importance to this practice. He used to say: "I think we can be reasonably certain that a boy will save his soul if he makes his confession and receives Communion every month as though they were his last." He would remind them about the practice a few days in advance in order to put them in the right frame of mind. They responded with a concentration and eagerness beyond their years that testified to the effectiveness of his exhortations. For many years, several distinguished laymen from town used to join the boys in the Exercise for a Happy Death. After the general Communion and the loud and clear recitation of the prayers for a happy death, Don Bosco always added a *Pater* and *Ave* for the one among those present who would be the first to die. This always made a great impression on all and inspired them to greater fervor. On these Thursdays something was added at breakfast to solemnize the occasion. On such days, Don Bosco, while in the midst of a large crowd of boys, would remark: "How wonderful it would be if we died today." Now and then, when winter had passed, Don Bosco would hold the Exercise for a Happy Death in some church on the outskirts of town to the great edification of those present.

On the day of the Exercise for a Happy Death the boys not only faithfully carried out the customary practices of piety but truly acted as though that day might be their last on earth; when they went to bed they even laid themselves out in the manner of the deceased. They longed to fall asleep clasping the crucifix; indeed, many of them truly wished that God would call them to Himself that very night when they were so well prepared for the awesome step into eternity. One day Don Bosco remarked to Father [John]

Giacomelli: "If everything is going so well in the Oratory, it is mainly because of the Exercise for a Happy Death." Father Leonard Murialdo recalled: "Once Don Bosco took about sixty boys to my summer house for a picnic. While conversing with me, he remarked that if one of the boys were to die suddenly during the night, he would feel tranquil about the boy's eternal salvation. More than anything else this shows the real worth of Don Bosco's method of education."

The spirit of prayer reigning at the Oratory and the earnest effort of the boys to achieve personal sanctity earned for them the protection of the Divine Shepherd. In fact, during all the principal novenas of the year, especially those in honor of the Blessed Virgin, if any evil person managed to sneak in disguised in sheep's clothing, he was discovered and forced to flee.

Meanwhile, to better insure the smooth running of the Oratory, Don Bosco invited Father Anthony Grella to assume the responsibilities of the office of catechist at Valdocco. This good priest had always zealously helped Don Bosco from the very beginning and fully enjoyed his trust. He accepted and fulfilled this duty with great dedication in 1853 and 1854. Later he was appointed chaplain at a hamlet called Gorra, near Carignano, where he remained until his death. He was a priest revered by all. The indisputable efficacy of his prayers earned him the veneration of his flock who called him "the saint of Gorra."

Undoubtedly, his prayers and those of the boys contributed to the success of *Letture Cattoliche*. This publication had already done much good and was destined to continue to do so, aided in no small measure by the blessing of the Holy Father. At the completion of the first six months of publication, Don Bosco had the first twelve issues handsomely bound into six small volumes and presented them to Pius IX through the good offices of James Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State. The Pontiff was highly pleased with the gift, and he instructed Cardinal Antonelli to acknowledge it, as follows:

Rome, November 30, 1853

Very Reverend and dear Father:

I was delighted to present to the Holy Father the six bound volumes representing the first six months of publication of *Letture Cattoliche*

that you founded to protect the common people from the snares persistently laid by the enemies of our Faith and those hostile to truth. His Holiness took great pleasure in speaking to me of your industrious zeal by which you have provided the faithful with such timely guidance. He was also gratified to learn that this publication has so quickly won the acceptance that you and your co-workers anticipated.

As a token of his gratitude, the Holy Father gladly grants your wish and hereby imparts his apostolic blessing to you, and to all those cooperating with you in the publication of *Letture Cattoliche,* in the hope that it may contribute to the steady growth of your edifying apostolate.

I also wish to thank you for your kind gift to me. With the greatest regard, I remain,

Yours devotedly,

James Cardinal Antonelli

The cardinal's letter renewed Don Bosco's strength. Notwithstanding his meager financial resources, he was toying with the idea of starting a printshop of his own at the Oratory when he received the following letter from Stresa:

Stresa, December 7, 1853

Dear Reverend Father and friend:

As I was thinking about your fine work on behalf of young artisans, I remembered a somewhat similar institute founded in Brescia [1] by a zealous priest. I believe his name was Father Bellati. In order to provide work for some of those poor youngsters and at the same time secure a source of income for their upkeep, he opened his own printshop. I thought I would mention this to you. Maybe you could do the same at Valdocco. In that case, I would be willing to provide a modest sum to help you get started. I imagine that your two major difficulties would be to find an honest and expert foreman and an efficient and dependable manager.

A printshop of this kind could produce fliers, pamphlets, and similar items. There is a demand for such things, and you could count on receiving orders from my own Institute of Charity.

Please think it over and let me know. With the deepest esteem, I remain,

Your servant and brother in Christ,

Fr. Antonio Rosmini

[1] A town in northern Italy some fifty miles east of Milan. [Editor]

Don Bosco was delighted with the suggestions contained in this letter, but he did not let himself be carried away by an easily aroused enthusiasm. He replied as follows:

Letture Cattoliche
(which I warmly recommend to Father Rosmini)
Office of the Editor

Turin, December 29, 1853

Very Reverend and dear Father:

Before attempting this reply I took stock of my financial situation and of the difficulties which might crop up in connection with our proposed printshop.

Let me say first that such a project has been one of my principal objectives for a number of years, and that only the lack of funds and space has prevented its execution. There is indeed a crying need for a dependable printshop combining quality of work with economy of operation. To acquire a good foreman and an efficient and honest manager will not present any particular problem. What does concern me is the cost that would be entailed in making alterations in the building now under construction and the initial outlay for the equipment. However, since you are prepared to provide part of the capital, I will go along with your suggestion, but I first need to know just how much capital you can supply and on what terms. If these two factors will not adversely affect my present financial situation, I believe that our project is feasible. Work will not be lacking, and I'll be able to employ a goodly number of my boys.

Remember, though, that I'll also need your moral support, perhaps even more than your financial assistance.

I heartily thank you for your goodness and your kindly interest in me and my poor boys. I have no other way to show you my gratitude than by asking God to shower abundant blessings on you and your well-deserving Institute of Charity.

With the deepest respect and veneration, I remain,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

While Don Bosco dreamed of establishing a printshop that within a few years would become the showpiece of the Oratory, Catholics in Piedmont had to endure further outrages. During the latter part of 1853 there were minor uprisings by the people of Turin and the provinces against onerous taxes and the high cost of living. The

outbreaks were easily quelled, but the anticlerical press deliberately accused the clergy of having instigated them. For example, in December an armed insurrection broke out in the Aosta valley. Bishop [Andrew] Jourdain tried to pacify the demonstrators, but they ignored his pleas and continued their march down to Aosta, terrorizing the population. When they reached the town and found it well guarded by troops, the rebels dropped their weapons and fled. This marked the end of the insurrection, but as an aftermath eleven priests were jailed—nine of them pastors who at the risk of their lives had followed their bishop's example in trying to pacify the rebels. A lengthy trial proved their innocence.

While Catholic priests were being thus victimized, the Waldensians enjoyed an hour of triumph. On December 15 [1853] they solemnly dedicated their new church with the participation of contingents of the National Guard. In his inaugural address, Amadeus Bert, the Waldensian minister, recalled the stake and the gallows of former days, and even portrayed the members of the royal house of Savoy as villains, but the police did not intervene. Two years later, in 1855, the government discontinued the yearly allowances for Catholic priests but reconfirmed those for Waldensian ministers; furthermore, it waived the usual state examinations for the professors of the Waldensian college at Torre di Luserna.[2]

It is noteworthy that prior to the dedication of their new church, the Waldensians felt constrained to single out Don Bosco as one of their foremost enemies. In its issue of October 2, 1853, *Rogantino Piemontese* ran an article entitled "Fra Omero" [Friar Homer]. After disparaging Catholics in an inane manner, it went on as follows:

> We are beginning to fear that our new church, instead of serving Waldensian worshipers, will eventually fall into the hands of Don Bosco who will then dedicate it to the Madonna under some new title. The solemn inauguration of this church is scheduled for October 20, but one of the bricklayers on the job doubts that it will be ready by that time. Time will tell! *Friar Homer* is perhaps even now rehearsing his choir for the Mass he plans to sing at the dedication. Of course, both the choir and the altar boys will be his own converts from the Protestant and Waldensian churches.

[2] Now called Torre Pellice, not far from Turin. [Editor]

Seemingly the Waldensians had heard about what Don Bosco had said and would often repeat through the years until 1886: "The Waldensian church will be changed into a Catholic church in honor of our Immaculate Mother. When and how this will take place is known only to God, but it will certainly come to pass."

Although Don Bosco was confident of victory, he was filled with interior calm, as is shown in this short letter to his former teacher, Father [John Baptist] Appendini in Villastellone:

Letture Cattoliche
Office of the Editor

Turin, December 18, 1853

Dearest Father:

Father Chiatellino's letter arrived too late for me to arrange for the outing of the choirboys to Villastellone, as you wished. To complicate matters further, that same day our Mutual Aid Society—mostly made up of our choirboys—was holding its annual dinner.

If on this one lone occasion I was regretfully unable to fulfill your desire, which was also my own, I hope that you will give me another chance to prove to you my sincere gratitude. God bless you. I remain, with all my heart,

Your most grateful pupil,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's interest in the working class was one of the reasons that prompted him to write pamphlets based for the most part on true episodes that were unflattering to the Waldensians. To boost the circulation of *Letture Cattoliche,* he kept up a steady flow of letters to prominent people, priests, and bishops. We have one in our possession that was addressed to [Aloysius] Cardinal Vannicelli, archbishop of Ferrara.

Letture Cattoliche
Office of the Editor

Turin, December 19, 1853

Your Eminence:

Since Father Novelli is about to leave for Ferrara, I take the liberty of recommending *Letture Cattoliche* to you. I am doing this not because I doubt your cooperation—your zeal is well known to all—but because

I want some copies delivered personally to you so that you may show them to others. The circulation is encouraging; we already have eighteen thousand subscribers.

His Excellency, Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea, is the editor-in-chief of this publication, and he himself asked me to write to Your Eminence about it. He would have enclosed a letter of his own if he had learned of Father Novelli's departure a little sooner.

I trust that you will benevolently accept this letter. I earnestly entreat you to invoke God's mercy on our poor Piedmont where the Church is going through very harrowing times. Pray also for me and all the boys at the Oratory. We all humbly beg your holy pastoral blessing. May God bless you and grant you a long life for the good of our Holy Church.

With the greatest reverence, I remain,

Your most obedient servant,

Fr. John Bosco

To forearm his boys against Waldensian propaganda, Don Bosco devised another weapon in addition to pamphlets—namely, a two-act play he wrote, entitled *A Debate between a Lawyer and a Waldensian Minister.* It was staged many times in the Oratory's little theater and was published in December. Don Bosco's Preface read as follows:

The success of the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in staging this play and the satisfaction registered by the audiences led us to hope that it would please our readers to see it in *Letture Cattoliche.*

The episodes about the family of Alessandro, an apostate, are true; equally true are the facts mentioned in the debate, although they took place elsewhere. They were woven into the play for the purpose of dramatic effect.

Whatever the play says about Protestants must be understood as referring to their doctrinal errors and never as a personal attack.

The staging of this play, whether in towns or in villages, will pose no problems. I believe that the plot, while presenting the truth, will also unmask error to the greater glory of God, the welfare of souls, and the honor of our Holy Catholic Faith.

Rev. John Bosco

This playlet not only instructed the Oratory boys, but also provided them with welcome entertainment from an unexpected source. During the month of October Mamma Margaret had gone to Castel-

nuovo for a couple of weeks on family business. She returned with Father [John] Giacomelli's sister one evening about 6:30. The Oratory boys were all busy at their tasks and Mamma Margaret's hens were safely enclosed in their coop for the night. News of her arrival spread like wildfire; happy shouts echoed all over the house and the boys ran out to greet her. They were filled with joy as they surrounded her, while she smiled and repeatedly told them: "Calm down, calm down please!" However, the sound of her voice had another totally unforeseen effect. The hens, upon hearing the familiar voice they had been missing for quite a while, woke up and scampered out to her, cackling lustily. The boys, enjoying the unusual spectacle, made way for them while Mamma Margaret rewarded the hens with a handful of breadcrumbs.

The chicken coop was Mamma Margaret's kingdom. The hens were so obedient that whenever she wanted to pick one up she would call to it and the bird would let her come near and allow itself to be patted. Her fondness for the hens was an object of great amusement in the Oratory. When the aforementioned play was staged for the first time, Mamma Margaret attended the performance with the others. One actor, describing the rout and confusion of the Waldensians when confronted with the lawyer's arguments, spoke the following lines:

> Things turned out quite well! One at a time, all three withdrew as if they were playing the game of fox and hens. The fox moves around the hens and, if they are not well guarded, pounces on them. But if the owner is around watching with a thick stick, then the fox cannot even get near enough to sniff the hens, and it has to flee for its own safety. These ministers thought they would find the hens unguarded, but instead they stumbled upon someone protecting them with a thick stick—the mighty weapon of sound arguments.

After the performance, Don Bosco, in discussing the highlights of the play with the boys, commented: "I'm sure that what struck my mother most was the reference to the fox and the hens." At that very moment Mamma Margaret was passing by. The boys immediately gathered around her as Don Bosco asked:

"What did you think of the play?"

"It was lovely," Mamma Margaret answered. "I still can't get over that fox and those hens."

Everyone laughed! However, the Waldensians were in no mood for levity. They fully realized that the playlet depicted their debates with Don Bosco and that their shameful defeat would now become open knowledge. They considered the performance to be another gauntlet flung at their feet, and they were greatly aroused. Don Bosco replied to their recriminations with articles in *L'Armonia* which for many years announced the titles of the forthcoming issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. However, the Waldensians had no intention of confining themselves to a verbal war; on the other hand, Divine Providence was watching over Don Bosco with tender and solicitous care.

CHAPTER 59

Attempts on Don Bosco's Life

IN a previous chapter [1] we described how two ruffians came to the Oratory to warn Don Bosco to stop publishing *Letture Cattoliche*. On their way out they threateningly promised: "We'll see you again." These words and their none too subtle threats during their conversation form just a single link in a long chain of vicious attempts on Don Bosco's life. Nevertheless, Don Bosco always escaped unharmed. Since these attacks were so numerous and almost unfailingly well planned, we have no hesitancy in declaring that Divine Providence must have shielded him. Heretics and cutthroats seemed to have joined together in a vast conspiracy against him. We shall now report the details of a few of the principal attacks that some Oratory boys either themselves observed or heard about from other witnesses.

One evening after supper, while Don Bosco was engaged in his customary role of teaching, two sinister-looking men appeared at the Oratory and asked him to rush to the bedside of a man in a nearby neighborhood called "Cuor d'Oro." The man was dying and wanted to make his confession. Ever ready to provide spiritual assistance, Don Bosco quickly turned over the class to someone else. As he was about to leave, realizing that it was already dark, he thought it prudent to have some of the older boys accompany him. "There's no need," the two strangers said. "We'll escort you there and back. Their presence might upset the sick man."

"Never mind!" Don Bosco replied. "My boys always enjoy a walk. When we'll get there they will wait for me outside." Reluctantly the two men led the way.

[1] *See* pp. 435ff. [Editor]

When they came to the house, they ushered Don Bosco into a room on the main floor, telling him: "Please wait here a moment while we tell the patient you're here." The boys—among whom were Cigliutti, [John] Gravano, and [Joseph] Buzzetti—remained outside. In that room there were several men gathered festively around a table. Seemingly they had enjoyed a fine supper and now were leisurely savoring or pretending to savor chestnuts. After greeting Don Bosco very respectfully and praising him enthusiastically, they invited him to sample some chestnuts. Don Bosco courteously declined, saying: "Thank you, but I really don't feel like any. I just had my supper."

"Then you won't refuse at least a glass of our wine," they chorused. "It's one of the best; it's from Asti." [2]

"No, thank you. I never drink except at meals; it upsets my stomach."

"Oh, come now; a little sip won't hurt you. It will even help your digestion. You could at least drink to our health!"

So saying, one of the men reached for a bottle and filled all the glasses. Since he had deliberately set out one glass too few, he placed the bottle on the table and went to fetch another glass which he proceeded to fill from a second bottle standing near it. He then offered it to Don Bosco who had not failed to observe the maneuver. Obviously they were offering him a poisoned drink. Without betraying his suspicion, Don Bosco lifted the glass and toasted the ruffians; then he put it down on the table again, excusing himself. "You can't do this to us," one of them protested. "You're offending us," another broke in. "This wine is of the very best! Drink to our health!" they all shouted.

"I already told you that I don't feel like drinking, and now I'll add that I cannot and will not drink it," Don Bosco replied.

"Yes, you will!" they shouted again. With these words, two of them grabbed Don Bosco by his shoulders and told him: "We won't swallow this insult. Drink you shall, and by force, if necessary."

Don Bosco was in a tight spot. He could not physically resist, nor would it have been prudent to do so. Therefore, he decided

[2] A province near Turin renowned for its excellent sparkling wines. [Editor]

to try his luck, saying: "If you really want me to drink, let go of me, or I won't be able to hold the glass steady."

As soon as they released their hold, Don Bosco instantly darted to the door. Fortunately it was not locked, and he quickly opened it. The sudden appearance of four or five husky young men between 18 and 20 years old curbed the belligerence of the men. Their spokesman very meekly said: "Well, if you don't feel like drinking, you don't have to."

"Maybe one of my boys might like this drink," Don Bosco remarked.

"Oh, just forget it," they replied. (Don Bosco would certainly not have given that drink to the boys; his suggestion was simply a ruse to force them to show their hand more openly.)

"Well, then, where's the dying man?" he asked. To save face, one of them led him to a room on the next floor. The dying man turned out to be one of the two who had come to fetch him at the Oratory. Don Bosco asked him a few questions, but the scoundrel, after making a prodigious effort at self-control, finally burst into laughter, saying: "I'll make my confession some other time." Don Bosco left the house immediately, thanking God for the protection he had received.

After hearing the whole story the next day, some boys made their own private investigations. They learned that a certain individual had offered a good dinner to these hired hatchet men after they had promised to make Don Bosco drink a little wine which he had prepared especially for him. Don Bosco never forgot that room; even during the last few months of his life, whenever he went out on a walk with one of us, he would point it out, remarking: "There's the chestnut room!"

On another evening in August, around six o'clock, Don Bosco was standing near the outer gate of the Oratory, engaging in pleasant conversation with some of his boys, when one of them suddenly shouted: "Watch out! Here comes a maniac. I think he's an assassin!" A man in his shirt sleeves came rushing toward Don Bosco. He was wielding a butcher knife and yelling: "I want Don Bosco! I want Don Bosco!" Don Bosco recognized the man as a former tenant in the Pinardi house whom he had often befriended. His name was Andreis, and he was now living in the Bellezza building.

At first the boys panicked and scattered through the playground

and the meadows fronting the Oratory. Among those who fled was the cleric, Felix Reviglio. His flight was providential, for the assassin mistook him for Don Bosco and chased him. By the time he realized his mistake and turned back toward the gate, Don Bosco had rushed to the safety of his room, after having first locked the small iron gate at the foot of the stairs. When the thug discovered that the gate was locked, began to pound it with a large stone and shake it violently in a vain attempt to force it open. He stood there at the foot of the stairs for more than three hours, like a tiger in ambush waiting for its prey. He appeared to be a maniac, but it was later ascertained that this was merely an act. He kept shouting at Don Bosco to open the gate, saying that he merely wanted to speak with him.

Meanwhile, the boys had recovered from their fright and gathered in a group. Their blood boiled at the sight of this man threatening their benefactor and father. Each of them impulsively grabbed a stick, a stone, or some other improvised weapon, planning to rush the attacker and give him the thrashing he clearly deserved. But Don Bosco, fearing that some of the boys might be injured in the scuffle, called to them from the balcony and forbade them to go near the miscreant.

No one could feel secure with that madman on the premises. Mamma Margaret was very much alarmed for the safety of her son and that of the boys. Not knowing what to do, she dispatched a messenger to summon the police but, incredible as it may seem, no one showed up until nine-thirty that evening when two policemen finally came, handcuffed that maniac, and led him away. Don Bosco was thus saved from this potential danger, but the unhurried response of the police did not speak well of those in charge of law enforcement in those days. And as if this slipshod performance on the part of the police were not enough to give every law-abiding person cause for concern, the chief of police had the audacity to send an officer to Don Bosco on the following day to ask him whether he would withdraw the charges against his assailant. Don Bosco replied that as a Christian and a priest he naturally forgave the aggression and other offenses as well, but that as a citizen and a director of a school he demanded in the name of the law that the public authorities provide more efficient protection for him and his household. It hardly seems believable, but on that same day the chief of police released the assailant. That very evening Andreis

was again lurking in the vicinity of the Oratory, waiting for Don Bosco to emerge so that he might finally carry out his murderous design.

During the spring of 1854 young [John] Cagliero was returning home from Professor Bonzanino's school at twilight. From a distance he glimpsed Don Bosco at the turn of the little lane leading to the Oratory, and he quickened his pace to join him. As he was walking alongside Don Bosco, he noticed Andreis, again in shirt sleeves, running wildly toward them. Supposing him to be drunk, they both parted to make way for him. They did this so swiftly that the force of the assailant's thrust carried him a few feet past his intended victims. Don Bosco, who at that moment had caught a brief glimpse of a hidden knife, immediately ran toward the Oratory and reached the gate. Meanwhile Andreis had wheeled around and was coming at him. Cagliero now realized what the man was up to, and he shouted for help. This alarmed Andreis. He hesitated for a moment and then turned in the direction of his own house.

On another occasion Andreis—this time in a different outfit—again showed up at the Oratory. Not seeing Don Bosco among the boys, he said that he wanted to speak with him and without further ado went swiftly up to his room. Cagliero recognized him, and noticing that the man kept his right hand in his pocket, he suspected foul play. He quickly alerted some companions, especially the cleric [Felix] Reviglio and [Joseph] Buzzetti who were quite strong. All three ran after Andreis, overtook him on the balcony, and forced him down the stairs and off the premises. As a result of this episode he was jailed again. When Don Bosco was called to the police station, he declined to make any charges against the man, and Andreis was immediately released. A sense of prudence had motivated Don Bosco in this decision. The police would have released Andreis anyway and the odium of the charge would have rested on Don Bosco.

Information as to who was behind these attempts was obtained through the efforts of Commendatore [Joseph] Duprè, a great friend and benefactor of Don Bosco and the Oratory. When the commendatore realized that the police either could not or would not provide adequate protection for Don Bosco, he took it upon himself to deal with this dangerous man who was terrorizing the entire Oratory day and night.

"I'm being paid to do it," the scoundrel told him. "Pay me just as much and I'll call it off."

Thereupon Commendatore Duprè offered him 160 lire, which amount would cover his overdue rent bill as well as his rent for the succeeding month. Thus ended a long-standing threat which could have resulted in considerable bloodshed. Andreis did not give any further trouble, and Don Bosco forgave him everything, treating him with the kindness he always showed toward his enemies. Indeed, he even helped him, as we learned from Bishop Cagliero: "Although Don Bosco had evicted from the Bellezza house all those tenants whose conduct was scandalous, he allowed Andreis and his family to stay on. I often heard Don Bosco say: 'Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you.' " [Matt. 5, 44]

There was another insidious aggression from which Don Bosco did not emerge entirely unscathed. Shortly after the events just narrated, Don Bosco was summoned one Sunday evening to hear the confession of a sick woman. She lived almost opposite the Rifugio in a house owned by a man named Sardi. In view of his previous experiences, Don Bosco prudently summoned two husky and courageous young men to accompany him.

"There's no need to bring them along," said the man who had called him. "I'll escort you both ways!" At these words Don Bosco became all the more suspicious. Instead of two boys, he decided to take four. Two of them, Hyacinth Arnaud and James Cerruti, were so muscular and strong that they could have felled an ox; the other two were Ribaudi and Joseph Buzzetti. When they reached their destination, Don Bosco told the latter two to wait at the foot of the stairs and took Arnaud and Cerruti with him to the second floor, instructing them to wait on the landing outside the sick woman's room. When he entered he saw a bedridden woman gasping for breath and four men sitting close to her. She acted out her role so well that it looked as though she really were about to draw her last breath. As Don Bosco asked the four men to leave the room so that he might minister in privacy to the patient, the woman interrupted him, shouting: "Before I make my confession I want that villain over there to retract the slanderous things he has said about me." As she said this, she pointed to a man opposite her.

"I won't retract a single word," he answered, standing up.

"Let's not get excited," broke in another.

"Yes."

"No."

"Shut up, you scoundrel, or I'll choke you."

This exchange, interwoven with several unprintable imprecations, created a terrible din in that small room. All of them were now on their feet. In the midst of the uproar the lamps were extinguished; then the din suddenly ceased and a veritable hailstorm of blows from clubs were directed at the spot where Don Bosco was standing. He immediately knew he had been tricked again. To defend himself he grabbed the chair near the bed, held it upside down over his head and, protected by this improvised shield, tried to get out of the room while murderous blows were crashing down noisily upon the chair. When he reached the door, he found it locked. Using his extraordinary strength he twisted and tore the lock away with one hand just as the two boys on guard outside were ramming into the door with their shoulders and flinging it open. Arnaud was the first to enter. He grabbed Don Bosco by the arm and pulled him outside. Don Bosco was grateful that both his head and shoulders were unharmed. However, one of the cudgels had grazed his left hand, injuring his thumb. The nail was ripped off, and the bone was so badly bruised that the scar was visible even thirty years later. Once safely outside Don Bosco urged his boys not to mention the incident at all to anyone, adding: "Let us forgive them and pray that they may see the light. Such poor wretches need our prayers, for they are enemies of religion!"

There is good reason to suspect that these and many other unsuccessful traps resulted from the enmity and bribes of those who did not take kindly to *Letture Cattoliche* and wanted to silence or liquidate the one responsile for that publication. They considered no cost too great if they could succeed in protecting the Waldensians from what they called Don Bosco's "slander." Their methods were in the tradition of their forefathers who—to mention just one of many outrages—on April 9, 1374 brutally murdered the Dominican, Blessed Pavonio of Savigliano, at Bricherasio because he had preached against their doctrines and converted a large number of them to Catholicism.

A story that Bishop Cagliero told us further substantiates our

suspicion as to the true identity of the behind-the-scene instigators of these attacks. One Sunday afternoon in January, 1854, two elegantly dressed men went up to Don Bosco's room and were received with the usual courtesy. The playground was deserted because the boys were in church singing. Seeing the two men, John Cagliero became suspicious and hid himself in a little room adjoining Don Bosco's, standing guard near the interconnecting door. At first he could not understand very well what was being said, although the discussion was being conducted in loud tones. It sounded as if Don Bosco were refusing to agree to some proposal they had made. The two visitors then raised their voices and Cagliero heard them say: "After all, what does it matter to you whether we preach this doctrine or that? Why should you oppose us?"

Don Bosco answered: "It is my duty to defend the truth and my holy Faith with all my strength!"

"So you won't agree to stop publishing *Letture Cattoliche?*"

"No!" replied Don Bosco resolutely.

It was then that they began to threaten him with two pistols, saying: "Either you do as we tell you, or you're a dead man!"

"Go ahead!" Don Bosco replied calmly, looking intently at them with great dignity. Just then a loud bang was heard. The two men hurriedly thrust the pistols back into their pockets. Cagliero, unable to grasp the last few words which had been pronounced in a low voice and fearing for Don Bosco's safety, had pounded on the door with all his strength and then had rushed to call Buzzetti who came running at once. As they were about to break into Don Bosco's room, the two men emerged, completely flustered. Don Bosco was following them humbly, biretta in hand, bidding them good-bye calmly and courteously. This was the second time that Cagliero was privileged to save Don Bosco's life.

"Despite these continual threats," Father Reviglio told us, "Don Bosco remained unperturbed. In fact, he even rejoiced when, for God's glory, he received insults and threats from his enemies. He never carried any weapon in self-defense or made use of his unusual physical strength to repel assaults. With his stamina he could easily have handled even two powerful men. Occasionally, finding himself cornered, he resorted to his nimbleness to escape harm." We

are indebted to Mr. Patrick Spinardi for the details of one such incident:

One night Don Bosco was on his way home from Moncalieri, walking along the edge of the road. About midway on the journey, almost below Cavoretto,[3] he noticed a man with a long, thick cudgel following him. At that moment the man started to run. When he was about to overtake Don Bosco and deal him a staggering blow, Don Bosco swiftly stepped to one side and gave him a vigorous push that sent him sprawling into a deep ditch thick with wild vegetation. Then Don Bosco quickened his pace to catch up with some people far ahead down the road.

Don Bosco's serenity during such encounters was remarkable but it did not lessen Mamma Margaret's anxiety about his safety. She often thanked God for having thwarted attacks on his life! Isolated as the Oratory was in the midst of orchards, fields, and meadows without the protection of a fence or wall enclosing it on all sides, she deemed it prudent to have a small iron gate installed at the foot of the stairs leading to the balcony of Don Bosco's room. As a further precaution, she frequently would assign a husky boy to stand guard there, especially at night. She even asked her other son Joseph to come from Castelnuovo to protect Don Bosco from his implacable enemies. When darkness fell and he had not yet returned home from visiting the sick or performing some other work of mercy, she would send some of the older boys to meet him and escort him back to the Oratory. She seemed to have a sixth sense in anticipating the dangers that threatened her beloved son.

In 1853 and 1854, when Don Bosco had to come home late, John Cagliero and two older boys used to meet him at the spot where the roads became paths across the fields. Friendly people or anonymous letters often warned Don Bosco to be on his guard because the Waldensians were trying to waylay him. When John Cagliero would go to meet Don Bosco and accompany him home, he often found him being escorted by friendly townspeople who were prepared to defend him, if necessary. Once he saw him accompanied by an armed soldier. Don Bosco had requested this protection from the sergeant in command of the detail at Porta Palazzo,

[3] A borough on the hills in the outskirts of Turin. [Editor]

for he had been forewarned that an assassin would be lying in wait for him.

The assaults against Don Bosco described above, and others which we shall mention shortly, started in 1852 and continued intermittently for about four years. Moreover, the instigators of these crimes had gangs of young roughnecks to carry out their orders. They stirred them up against the Oratory and sent them to Valdocco on Sundays to bang on the door of the chapel during the sermon with stones and clubs. Sometimes their raucous shouts and the noise of the blows against the door drowned out Don Bosco's voice completely. He and the boys endured such provocations patiently for a few weeks, but finally their patience began to wear thin. Therefore, some of the boarders secretly armed themselves with clubs and stationed themselves behind the half-opened door, waiting for the usual disturbance. They did not have to wait long, but this time they were ready. John Cagliero and others rushed the attackers, downed the first one in their path, and routed the others, knocking down five or six more in the process. Meanwhile, Don Bosco had interrupted his sermon to call the boys back, and they promptly obeyed. They had received a goodly number of bruises themselves in the scuffle, but they got their message across. Gradually the weekly disturbances ceased altogether.

Don Bosco's enemies and their hirelings were not from the Valdocco neighborhood, and the few from that area who at first had opposed him had by now changed their opinion and were friendly to him. During the summer, crowds used to gather in Via Cottolengo, playing, singing, and dancing until late at night, but when they saw Don Bosco coming down the street, they would stop whatever they were doing to shout with evident pleasure: "Look! Don Bosco is coming!" When he drew closer, they would grab his hands reverently and affectionately and accompany him to the Oratory gate.

Aware of the cruel persecution he was suffering, all decent people grew very fond of him and marveled that he had emerged unscathed from so many attacks. On his part, Don Bosco remained tranquil and prayed to the Lord with the trusting words of the Psalmist: "You will lead and guide me. You will free me from the snare they set for me, for You are my refuge." [Ps. 30, 5]

CHAPTER 60

A Mysterious Dog

HOLY Scripture and church history tell us that God would occasionally use animals to defend and help His servants in wondrous ways. When the prophet Eliseus was being mocked by a band of godless, insolent youths, two bears suddenly emerged from an adjacent forest and tore them to pieces. For seventy years a raven brought food each day to St. Paul, the first hermit. When Paul died, the responsibility for burying him devolved upon St. Anthony [the patriarch of the monastic life], but he had no tools with which to dig a grave. Immediately two lions came running to him and hollowed out a grave with their paws. Then, after the saint blessed them, they went away as meek as lambs.

The same circumstance proved true in the case of Don Bosco. During this dangerous period in his life, Divine Providence sent him a large, very handsome gray dog for his protection and defense. Much has been said and will still be said about this dog which several Oratory boys saw, patted, and petted. Through them—particularly Joseph Buzzetti, Charles Tomatis, and Joseph Brosio—we learned of many noteworthy incidents that we shall now narrate. Don Bosco himself confirmed several details when we questioned him about them. This canine looked like a gray sheep dog or a watchdog [and was promptly named "Grigio"]. No one—not even Don Bosco—knew where it came from. We cannot vouch for its pedigree, but we can certainly provide it with a testimonial of faithful service. For several years it proved to be a blessing to Don Bosco and the Oratory.

Don Bosco, knowing that his life was constantly in danger, listened to his friends' recommendations and did his best to avoid being on the streets after dark. At times, however, this could not be

helped, especially when he had to visit the sick, seek help from some benefactor, or try to bring back to the fold some family that had defected to the Waldensians. When he was thus delayed, he had to try to get back to the Oratory as best he could. In those days this area was very sparsely inhabited. The last outpost of the city before reaching the Oratory was the insane asylum. Between these two structures the land was barren and uneven. Dotted with acacias and bushes and clothed in darkness, it was an ideal place to waylay unsuspecting passers-by. Dangerous as this area was for the average citizen, it was all the more for Don Bosco who had become the target of unscrupulous anti-Catholics ready to employ any means to silence him, as we have already noted in the previous chapter.

One evening in 1852 Don Bosco was coming home alone—not without some misgivings—when he saw a huge dog coming close to him. At first he was afraid, but when he noticed that the dog looked quite peaceful, he began to pat it and soon made friends with it. The faithful beast accompanied him as far as the Oratory gate and then trotted away. This happened every time he had to return home late and alone. This gray dog would suddenly appear on either side of the road as soon as he had passed the last building before the Oratory. As we have already mentioned, if he was not home by the usual time, Mamma Margaret would become deeply concerned and send some boys to meet him. It was on these occasions that they found him several times being escorted by this four-legged guardian.

In 1855, Cigliutti, [John] Gravano, [Francis] Falchero, [Thomas] Gaspardone, Charles Castagno, Joseph Buzzetti, and Felix Reviglio told John Villa that they had seen Grigio. So did many other boys, who had likewise witnessed threats and assaults against Don Bosco. He used to call Grigio "his bodyguard." Charles Tomatis assures us that once he saw the dog walking along a street around 9 at night, and he described it in this way: "It had a truly frightening appearance. Every time she saw it, Mamma Margaret would unfailingly exclaim: 'Oh, what an ugly beast!' It looked like a wolf, with a long snout, erect pointed ears, and gray fur. It was over three feet tall."

People were terrified at the mere sight of it. Once Don Bosco told us:

I was coming home rather late one evening and met a friend who accompanied me as far as the Rondò;[1] from here to the Oratory lay the most dangerous stretch. As we bid each other goodnight and he was about to retrace his steps, Grigio suddenly appeared from nowhere. My friend was taken aback and wanted to chase it away, but I told him not to do so because I knew the dog was friendly. He was not convinced and said: "I can't let you go home with that horrid beast." As he said this, he picked up two rocks and threw them at Grigio with all his might. They hit the dog, but it did not budge an inch or even growl. Instead, seeing that I had company, it disappeared. My friend then became truly frightened at this unusual occurrence, saying: "It's bewitched! It's bewitched!" He did not dare go home alone. He stayed with me until we arrived at the Oratory, and then I had two boys escort him home.

It is indeed remarkable how this gray dog—which the cleric Michael Rua saw on two occasions—would materialize out of nowhere whenever Don Bosco was in great danger and rescue him with its prodigious intervention.

Once, instead of accompanying Don Bosco home, Grigio reversed its role and prevented him from going out. On this occasion Don Bosco had forgotten an urgent matter and thus was obliged to go to town after dark. Mamma Margaret tried to persuade him to put it off until the next day, but he calmed her fears by agreeing to take several boys along with him, and they started for the gate. When they got there, Grigio was leisurely stretched out in front of it. The doorkeeper, who was seeing this dog for the first time, vainly tried to shoo it away, but the dog kept coming back as though waiting for someone. "Oh, it's you, Grigio," Don Bosco exclaimed. "Fine. The more the merrier. Come along; let's go." Instead of obeying, Grigio growled. Twice Don Bosco tried to go through the gate, but each time Grigio blocked him. One of the boys then kicked at it gently to make it move; Grigio responded with a terrifying bark. When Don Bosco attempted to slip past it, keeping very close to the door posts, the dog stood up and again blocked him. At this sight Mamma Margaret told Don Bosco: "If you won't listen to me,

[1] Located where Corso Valdocco now intersects Corso Regina Margherita. [Editor]

at least listen to that dog and stay home!" Noticing her worried look, Don Bosco yielded. Hardly fifteen minutes later a neighbor came to tell him to be on his guard because he had learned that three or four men were lurking in the neighborhood to waylay him. Foiled in their attempts, those villains did not give up. On another night, Don Bosco was coming home along the road [2] which led from Piazza Emanuele Filiberto [3] to the Rondò. He was slightly more than halfway home when he heard someone running behind him. He swiftly turned around to see a man only a few feet away armed with a stout club. Don Bosco also began to run, hoping to outdistance his pursuer. As he reached the slope in the road (where Casa Delfino now stands), he noticed other men waiting at the bottom of it. Obviously they were there to bar his way. Don Bosco quickly decided to first rid himself of his pursuer. He stopped dead in his tracks just as the man at his heels was about to club him, and he vigorously jabbed his elbow into the ruffian's stomach. The man doubled up with pain and fell screaming to the ground. Immediately his fellow thugs, also brandishing clubs, began advancing on Don Bosco. At that very moment Grigio suddenly appeared at Don Bosco's side. Growling and barking, it lunged at all of them in turn. He appeared so frightening that they begged Don Bosco to call it off lest it tear them to pieces. Then they fled in panic. The dog did not leave Don Bosco's side until he was back at the Oratory. For the first time, Grigio followed him across the playground up to the door of the kitchen, where it received well deserved but still timorous caresses from Mamma Margaret, as she herself and [Joseph] Buzzetti told Peter Enria.[4]

On another occasion, again at night, Don Bosco was returning home along Corso Regina Margherita when a man, who had been lying in wait for him behind an elm, fired two pistol shots at point-blank range but missed him. The assassin then flung himself on Don Bosco, resolved to finish him off in some other way. Grigio

[2] The present Corso Regina Margherita, once known as "Strada di San Massimo e di Santa Barbara." [Editor]

[3] Now renamed "Piazza della Repubblica" but still popularly called "Porta Palazzo." [Editor]

[4] A Salesian coadjutor brother who died in 1898. He had entered the Oratory as a boy in 1854. [Editor]

instantly appeared and sprang furiously upon Don Bosco's assailant, forcing him to flee as fast as he could; then the dog accompanied Don Bosco all the way to the Oratory.

On another evening Grigio provided some unexpected entertainment for the boarders. It was suppertime and Don Bosco was in the refectory with some of his clerics. His mother was also present. Some boys saw Grigio in the playground. Those who had never seen it before were afraid and wanted to scare it away with stones, but Buzzetti stopped them. "Don't do that," he said. "It's Don Bosco's dog." On hearing that, all of them ran to Grigio; they patted it, fondled its ears, stroked its head playfully, and finally led it into the refectory. The unexpected visitor startled some of those present, but Don Bosco reassured them, saying: "Grigio won't hurt anyone; don't be afraid."

After a glance at all those present, the dog, joyfully wagging its tail, went around the table to Don Bosco. He patted it affectionately and offered it food and drink but Grigio declined everything; it did not even sniff the food as if to indicate his disinterest.

"What do you want, then?" asked Don Bosco. The dog wiggled its ears, wagged its tail, and then leaned its head on the table, gazing at Don Bosco as though wishing him a good night. Then it turned around and retraced its steps to the gate, escorted by all the boys. "I recall that Marquis Dominic Fassati had taken Don Bosco home late that night in his coach," [Joseph] Buzzetti told us. "Having missed him, Grigio seemed to have come to assure Don Bosco that it had waited for him with its customary fidelity."

Bishop Cagliero confirmed all these incidents, and he added: "I saw Grigio one winter evening. Crossing the playground and entering the tiny room where Don Bosco used to take his meals, it ran gleefully to greet him. 'Oh, Grigio!' Don Bosco said. 'I missed you. You were late!' As he said this, he offered it a piece of bread, but the dog refused it. Don Bosco then remarked: 'You glutton, you want meat, don't you? But Don Bosco hasn't any. If you're not hungry, that's fine. Now you'd better go.' The dog hung its head with a hurt look and slowly moved toward the door, but Don Bosco called it back. 'Come here, Grigio. I didn't mean to slight you. Come back!' The dog returned and allowed Don Bosco to caress it

reassuringly. We also patted it for a while. Some of my companions saw this dog on several other occasions."

Grigio saved Don Bosco's life a third time toward the end of November, 1854. On a very dark and foggy evening, Don Bosco was coming home from the Convitto. To avoid possible dangers he took the road [5] leading from the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation to the Cottolengo Hospital, for he did not wish to stray too far from the inhabited area. Soon he noticed that two men were walking only a little distance ahead of him, quickening or slackening their pace in keeping with his. To dodge them he crossed over to the other side of the road, but they quickly did likewise. Thus it was abundantly clear that they had some evil plan in mind. Growing very cautious, Don Bosco began to retrace his steps with the intention of seeking refuge in some neighbor's house, but it was too late. When the two men saw him turn back suddenly, they moved on him swiftly and silently and threw a cloak over his head. Don Bosco struggled in self-defense. Bending quickly, he managed to shake off the cloak from his head and then tried to free himself. His efforts were in vain; his assailants wrapped the cloak tightly around his throat and thrust a handkerchief into his mouth to stifle his shouts for help. As he invoked God in that terrible instant when death semed inevitable, Grigio miraculously appeared, barking in so savage and terrifying a manner that it no longer sounded like a dog, or even a wolf, but like a vicious bear. In a flash it leaped at one of the assailants, forcing him to let go of the cloak. Then it pounced on the other assailant, snapping at him and knocking him to the ground. Badly frightened, the first thug tried to sneak away but Grigio did not give him a chance. It lunged at him and threw him sprawling into the mud. Then it kept both of them at bay, growling menacingly and glaring at them as if to say: "Don't either of you dare make a move!" Thoroughly terrorized by now, the two thugs began to plead: "Don Bosco, please call that beast off. Have pity on us."

"I'll call it off if you'll allow me go my way in peace," replied Don Bosco.

[5] Now called "Via Consolata" up to the point where it intersects with Corso Regina Margherita, and "Via Ludovico Ariosto" on the other side of the boulevard. [Editor]

"Yes! Yes! Anything! Just get this dog away from us."

"Come on, Grigio; come here," Don Bosco said. The dog obediently came to him, letting the two scoundrels flee as fast as they could. Despite this unexpected rescue, Don Bosco was still too shaken to be able to return home immediately; he first had to make a stop at the nearby Cottolengo Hospital. There he was received charitably and strengthened with some cordial; then, after recovering from the shock, he was escorted back to the Oratory. Grigio followed him up to the foot of the stairs leading to his room.

"That was the time," Father Ascanio Savio told us, "when the infamous *Gazzetta del Popolo* threatened physical reprisals against Don Bosco because of his zeal in upholding his Faith and unmasking Waldensian propaganda." Other anticlerical newspapers that delighted in vulgar and ignorant attacks on religion used to refer to Don Bosco as "Don Bosio" to avoid legal entanglements.

There was always much talk and speculation about Grigio because indeed there was something strange and even supernatural about that dog. No one was ever able to find out where it went after fulfilling its mission. Don Bosco used to say: "Sometimes I thought I should try to find out where it came from and to whom it belonged, but then I decided that it really did not matter as long as the dog was a good friend to me. All I know is that in the many dangers I encountered, that dog was a true godsend to me."

This story may sound like a fairy tale. Everyone is free to make his own decision in this regard. But we ourselves think that it is legitimate and logical to entertain the notion that God, in His fatherly goodness, chose to use an animal, which is a symbol of fidelity, to defend and protect one of His servants who constantly braved the onslaughts of dangerous and unscrupulous enemies to keep himself, his boys, and his fellow believers loyal to God and to His Church.

CHAPTER 61

Combating Spiritism

IMPREGNABLE as a wall of bronze in his struggle against the Waldensians, Don Bosco now girded himself for another equally fierce encounter.

Spiritism—a mixture of animal magnetism, diabolic evocation, and sheer fraud—made its first appearance in Turin in 1852, and its impact was considerable. This ancient superstition, now newly revived, had penetrated the Americas, and after sweeping through Protestant Germany and Voltairian France was beginning to filter into many parts of Italy. "The frenzy which seized its disciples," Balan declared, "caused the great upheavals of 1848 which brought European society almost to the brink of disaster." [1]

Spiritism was introduced so adroitly and enticingly in Turin that many good practicing Catholics unsuspectingly attended spiritistic séances, but they quickly left when the strange evolutions of "talking" tables indicated the intervention of unnatural causes. However, the fad continued with disastrous results. It was nothing else but a deceptive maneuver to camouflage a revolt against Church teachings and to further the promotion of immoral practices. In a short space of time, mediums and fortunetellers were in evidence everywhere.

Don Bosco was convinced that spiritism was nothing but a huge swindle to trick fools, but he feared that it might lead to greater evils since it had stirred up a morbid curiosity in the occult and was beginning to condition participants to diabolical interventions. With the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities, he attended spirit-

[1] Pietro Balan (1840-1893), *Storia della Chiesa* (a continuation of the *Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise Catholique* by Réné François Rohrbacher). Vol. I, p. 911, Modena, 1879. [Editor]

istic meetings on several occasions in order to determine just where fraud ended and diabolical intervention began. He hoped to thus disenchant the simpletons and save them from further folly.

All Turin began to flock to Piazza Castello to attend the animal-magnetism demonstrations conducted by a well-known and elegantly dressed charlatan. Through his revelations and predictions he had acquired a great following. One day, after several demonstrations had received tremendous applause, he had a clairvoyante take sealed letters and read them aloud. At this point Don Bosco pushed his way through the crowd.

"There's a priest here who wants to talk to you," someone yelled to the man.

"Please come forward, Father," he replied.

Don Bosco stepped into the open space in front of the clairvoyante who was seated and blindfolded. Don Bosco took out a sealed letter received that very day from Archbishop Fransoni. "What may I do for you, Father?" asked the charlatan.

"I would like the clairvoyante to read this sealed letter," Don Bosco replied.

"That's easy," the man remarked. Then he turned to the woman and imperiously told her: "Read it!"

The woman hesitated as if things were not going according to plan. The inflection of the voice commanding her had not given her any clue as to what she should answer. Forced to say something, she exclaimed: "I see it! I see it all!"

"What do you see?" the man asked.

"I cannot say."

"Why not?"

"Because its contents cannot be revealed."

"Why not?"

"The letter is sealed."

"That explains it," said the man to the crowd. Then, turning to Don Bosco, he added: "She is right; sealed letters are inviolable!"

"If that's the case, there's an easy solution," replied Don Bosco. So saying, he broke the seal.

"Excellent; now the letter may be read," the charlatan said to the woman.

"I still can't read it," she replied.

"Why not?"

The clairvoyante, now obviously annoyed, answered: "Because . . . because as I've already told you, I can't operate with priests around." Then she uttered a terrible blasphemy. On observing this fiasco, the crowd broke into derisive laughter and quickly dispersed, making caustic comments.

On several other occasions, Don Bosco publicly intervened under various pretexts to expose the trickery of such charlatans; in his presence they proved unable to perform any unusual feats and were always unmasked as imposters in full view of a scornful and jeering audience. Soon many people lost interest, and if they spoke about spiritism it was with contempt.

Don Bosco then turned his attention from the public squares to the séances in private homes conducted by certified spiritists. But even though certified, they sensed that Don Bosco would be their nemesis.

A charlatan named Dr. Fiorio had set up shop in a studio near St. Peter-in-Chains Church, and he revealed that through the medium of a clairvoyante he knew the general location of a hidden treasure in their neighborhood. Don Bosco attended some of the séances with a few boys who had previously been briefed so that they might act as witnesses—among them the cleric Felix Reviglio and Serra. The clairvoyante declared that she could actually see the treasure, and she described it in detail, arousing a sense of avarice in many of those present. Several deep excavations were indeed made, but to no avail. After verifying this failure, Don Bosco lost no time in publicizing it, especially through those who had financed the venture and were now bitter at their gullibility.

Another swindler named Dr. Giurio opened a studio in Via Santa Teresa that featured a clairvoyante called Brancani. People suffering from incurable or little known diseases were asked to send in personal objects, even if they lived very far away. The doctor claimed that by simply examining these objects in consultation with his clairvoyante, he could diagnose the patient's sickness and prescribe the necessary treatment. The lamentable moral and spiritual consequences that had resulted from similar setups in other places clearly indicated that these consultations smacked of diabolical intervention.

Don Bosco attended one of Dr. Giurio's meetings with Father [Francis] Marengo and Father [Joseph] Mottura. The studio was filled to capacity. After watching several demonstrations, Don Bosco asked the doctor to put him in communication with the clairvoyante. The doctor agreed to do so with great self-assurance. Don Bosco began to ask questions, but the woman's answers—which at first dealt with faraway places such as Petersburg—suddenly switched to details of matters far closer to home. Don Bosco then took out a lock of hair which Father [Louis] Nasi had given him and asked the woman to diagnose the illness of the person to whom it belonged.

"Your question is in order," commented the doctor. Turning to the clairvoyante, he bid her to answer.

"To whom does this hair belong?" Don Bosco asked.

"Poor boy! How greatly he must be suffering," the woman murmured.

Don Bosco interrupted her, saying: "This hair doesn't belong to a boy. Listen, I haven't much time. Can you tell me where this person lives?"

"Yes, yes. I see that person in Via della Zecca."

"Wrong," commented Don Bosco. "That person is not there."

"Let me finish. He's going further down . . . beyond the Po. . . ."

"Wrong again," exclaimed Don Bosco. "Now, tell me what this person's illness is."

"Just give me a little time. Oh, what sufferings the poor wretch has to endure!"

"What's his illness?"

"The same as mine."

"And what's that?"

"Epilepsy."

"Wrong!"

At this point the woman, who at first had been embarrassed, became angry and uttered such an obscene and insulting word that everyone present was shocked and immediately left. Obviously, it was either a fraud, or else the devil was afraid of a good priest.

The séances that attracted most people were those at which tables made unusual movements when the audience formed themselves into a chain around them. These tables swayed, revolved, rose up in the air, and bounced about the room. Then they answered cate-

gorically the questions put to them by tapping one of their legs on the floor. Often a pencil was tied to the lowest part of one of their legs and a sheet of paper was put beneath it; the pencil would then jot down the answers in a clear handwriting. Small stands produced the same effects. Obviously there had to be a rational cause for these effects. Generally the clairvoyante ascribed what transpired to some saint she named or to some well-known deceased person.

These happenings were conversation pieces at social gatherings. Shortly after hearing about them, Don Bosco met one of the better known operators of these studios and frankly told him that in his opinion all these table-rappings were nothing but charlatans' tricks. The man challenged him to come to his house and see for himself. Don Bosco accepted and, with the approval of the chancery, went there with Father [Francis] Marengo and Father [Louis] Nasi. On his person he secretly carried a relic of the Holy Cross. The clairvoyante, looking supremely confident, warmly welcomed him. But despite all the efforts of the medium and of others, the table in the middle of the room remained still. Astounded and irritated at his many unsuccessful attempts, the man then turned to Don Bosco, accusing him of being the cause of this failure since his will resisted and did not believe in such phenomena. He concluded: "I can't do it because you have no faith!"

"Faith in whom or in what?" Don Bosco asked, looking at him very gravely. He then left with his two friends, convinced that the relic of the Holy Cross had caused that dismal failure. He himself told this story to his priests and clerics.

Unfortunately, the number of educated people attending such séances increased. They were curious to see a person being mesmerized and to witness the wondrous and frightful spiritistic demonstrations that followed: interplay of darkness and light; music from invisible sources; mysterious hands which clasped, caressed, or slapped the members of the audience; sudden, wild, and unrestrained dancing of the furniture in the room; alluring or horrifying apparitions of ghosts or of the souls of the departed. The aftereffects in Turin and in the provinces were appalling: widespread cases of insanity, suicides, obsessions, despair, sudden deaths, incurable hypochondria, paralysis, spasmodic pains, and many other afflictions.

Don Bosco was convinced that these unfortunate spiritists at

least indirectly evoked the devil. One day he told [Joseph] Buzzetti and others that a man who had been lured into some secret society once called on him and related the following story about his experiences:

Until now I was too busy to concern myself with religion; accordingly, I was leading a rather loose life. I'd like to tell you how I regained my Faith. This is a true story without the slightest exaggeration. A friend of mine introduced me to certain gatherings attended by fun-loving people. Although they were hostile to religion, they seemed to be dedicated to humanitarian causes. They organized dances or staged carnivals, donating the proceeds to the needy and the sick; in other words, they did good in their own fashion and that was fine with me. One thing I rather disliked was their penchant for saying evil things about the Pope, but that seemed to be the fad everywhere; after all, it really didn't hurt anyone, so I overlooked that too.

The worst, however, was still to come. One evening I agreed to attend a spiritistic demonstration, during which I had the terrible shock of seeing appear before me—real and frightfully alive—the devil himself or, to use their parlance, "the great architect." I can't tell you how scared I was and how I regretted having come to that place, but there I was. Like everyone else, I sat through the entire demonstration. I was speechless and bathed in a cold sweat. On my way home I remonstrated with my friend for having invited me to such a frightening demonstration. Later on, during the night, while lying awake and mulling over the monstrous apparition, I said to myself: "If the devil exists, then God must exist too!" One thought led to another, and I finally decided that the thing for me to do was to begin once again to observe God's laws, as I had formerly done in my early youth.

When morning came, I decided to put my conscience in order and did something I had not done for years—I went to confession. The priest comforted me, and his words impressed me deeply and indelibly. By loving God and practicing my Faith I have again found peace; I no longer fear the devil. But it was the sight of that hideous monster that reformed me by making me think again of God whom I had long since forgotten.

This episode exemplifies the philosophical and historical truism of Novalis [2]—namely that when people reject God they enslave themselves to the devil. As godlessness and immorality increased

[2] Alias, Friedrich von Handenberg (1772-1801), poet. [Editor]

in Turin, the evil spirit grew bolder and avidly strove to recover the power he had wielded in pre-Christian times. With God's permission, he began to manifest himself even outside spiritistic séances. In Father Thomas Chiuso's excellent work *La Chiesa in Piemonte dal 1797 ai giorni nostri* [The Church in Piedmont from 1797 to the Present Day] [3] there are irrefutable proofs of diabolical visitations that took place in Turin and elsewhere during that period. Several times Don Bosco himself came face to face with similar visitations and obsessions, and each time he overcame the evil spirits by spiritual weapons. We shall now limit ourselves to the description of only two such incidents. The first is contained in Father Ascanio Savio's letter to his brother, Father Angelo, at the Oratory, asking him to inform Don Bosco of what was happening in his own hometown and seek his advice and prayers.

Castelnuovo d'Asti, January 18, 1867

Dear Father Angelo:

Listen to this tale of the "stones," about which so much has been said. On the 10th of this month, my bedridden aunt and the good Angelina who acts as her nurse were in my godmother's stable,[4] when suddenly they heard a dull thump on the door. Angelina went to the door and opened it, but no one was there. The thump was repeated. She opened the door a second time and looked around more carefully, but again she saw no one. Then the thump was heard a third time. The girl became uneasy and exclaimed: "Oh, these naughty youngsters; how annoying they are!" She went out to scold them, but there was no one to scold. "Well, let's forget about it," she told herself as she returned to the stable. Just then stones began raining down on the yard and bouncing against the windows of the stable. They even fell inside the stable itself, though the door was tightly shut, and actually rolled around on the floor.

The men who came running at these strange happenings were flabbergasted. This tempest of stones was repeated the next day, Friday, and again on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday—five times in all. Some of the stones were as small as a man's thumb; others weighed as much as three and a half pounds. In addition, the stable was also bombarded by pieces of lumber, sods, muddy fragments of tiles, an olive branch

[3] Speirani Press, Turin, 1887, Vol. IV, Ch. 2. [Editor]

[4] Since the rooms in farmhouses were not heated, the only permanently warm place was the stable. [Editor]

wrapped up in straw, and a vine twig about ten inches long. All told, the debris weighed about eighty pounds. It rained from above and sprang from below in an upward direction; in fact, it came from all directions. It hit the door, walls, roof, and windows—but even those that had paper panes were not pierced in the least. The debris also struck those in the stable on various parts of their bodies, but even the largest pieces of debris never caused the least bruise. Some stones loudly splashed into a washtub and a pail but did not dent them in the least.

One of the stones had loathsome spittle on it; some were dry, while others were wet with rain. I picked up some as others rained down on my hat, my stomach, and my left knee. I watched them fall for about an hour and a half. Many people—young and old, and even some that were very skeptical and irreligious—flocked there from the immediate neighborhood, and even from Castelnuovo, Bardella, Buttigliera, Mondonio, and other places. No one has yet been able to offer a satisfactory explanation. Some say it was a soul in purgatory; others think it was the devil himself; still others—without a shred of evidence—declare that it was a carefully planned and well-staged practical joke. My conclusions are these: first, the fact is certain and hundreds of people witnessed it; second, no one knows what caused it.

Well, Father Angelo, this is the story of the "stones." There are learned people in Turin; seek an explanation and ask them whether such an occurrence is a natural phenomenon. Remember that those stones did not enter the stable through the roof, walls, door, or windows, and that, despite the racket they made, they did not hurt. When they struck me, it felt as though I had been lightly touched or tickled.

Your affectionate brother,

Ascanio

Father John Turchi also told us of another strange happening:

One winter (I don't recall the year) in a hamlet of Bra [5] an honest, hard-working peasant family—whose members are nearly all still living —had a very frightening experience. They all slept in the stable [the only warm place in the house]. One night one of the adult daughters suddenly woke up screaming that she had seen a light over the head and horns of one of the oxen and that the light was moving toward the door. All assured her that it was just a dream and that she should go back to

[5] A small town in Piedmont in northern Italy. [Editor]

sleep. The same thing happened several nights in succession, and on these occasions all the members of the family observed the phenomenon. Even the grown sons—husky and brave men—became as panic-stricken as the others. During the daytime they all felt brave, but they were gripped by fear as night approached. The incident so affected them that their health visibly suffered. They prayed and had others pray—I believe they even had Masses said—but to no avail. This went on for months, until someone finally advised them to see Don Bosco. They did, and after listening to their story, Don Bosco said: "I cannot offer the Mass tomorrow, but at such and such an hour—and he gave them the exact time—on the day after tomorrow, I shall say Mass for your intentions, and I hope this will free you from this infestation. However, you must all go to your church and hear Mass at the same time." They followed his instructions and the disturbance ceased. In Bra, and especially in the immediate vicinity of that family's home, this episode is well known. I learned about it a few years ago from Father [Joseph Leonard] Gazzani, a virtuous, zealous, and learned priest.

Similar phenomena which were even more terrifying occurred in many other places throughout these years, and the civil authorities tried in vain to ascertain their causes. The spreading of spiritistic practices fanned the pride of Satan and his hatred against God and men. Spiritistic publications, which emanated from Turin and were avidly read, continued to recount portentous tales and expound evil doctrines.

It was then that Don Bosco, hoping to instill horror for spiritistic practices and for the devil who inspired them, urged Father Charles Philip of Poirino, a Capuchin, to write a booklet on this subject, volunteering to print it at his own expense. The learned friar agreed. Basing his text on the testimony of the Old and New Testaments and historical facts, he proved the existence of the rebel angels, their eternal punishment, their presence on this earth, and their formidable—though God-controlled—power over external things; he also described cases of diabolical temptations and obsessions permitted by God for the testing of good Christians or the punishment and conversion of the wicked. The booklet also explained the power which the Church exercises over evil spirits through her exorcisms, the possibility of pacts between evil men and the devil, and the

severe church penalties in such cases. Lastly, the author discussed magnetism—not "mineral" or "animal magnetism," but the type defined by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office,[6] as well as the phenomena of tables that moved about and talked. He asserted that this was due to witchcraft, inasmuch as the effects were out of all proportion to their cause.[7] In addition, the author clearly stated that fraud or ignorance could in many cases lead to false conclusions, but he asserted that our merciful God did not easily permit the devil to gain such dominance over the faithful and thus encourage superstition in preponderantly Catholic countries. Nevertheless, the Capuchin priest pointed out ways and means of banishing evil spirits and fleeing them. There was also a chapter on the tragic consequences of maledictions, imprecations, and blasphemies.

This book was published in 1862 under the title *The Prince of Darkness: Moral and Doctrinal Observations on Evil Spirits plus a Report on a Case of Diabolical Possession in Val della Torre in 1858.* In this Alpine village in the deanery of Pianezza, which was part of the archdiocese of Turin, an unhappy girl was freed from diabolical possession through an apparition of the Blessed Virgin.

Fifteen thousand copies of this issue of *Letture Cattoliche* were printed, and the supply was almost immediately exhausted. To meet the demand, a reprint of twenty thousand copies was issued the following year, 1863. Again it sold out completely; not one single copy was left.

Don Bosco was still not satisfied because he could see that a great number of people, especially among the uneducated, continued to be taken in by the fantastic demonstrations of magnetism. He therefore asked a close friend of his, a former schoolmate and a renowned physician and surgeon, Dr. Gribaudo of Turin, to write another booklet, offering him an outline of the subject. It was published as an issue of *Letture Cattoliche* in 1865 and was entitled *Animal Magnetism and Spiritism.* Don Bosco proofread the galleys. The author began by laying down as a principle God's prohibition

[6] Now renamed "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith." [Editor]

[7] In the United States the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1866), while making due allowance for fraudulent practices in spiritism, declared that at least some of the manifestations were to be ascribed to satanic intervention, and it warned the faithful not to lend any support to spiritism or to attend séances out of curiosity. [Editor]

and threatened punishment to the Jewish people: "Let there not be found among you . . . a fortune teller, soothsayer, or caster of spells, nor one who consults ghosts and spirits or seeks oracles from the dead." [Deut. 18, 11] This is a ban on spiritism. God reiterated His threats through Osee, because "they consult their pieces of wood, and their wand makes pronouncements for them." [Osee 4, 12] Obviously this condemnation includes tables and stands that move and write. The author then proceeded to prove on the basis of history that the ancient and modern pagan world, and even certain periods of the Christian era, witnessed happenings that because of their evil, hypocritical, and cruel character were to be ascribed to an intelligent but evil being; this could be none other than the devil himself.

After accounting for physical, physiological, and psychological phenomena—always more or less detectable—and for fraudulent performances aimed at emptying the purses of a gullible audience, Dr. Gribaudo concluded that in spiritistic magnetism the supernatural element was predominant, and therefore that the many wondrous things heard about it from reliable persons and the practitioners themselves could not be ascribed to natural laws. Obviously, then, diabolical intervention was the only rational explanation; falling into a trance was just a temporary diabolical possession that bore all the hallmarks by which the Church characterizes obsessions.

Don Bosco printed thousands and thousands of copies and spread them far and wide because this fad, like an insidious serpent, continued to worm its way into family circles with serious moral and material consequences for the individual, the family, and the whole of society. In addition, in 1865 Don Bosco's friend, Father [Francis] Marengo, published a book entitled *Modern Spiritism Unmasked* [8] for the educated classes. Its purpose was to prove that spiritism was godless and dangerous, led to pantheism and materialism, and therefore was both morally and physically harmful, diabolically inspired, and an emanation of hell.

Whatever was humanly possible to do had been done. The next step was to pray: *Ab insidiis diaboli libera nos, Domine* [From the snares of the devil, deliver us, O Lord].

[8] A 99-page booklet printed by the Tipografia del Collegio degli Artigianelli in Turin. [Editor]

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

A SONG TO DON BOSCO

(See Chapter 8, footnote 2)

Arise, brothers, for on this day
Our grateful hearts
Hail Don Bosco, our good shepherd,
For the acts of kindness he has shown us.

Let the trumpets blare
And the bells ring loudly,
Inviting the whole neighborhood
To rejoice with us this day.

Shout so all can hear: He is the light
Sent to us by the Lord
To illumine the minds and hearts
Of the untutored young.

He is a pillar of strength to the aged,
To children without bread;
He sustains and guides his young charges
Along the path of virtue.

Sound off, therefore,
All young and old,
With loving hymns and shouts of praise
Upon this joyous day.

And bowing before God
Let us implore with all our hearts
That He keep this pious man
In our midst to the fullness of his years.

Appendix 2

REGULATIONS FOR THE MUTUAL AID SOCIETY

(See Chapter 8, footnote 3)

Foreword

My dear young men, here are your society's regulations. They will serve as a norm of conduct for your society to function in an orderly and rewarding way. I cannot but praise your zeal and diligence in promoting it, for you have been very wise. You will be setting aside one soldo per week, of little value when spent, but of great benefit when one is in need. I heartily approve your initiative.

My only suggestion is that, while you further the good of this society, you do not forget to carry out your obligations as members of the St. Aloysius Sodality, from which your spiritual welfare derives.

May the Lord imbue your hearts with true charity and joy. May all your deeds be accompanied by the salutary fear of God.

Regulations

1. The aim of this society is to provide assistance for those members who may be in need during illness or involuntary unemployment.

2. No one shall be admitted to membership in this society without prior membership in the St. Aloysius Sodality. Loss of this membership, for any reason whatsoever, will also entail loss of membership in the Mutual Aid Society.

3. Each member shall pay one soldo per week; no member may receive any benefits of the society until six months after his admission. However, a member will have the right to immediate assistance if, upon admission, he pays one lira and fifty centesimi and is neither sick nor unemployed at the time.

4. A daily subsidy of fifty centesimi shall be paid to sick members until their complete recovery. This aid shall cease if a member is accepted free in some hospital and will be resumed when convalescence begins.

5. Members who are unemployed through no fault of their own shall begin to draw the above subsidy eight days after the loss of their jobs.

After twenty days the council shall determine whether or not it should be increased or reduced.

6. All donations will be gratefully received, and a special collection will be made each year.

7. Any member who fails to pay his share over a long period of time shall forfeit his right to benefits until he meets his full obligations, and he then shall not be eligible for assistance for one month.

8. The society shall be governed by a director, a vice-director, a secretary, a vice-secretary, four councilors, a visitor and a vice-visitor, and a treasurer.

9. Besides prompt payment of dues, all officers shall diligently observe the regulations of the St. Aloysius Sodality, thus promoting their own sanctification and encouraging others to be virtuous.

10. The Oratory director is ex officio also the director of the society. He shall see to it that the officers perform their duties properly and that the needs of the members are satisfied in conformity with these regulations.

11. The vice-director shall assist the director. He shall duly instruct the secretary to discuss matters of the society's welfare at meetings which he shall attend.

12. The secretary shall collect dues every Sunday and keep an accurate, up-to-date account tactfully and courteously. The secretary shall also furnish the treasurer with subsidy vouchers bearing the names, surnames, and addresses of sick members and keep minutes of deliberations made at the meetings. He shall be assisted in his duties by the vice-secretary, who shall also act in his place when necessary.

13. The four councilors shall express their opinions in all matters concerning the welfare of the society; they shall vote on all matters of government, as well as the nomination of new members.

14. By virtue of his office the spiritual director of the St. Aloysius Sodality is the visitor of this society. He shall call on sick members at their homes to learn their needs and report the same to the secretary. On obtaining the required subsidy voucher, he shall present it to the treasurer and then bring the money to the patient. As he does so, the visitor shall also give some spiritual advice to the sick member, encouraging him to receive the sacraments in case his sickness becomes more serious. In the performance of this task he will be assisted by the vice-visitor.

15. The treasurer shall administer the society's funds and account for them every three months. He may not grant subsidies to anyone unless he has first received a voucher from the visitor, signed by the director.

16. Each officer shall remain in office for one year and may be reelected.

17. Officers shall give a report of their administration every three months.

18. These regulations shall become effective on July 1, 1850.

(As a membership card each member received a booklet entitled *Mutual Aid Society of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for Members of the St. Aloysius Sodality,* Speirano & Ferrero Press, Turin, 1850. The frontispiece bore the scriptural quotation: "Behold how good it is and how pleasant where brethren dwell as one." (Ps. 132, 1) The last page of the booklet contained a registration form with the name, address, and occupation of the member and the date of his registration.)

Appendix 3

FIRST MENTION OF THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

(See Chapter 9, footnote 9)

Diocesan and papal faculties granted Don Bosco up to 1850 were personal. As director of the Oratory, Don Bosco communicated them to those eligible and within the prescribed limitations. September 28, 1850 was the date on which faculties were first granted to the Superior of the Salesian Congregation.

In the following petition to the Pope, Don Bosco mentions the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales for the first time, meaning the directors of the [festive] oratories and all the priests and laymen caring for the boys attending said oratories. The Holy See acceded to Don Bosco's request.

Holy Father:

Father John Bosco of Turin respectfully informs Your Holiness that a congregation under the name and patronage of St. Francis de Sales, of which he is the director, has been lawfully founded in this city. Its purpose is the religious instruction of abandoned youth. The undersigned implores Your Holiness to graciously grant the following spiritual favors:

1. A plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions, for all those joining this congregation.
2. Another plenary indulgence on the feast of St. Francis de Sales for the members who will receive the sacraments on that day.
3. Likewise, a plenary indulgence on the feast of the Assumption for the members of this congregation who will receive the sacraments and pray for the glory and exaltation of Holy Mother Church.
4. A partial indulgence of 300 days for those who, though not belonging to this congregation, will participate in the procession usually held on the first Sunday of each month in honor of St. Francis de Sales.

Ex audientia Sanctissimi—Die 28 Septembris 1850

Sanctissimus Dominus Noster Pius Divina Providentia Papa IX Oratoris precibus per me infrascriptum relatis benigne annuit iuxta petita absque ulla Brevis expeditione.

DOMINICUS FIORAMONTI
SS. D.N.S. ab Epistolis Latinis

In his audience of September 28 [1850], the Holy Father, as a gesture of his fatherly affection to the boys frequenting the Turin oratories, orally extended the same indulgences to the St. Aloysius Sodality. This

extension of spiritual favors was duly communicated by letter to Don Bosco along with the rescript. In addition, the Pope granted a plenary indulgence to those who made the Six-Sunday Devotions in honor of St. Aloysius on any six consecutive Sundays of the year. Said indulgence could be gained on each Sunday, provided one received the sacraments that day and performed some act of piety. He also granted an indulgence of 300 days to anyone participating in the monthly procession in honor of St. Aloysius and on the feast day of the patron saint of each oratory. All the above indulgences were granted in perpetuity.

Appendix 4

DON BOSCO'S LIST OF RETREATANTS AT GIAVENO IN 1850

(See Chapter 12, footnote 14)

Name	*Age*	*Name*	*Age*
Brosio, Joseph	21	Audenino, Victor	16
Cumino, Joseph	17	Ippolito, Louis	17
Diato, Bartholomew	18	Perim, John	16
Reffo, Herman	18	Vaschetti, Victor	17
Gaspardone, Thomas	18	Falchero, Francis	19
Testore, Michael	17	Pasero, Lawrence	17
Costa, Eugene	19	Alasia, Felix	17
Tirone, Dominic	18	Casassa, Joseph	16
Piumatti, John	18	Gorino, Peter	33
Beglia, James	17	Ferro, Felix	17
Buzzetti, Joseph	18	Demateis, John	22
Rastelli, John	19	Ferro, Michael	20
Reviglio, Felix	18	Picco, John Baptist	20
Reviglio, Joseph	17	Rolando, . . .	17
Caglieri, Hyacinth	18	Delfino, Luciano	20
Gastini, Charles	18	Marnetto, Paul	25
Chiosi, Joseph	16	Randù, Joseph	45
Canale, Joseph	22	Rosa, Hyacinth	18
Fornasio, Clement	21	Guardi, . . .	19
Libois, Michael	18	Cagno, James	16
Valfrè, John	20	Borselli, Francis	20
Croce, Alexander	16	Gotti, Stephen	18
Casetti, Francis, cleric	16	Micheletti, . . . (elder)	19
Bardissone, John	17	Micheletti, . . . (junior)	17
Comoglio, Joseph	23	Pagani, Felix	16
Rovetti, Joseph	38	Montanaro, Lawrence	25
Marchisio, Dominic	16	Porporato, Lawrence	16
Locatelli, Francis	17	Ghiotti, Anthony	28
Ferrero, John	16	Pasquale, Michael	16
Rua, Michael	16	Gillardi, John	48
Savio, Ascanio, cleric	18	Manuele, Matthew	17
Odasso, Joseph	16	Chiala, Caesar	16
Rossi, Francis	17	Bruno, George	17
Bracotti, John	18	Bertolino, James	17
Battagliotti, Joseph	18	Bosselli, John Baptist	16

Name	*Age*	*Name*	*Age*
Margaretelli, Stephen	16	Lione, Francis	17
Bruna, Joseph	16	Costa, Eugene	19
Savio, Angelo	17	Comba, Anthony	18
Bargetti, Francis	20	Usseglio, John	19
Costante, Zephyrinus	17	Tessa, Charles	17
Forno, Bernard	38	Brunelli, John	19
Piovano, Peter	25	Ricci, Francis	16
Giraldi, Dositheus	40	Vesso, George	17
Casanova, Alphonse	26	Rosso, Felix	21
Gauter, John	22	Pezziardi, Albert	16
Rovere, Julius	19	Santi, Modesto	17
Bajetti, John	25	Giovale, Gaudenzio	17
Serale, Peter	16	Plano, John	16
Castagna, James	16	Depetris, . . .	21
Gatta, Bernard	22	Dalmasso, Francis	17
Rovaretto, Anthony	17	Rufino, Francis	17
Reviglio, Joseph	16	Giay, Ireneus	19
Giovannino, Augustine	16	Davico, Louis	23
Giacomelli, Anthony	21	Usseglio, Louis	20
Barrucco, Joseph	35		

Appendix 5

A ROYAL SUBSIDY

(See Chapter 20, footnote 8)

[Following is one of the four replies received. The recipient was the cleric Charles Gastini in Turin.]

Turin, October 3, 1851

In conformity with instructions issued from the Royal Secretariat of State for Ecclesiastical Affairs of Mercy and Justice on September 30, the Head of the Royal Apostolic Steward's Office was informed that His Majesty has graciously consented to grant you a subsidy of 90 lire from this fund.

Please report in person or entrust someone of your acquaintance with duly notarized power of attorney to receive said amount on your behalf.

Canon [Anthony] Moreno, *Royal Almoner*

Appendix 6

FATHERLY SOLICITUDE

(See Chapter 23, footnote 5)

Turin, August 29, 1851

Dear Father Chiatellino,*

I think I should inform you that Mr. Joseph Battistolo, the father of the boy you sent me, took his son home at the suggestion of Mr. Michael Chiusano, as you can see from the enclosed letter.

This is fine with me. Most likely, the boy's parents are no longer in straitened circumstances, and thus I can make room for someone else. Nevertheless, I was rather sorry to see him go because he had finally improved considerably, especially in his work.

Well, Mr. Chiusano, you, and I have done everything we could. May the Lord continue the little we have attempted to do.

Please give my affectionate regards and those of the Oratory boys to your cousin, Michael Chiusano, and to your family. Love me in the Lord.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

* Father Michelangelo Chiatellino, a diocesan priest, had taught music at the Oratory and was now an elementary school teacher at Carignano near Turin. [Editor]

Appendix 7

EPISCOPAL DECREE NAMING DON BOSCO DIRECTOR OF ALL THE ORATORIES

(See Chapter 33, footnote 1)

MARQUIS LOUIS FRANSONI

Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation,
by the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See
Archbishop of Turin

To

The Very Reverend
JOHN BOSCO OF CASTELNUOVO,
Diocesan Priest

Greetings.

We congratulate you, worthy priest of God, for your zeal and charity in gathering poor boys in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales in Valdocco, an enterprise which can never be sufficiently commended. We consider it only proper to register our complete satisfaction for this undertaking by officially appointing you, with this letter, Head Spiritual Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and also of the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories in order that the work undertaken under such felicitous auspices may prosper and develop in a spirit of charity for God's true glory and for the great edification of the people. Therefore, we herewith confer upon you every faculty necessary and suitable to this holy purpose.

The original of this certificate is being forwarded to our chancery for filing, and the chancellor will be authorized to issue a copy to you.

Turin, March 31, 1852
Signed: Philip Ravina, *Vicar General*
Balladore, *Chancellor*

This copy agrees with the original.

Balladore, *Chancellor*

The chancery of Turin had granted the following faculties to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales:

1. To celebrate low and high Mass, give Benediction with the Holy Eucharist, hold triduums, novenas, and spiritual retreats.

2. To teach catechism, preach, admit children to First Communion, and prepare them for the sacraments of Penance and Confirmation.

3. To allow children and adults to make their Easter duty in any of the chapels of the oratories, to bless sacred vestments and clerical habits, and to confer such habits on those young men who manifested a vocation for the priesthood but only if they intended to work in the oratories and boarded in the adjoining hospice.

These authorizations in practice frequently gave rise to uncertainties. Therefore, Archbishop Fransoni, with his decree of March 31, 1852, granted them without any limitation and thus included whatever was opportune or necessary for the smooth and proper running of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, that of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova, and that of the Guardian Angel in Borgo Vanchiglia.

Appendix 8

EPISCOPAL DECREE HONORING FATHER ROBERT MURIALDO

(See Chapter 33, footnote 2)

MARQUIS LOUIS FRANSONI
Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation
Knight of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus
by the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See
Archbishop of Turin

To

The Very Reverend
Father Robert Murialdo,
Diocesan Priest

Greetings.

In consideration of the deep commitment and fervent zeal with which, as a worthy priest, you diligently and assiduously labor on behalf of the Christian education of poor boys gathered in the Guardian Angel Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, we deem it proper to give public testimony of our complete satisfaction by officially appointing you, with this letter, Spiritual Director of the above-mentioned Oratory, under the sole condition that you faithfully preserve its unity and dependence under the Reverend John Bosco, Head Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco and founder of this Guardian Angel Oratory. We therefore grant you all the necessary and opportune authorizations connected thereto.

We are forwarding the original copy of this certificate for filing to our chancery. Our chancellor is authorized to issue a copy thereof to you.

Turin, March 31, 1852
Signed: Philip Ravina, *Vicar General*
Balladore, *Chancellor*

This copy agrees with the original.

Signed: Balladore, *Chancellor*

Appendix 9

AN ODE BY DON BOSCO

(See Chapter 37, footnote 7)

Come augel di ramo in ramo
Va cercando albergo fido,
Per poggiare ansioso il nido
E tranquillo riposar;

Non si posa in valli o in monti,
Non per campo o per foresta,
Nol trattien turbo o tempesta
Finché il nido non formò:

Cosí noi oltre dieci anni
Questo nido abbiam cercato,
Nè dal ciel mai ci fu dato
Di poterlo ritrovar.

Ora un prato, or un giardino,
Or cortile, stanza o strada,
Talor piazza oppur contrada
Oratorio era per noi.

Quando alfin pietoso Iddio
Volse a noi benigno un guardo,
E due lustri di ritardo
Largamente compensò.

Compensò. . . Ma che dir più?
Ogni speme fu appagata,
Già la chiesa è consacrata,
Sono paghi i nostri cuor.

Egli è ver, signori amati,
Per più mesi faticaste,
Caldo, freddo tolleraste
Per la casa del Signor:

Negazion di spasso e sonno,
Non disagi, affanno o stento
Non la pioggia o turbo o vento
Vostro zelo rallentò.

Ora lieti festeggiate,
Quai guerrier dopo vittoria,
Cui la vera e santa gloria
Solo il merto procacciò.

Il Signor v'ha compensati
La fatica è coronata,
Nostra chiesa è consacrata,
Che bramar possiam di più?

Presto adunque, o cari figli,
Corriam tutti al Tempio santo,
Innalziamo a Dio un canto
Pel favor che c'impartì.

Oh! Signore onnipotente
Che al meschin mai nulla nieghi,
Deh! benigno ai nostri preghi
Tu ci ascolta in questo dí.

Fa' che questo nuovo tempio
Al tuo nome consacrato,
Mai non sia profanato
Da chi fede in cuor non ha.

Fa' che quanti qua verranno
Supplicanti tuoi divoti,
Abbian paghi i loro voti;
Porgi aíta, dà mercè.

E tu, Vergine beata,
Che appo Dio tutto puoi,
Benedici i figli tuoi,
Fede, speme inspira e amor;

Fa' che mai per opra ria
Noi cessian d'esser tuoi figli,
Tu ci franca dai perigli
Dell'incauta nostra età.

Ma qual cosa tu darai
Ai benefici signori,
Che lor pene e lor sudori
Consacrarono al tuo onor?

Tesserai, Vergine bella,
Su nel Ciel di fiori un serto,
Che ricambi ogni lor merto,
Con quel ben che fin non ha.

Noi intanto grato il core
In caratteri dorati
Scriveremo in tutti i lati:
VIVA ETERNO QUESTO DÍ.

Nè per tempo o per vicenda
Non sia mai che si cancelli
Questo dí, che fra' più belli
Tra di noi sempre sarà.

Appendix 10

VERSES BY DON BOSCO

(See Chapter 38, footnote 2)

Pria il sole dall'occaso
  Fia che torni al suo oriente,
  Ogni fiume alla sorgente
Prima indietro tornerà
Che dal cuor ci si cancelli
Questo dí che tra i più belli
Fra di noi sempre sarà.

Appendix 11

ADDITIONS TO THE REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY

(See Chapter 39, footnote 1)

The Sacristans

While Lauds of the Blessed Virgin Mary are being chanted, or at the latest when the hymn is intoned, the sacristans should invite the priest to vest for Mass.[1]

The Monitor

After Lauds of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin the monitor shall intone the usual prayers in a clear voice, and the congregation will continue. He shall then read the prayers that accompany the Mass, leaving the acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity for after Mass. After the sermon, he shall recite five *Paters* and *Aves* for the benefactors of the Oratory, and another *Pater* and *Ave* in honor of St. Aloysius, ending with "Praised forever be the most holy names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," which he shall begin. On greater solemnities, he should read the preparation for Communion after the *Sanctus* and, later, the thanksgiving.[2]

The Chapel Subassistants

There shall be four chapel subassistants. The first one will supervise the area near the altar of Our Lady; the second one, the area near the altar of St. Aloysius; and the other two the rest of the church, from the center to the main entrance.[3]

[1] For comparison, *see* Vol. III, p. 443, Appendix 1, Ch. 5, No. 3. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. III, p. 445, Appendix 1, Ch. 6, Nos. 2, 3, 4. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. III, p. 445, Appendix 1, Ch. 7, No. 2. [Editor]

Catechism Classes

Fifteen-year-olds who have been permanently admitted [4] to Holy Communion will assemble in the choir; those who have been permanently admitted to Communion but are not yet fifteen should gather near the altars of Our Lady and of St. Aloysius; the others should be arranged according to age and knowledge.[5]

The Archivist

The archivist is to keep an accurate record of all objects destined or donated for the altars of Our Lady and of St. Aloysius.[6]

[4] According to a diocesan custom, admission to First Communion was on a temporary basis to insure that first communicants continued to attend religious instruction. [Editor]

[5] *See* Vol. III, p. 447, No. 13. [Editor]

[6] *See* Vol. III, p. 448, No. 3. [Editor]

Appendix 12

MINUTES OF THE DRAWING OF THE LOTTERY ON BEHALF OF THE BOYS' ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES IN VALDOCCO

(See Chapter 40, footnote 8)

Turin, July 14, 1852

In the year of Our Lord 1852, at 2:30 P.M. of July 12, on the balcony of the City Hall in Turin there took place the drawing of the lottery, authorized on December 9, 1851 by the City Finance Office, on behalf of the Boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco.

In accordance with the postponement authorized by the aforesaid Finance Office and published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale,* the lottery executive committee held a public meeting presided over by the Reverend Canon Peter Baricco, deputy mayor, with the undersigned acting as secretary.

Since the organizers of the lottery had been authorized to issue 99,999 tickets, the deputy mayor permitted the use of four revolving containers. The first one held blue counters numbered from 0 to 99, corresponding to thousands; the second, red counters numbered 0 to 9 for hundreds; the third, yellow counters numbered 0 to 9 for tens, and lastly, the fourth, grey counters numbered 0 to 9 for units. After the deputy mayor had verified that these revolving containers were empty, he himself placed the counters inside, one by one. At the end of this operation the four containers were closed and spun to mix the counters. Then, eight Oratory boys, in two groups of four, took turns extracting successively a counter from each of the containers. [The combined group of counters represented a winning number.] This operation was repeated as many times as there were prizes—that is, three thousand two hundred and fifty-one times. Each winning number was announced in a loud voice by a member of the committee, repeated by another member, and registered by three examiners in a special ledger next to the number of the prize won.

Since the drawing could not be completed at one session, the deputy

mayor adjourned the drawing to the following day [July 13] at 9 A.M., sealed the containers, and put the ledgers away in a safe place.

The drawing was resumed the following day at the stated time in the presence of the above-named persons, and since once again it was not possible to conclude the operation, the deputy mayor again decided to continue it on the next day [July 14] at 8:30 A.M.

The drawing was recommenced as indicated above in the presence of the same officials and was concluded at 5:30 P.M. of July 14, 1852.

The deputy mayor certified that the drawing had been conducted according to law, and at his request I, the secretary, drew up these minutes in conformity with the regulations issued by the Finance Office. The deputy mayor, the members of the executive committee of the lottery, and the acting secretary have signed these minutes.

In faith.

Rev. Peter Baricco, *Deputy Mayor*
Rev. John Bosco
Frederick Bocca
Rev. John Borel
Lawrence Agliano
Cajetan Bellingeri, *Acting Secretary*

Appendix 13

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

(See Chapter 44, footnote 8)

Ero lí che sognavo, e mi parea
Veder tutta fumante in sul tagliere
Una bella polenta, che mi fea
Rider l'anima lieta pel piacere;
Quando la mamma con dolente voce
Grida: Cade la casa! Ahi caso atroce!

Io mi sveglio intronato nella testa
Da un forte scroscio, che sentir si fece;
E con la mente ancor non bene desta,
Gli abiti cerco, e del cappello invece
Prendo a Brunengo il sarto la parrucca;
Frettoloso cosí salvo mia zucca.

Uscito fuori, cerco invan le stelle
La bella luna luminosa in cielo,
Che invece piove a furia, a catinelle;
Trovo Don Bosco, con paterno zelo,
A cercar, a contar tutti i suoi figli
Scampati per prodigio dai perigli.

In chiesa ci raduna, e poi ci esorta
A confidar nella celeste aïta;
Ognuno nel sentirlo si conforta,
Nè teme davvantaggio della vita:
Mentre un colpo all'orecchio s'avvicina
Come il mondo n'andasse alla rovina.

Che sara mai? gridammo spaventati,
Guardandoci l'un l'altro con orrore;
Saremmo in questa notte sotterrati?
Un trave e poi un altro con rumore,
Come la paglia che si porta il vento,
Col muro eran caduti in quel momento.

E là pochi dí prima aveva il letto
Posato, ove dormiva i sonni belli;
Di me che saría stato, poveretto,
E della tavolozza e dei pennelli?
Sarei andato con i padri antichi,
Nè più la pancia serberei pei fichi.

Che ne dici, Gastini, e tu, Buzzetti?
Che vi pare di questo gran periglio?
Mi trema l'alma se penso a Rocchietti;
Mi ride invece in osservar Reviglio
A pregar, o gridar con vivo affetto,
Tenendo in testa il berrettin da letto.

Ed Arnaud il guantaio, e poi Battista,
Colui cioè che pela le carote,
E Marchisio, e ben altri in lunga lista
Stavano bianchi in ambedue le gote.
Di quella notte è degno che la storia
Ne serbi in bella pagina memoria.

All'alba intanto rovinava in tutto
Con orrendo frastuono quella mole,
Che il buon Padre erigeva, e in mezzo al lutto
Ci disse, e le ricordo sue parole,
Con la calma dell'anima sicura:
Risorgeranno un dí coteste mura!

Carlo Tomatis

Appendix 14

PETITION FOR PERMISSION TO READ FORBIDDEN BOOKS

(See Chapter 45, footnote 9)

To His Holiness Pope Pius IX

Most Holy Father:

The Rev. John Bosco, in his capacity as director of the boys' oratories he founded in Turin, very frequently receives all kinds of heretical books from the boys attending said oratories.

Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, he requests permission to read and retain forbidden books as necessity may dictate.

For this grace, etc.,

Rev. John Bosco, *Petitioner*

RESCRIPT

Feria sexta, die 17 decembris, 1852

Auctoritate SS.D.N. Pii PP. IX nobis commissa liceat Oratori (si vera sunt exposita) attentis litteris testimonialibus, et quoad vixerit, legere ac retinere, sub custodia tamen ne ad aliorum manus perveniant, libros quoscumque prohibitos, exceptis de obscenis ex professo tractantibus.

In quorum fidem

Fr. Angelus Vincentius Modena,
Sacrae Indicis Congregationis a Secretis

Loco sigilli

Appendix 15

SUBSCRIPTION RATES AND OTHER INFORMATION ON THE *LETTURE CATTOLICHE*

(See Chapter 46, footnote 1)

Subscription Plan

1. These booklets will be written in a simple, popular style and their contents will deal exclusively with the Catholic Faith.
2. These booklets, averaging about 100 pages, will be published monthly. Format, stock, and font will be exactly as in this prospectus.
3. The subscription rate (payable in advance) is 90 centesimi per semester, or Lire 1.80 per year. The mail delivery rate is Lire 1.40 per semester, or Lire 2.80 per year.
4. There will be no charge for domestic bulk deliveries of at least fifty copies to distributors who wish to cooperate in this apostolic work.
5. In towns and rural centers subscriptions may be paid to agents appointed by the respective bishops to whom we recommend this new publication.

(Address of bishops enclosed)

Appendix 16

REGULATIONS FOR THE HOSPICE ATTACHED TO THE ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

(See Chapter 46, footnote 7)

PART I

Purpose of this House

Among the boys attending the festive oratories of this city there are some who will not benefit from any spiritual assistance unless they also receive material help. Some of them, already somewhat advanced in years, are either orphans or bereft of all assistance because their parents cannot or will not take care of them; they are without a trade or even a mere elementary education, and they are bound to fall into many dangers if they are not received into some home and there trained to work, to discipline, and to the practice of religious duties. Such boys are welcome in the hospice attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. However, since it is not possible to accept all those who are in grave need, some rules must be established for giving priority to those whose need is greater. Likewise, there must be rules specifying the duties of each superior and disciplinary norms for the orderly spiritual and material functioning of this hospice.

Chapter 1. *Admission*

Conditions for admission are as follows:

1. A boy must be at least twelve and not over eighteen years of age. Experience has shown that, as a general rule, boys under twelve are incapable of doing great good or great harm, while those over eighteen find it very difficult to break off their habits and adapt themselves to a new tenor of life.
2. He must be a totally destitute orphan with no one to take care of him. If his brothers, uncles, or aunts can provide for him, he is not eligible for admission.
3. He must not be suffering from any repelling or contagious disease, such as scabies, ringworm, tuberculosis, etc.

4. He must already be attending one of the [festive] oratories of this city, since this hospice aims at assisting those frequenting said oratories. Experience has taught us that it is most important to know well the character of a boy before accepting him.

5. He must present a letter of recommendation from his pastor confirming his age and circumstances. This letter must also state whether or not the boy has had smallpox and certify that he is free of any repelling or contagious disease and that he is in no way disabled. In the absence of such health certificate, a medical examination [upon admission] will suffice.

6. The applicant should bring with him his own belongings for personal use; it would not be fair for him to depend on charity when he has things of his own. The persons whom each boy must obey and consider in their respective offices as his superiors are: the Director, the Prefect, the Catechist, the Assistant, the Protector, the Monitor, and the Domestics.

Chapter 2. *The Director*

1. The director is the head superior. It is his right to accept or dismiss boys and to see that each staff member carries out his duty. He is responsible for the moral conduct of all.

2. No changes may be made as regards personnel, property, or management of the house without the authorization of the director.

Chapter 3. *The Prefect*

1. The prefect, or administrator, shall take the director's place in his absence. If possible, such office shall be entrusted to the prefect of the festive oratory.

2. He is responsible for the entire administration of the house and workshops; he must supervise all contracts, keep an exact account of incomes and expenditures, and provide food, clothing, and fuel.

3. He is in charge of the boys' register in which he shall record not only the full names of the boys, but also other private information, especially if a boy is in grave moral danger. He shall record whether or not the boy or other people can contribute financially or otherwise to his maintenance.

4. He shall enter into this register the date of the boy's arrival and other information, such as any money, bed linen, or clothes he may have brought along or whether his admission is on a temporary or permanent basis.

5. He shall ensure that the catechist instructs the new boy in his duties and the routine of the house, and he shall assign him a place in church, at table, and in the dormitory. As far as possible, he will place him with companions of the same age.

6. He shall record the wages and employment conditions of each boy and see that they are observed. Whatever each boys earns daily over and above sixteen soldi will be set aside for him. Boys who do not earn that much shall receive half a day's pay per week.

7. When a boy leaves the hospice, the prefect shall duly record the date and the reason for his departure.

8. He is urged to see to it that all other staff members do their duty, and he must be always prepared to give an account of the conduct of the boys and of the staff members.

9. All evening classes are under his jurisdiction.

10. It is also his duty to provide whatever is needed for the sacristy, to supervise the sacristans, and to teach sacred ceremonies to the clerics. If unable to attend to all these duties by himself, he may entrust some of them to other qualified persons.

Chapter 4. *The Catechist*

1. The catechist, or spiritual director, has the duty of supervising and looking after the spiritual welfare of the boys. He must be a priest or at least a cleric and his conduct must be exemplary.

2. He must immediately brief new boys about the rules of the house. He shall also ascertain in a kindly manner whether they need religious instruction and, if so, he shall solicitously impart it to them.

3. He shall teach the catechism of the diocese and assign a weekly lesson which shall be due on Sunday before lunch. He shall keep a record of those who have been admitted to Holy Communion, and of those who have received Confirmation. He shall also inquire whether any of those admitted to Holy Communion need further instruction in order to receive it worthily.

4. It is also his duty to keep busy those boys who might be temporarily unemployed by assigning to them some material or intellectual work lest they be idle.

5. He shall duly note the boys' faults in order to be able to correct them at an opportune time and give conduct marks at the end of each month.

6. He shall see to it that the boys are punctual at church services and morning and night prayers. It is his duty to forestall anything which

may interfere with the practices of piety. After night prayers, he shall visit the dormitories to see that silence is kept and make sure that no one is missing. Should this be the case, he shall take the opportune measures and, if necessary, inform the director.

7. He shall endeavor to ensure that the dormitory monitors are at their posts on time. He shall keep track of those not attending sacred services on Sundays and weekdays; in this he shall be assisted by sub-monitors.

8. If any boy is sick, he shall provide all necessary spiritual and material assistance, but he shall be very cautious about prescribing remedies on his own.

9. He shall keep in close contact with the prefect to learn about the boys' conduct at work and thus be able to forestall any disorder and provide temporary work for any boy who might become unemployed, or find him a new job.

Chapter 5. *The Assistant*

1. The assistant must see to it that the boys keep their bodies and clothes clean. He must also look after the tidiness of the premises, under the supervision of the prefect.

2. At least once a week he shall inspect the cleanliness of the boys' heads and see to it that their hair is kept short and free of lice.

3. He shall put out a clean shirt on each bed every Saturday evening and collect the soiled ones next morning.

4. He shall change the towels every other week and the sheets once a month.

5. He shall take great care that clothes are marked indelibly lest they be misplaced. Before purchasing or replacing clothes of any sort, he should first verify the necessity of doing so and inform the prefect of that fact.

6. He shall see that dormitories and the rest of the house are swept every day and that the beds are tidily made. He should verify the proper functioning of doors, exits, windows, keys, and locks and provide for their prompt and economical repair when they are out of order.

7. Every week he shall appoint two boys (from among those working inside the house) to sweep and tidy the whole house. However, if any boy should be temporarily out of work, he shall be immediately assigned to this chore.

8. The assistant shall distribute the bread at breakfast, supervise the boys at table, and prevent any waste of food. He shall constantly remind

the boys to put aside what they do not care to eat. Any boy willfully wasting bread, soup, or other food shall be warned only once; if he does it again, he should be immediately dismissed.

9. The assistant should take great care that all report on time to their workshops, keep busy at their work, and avoid disturbing others.

Chapter 6. *The Protectors*

1. The protector is a benefactor who assumes the very important responsibility of finding work for the boys and making sure that their employers and fellow workers are such as not to endanger the boys' eternal salvation.

2. The protector shall keep a file of names and addresses of prospective employers and will direct to them those boys who wish to learn some craft or who are unemployed.

3. The protector is like a solicitous father who looks after his charges, correcting them and encouraging them to be more diligent. He will also ask employers to be patient and kindly.

4. He should not make any agreement with non-Catholic employers or with those who refuse to give a day off to the boys on Sundays and holy days.

5. If the protector becomes aware that a boy is in a dangerous environment, he shall watch over him to forestall any harm, bring the matter to the attention of the employer if it seems advisable, and do his utmost to find a more suitable place of employment.

6. He shall maintain close contact with the prefect and the catechist to discuss and take those measures which seem most beneficial to the boys.

7. At least every two weeks he shall call on each employer to inquire about the boys' diligence, progress, and conduct.

Chapter 7. *The Monitors*

1. There shall be a monitor and submonitor in every dormitory and workshop. It is their duty to report on what is said and done in each of these places.

2. They shall lead by their example and strive at all times to be fair and conscientious in a spirit of love of God and neighbor.

3. It is their duty to admonish their companions, but they are not to inflict any punishment; should that be necessary, they shall refer the matter to the prefect or to the director. Before going to bed themselves,

they should check that no one is missing; if that should be the case, they shall inform the prefect or the catechist.

4. They should ensure that silence is observed at the appointed times. In the morning, at the sound of the bell, they shall rise promptly. They should be the last ones to leave the dormitory. After locking it, they shall bring the key to the assigned place. If any boy is sick, they shall inform the catechist.

5. They shall be most vigilant in preventing foul conversation and immodest gestures, words, signs, or jokes. St. Paul says that such things should not even be mentioned among Christians. *Impudicitia ne quidem nominetur in vobis.* Should they discover any such transgressions, they are gravely bound to inform the director.

Chapter 8. *The Domestics*

1. The cook, the waiter, and the doorkeeper should help one another whenever it does not conflict with their respective duties.

2. The domestics are strongly urged not to get involved in matters not pertaining to their duties or unrelated to the welfare of the house. In matters affecting their own welfare, they should speak to the prefect.

3. They should be conscientious even in little things. Woe to the domestic who begins to pilfer when buying, selling, or performing similar duties; unwittingly he will soon become a thief.

4. They shall be temperate in eating and especially in drinking. Whoever cannot do that is a useless servant.

5. They shall not become familiar with the boys. They should deal charitably and courteously with all but without developing any personal friendship or familiarity.

6. They should receive the sacraments at least once a month, preferably in the Oratory, so that their Christian conduct may be known also to the boys. The specific duties of each domestic are as follows:

Article 1. *The Cook*

1. It is his duty to prepare wholesome and economical meals and to serve them on time to avoid inconveniencing the community.

2. The cook is responsible for the cleanliness of the kitchen and shall attend to this with the greatest care. He shall also try to prevent any spoilage of food.

3. He shall put aside all leftovers and shall not dispose of them in any way without the superior's authorization.

4. He shall be very strict in not allowing any boy of the house into the kitchen. Likewise, he should not permit others to linger in it without the superior's authorization. Should any visitor ask him for some member of the household, he shall politely direct him to the waiting room or to the doorkeeper.

5. When his work is done, the cook shall help the waiter in servicing the lamps or in doing some other chore; he should never remain idle.

Article 2. *The Waiter*

1. The waiter shall retire to bed and also rise half an hour earlier than the others. Ten minutes before the hour of rising he shall wake the doorkeeper whose duty it is to light the lamps in the dormitories. The waiter will then ring the bell for rising, for the *Angelus,* and for Mass.

2. It is his duty to tidy up the rooms of the superiors, wait at table, help scrubbing the kitchen, wash dishes and pots, and store them away.

3. If he has any spare time, he should report to the prefect.

Article 3. *The Doorkeeper*

1. The doorkeeper's most important duty is to be always at his post and courteously receive all callers. Whenever he has to absent himself for his religious duties, meals, or other legitimate reasons, he should have a substitute appointed by the director.

2. He shall not admit anyone into the premises without informing his superiors. He shall direct business callers or those who need to discuss matters pertaining to the boys to the prefect. He shall refer to the director only those people who explicitly ask for him.

3. He shall not allow any boy to leave the premises without a pass unless he has been instructed otherwise by the superior. In that case he should keep the matter confidential and record the time of departure and return.

4. Any letter or package addressed to any boy shall be handed over to the prefect before delivering it to the addressee.

5. He shall take care to lock all street doors and gates at night. A quarter of an hour after night prayers he shall ring the bell and then start extinguishing the lamps in the dormitories.

6. In the morning, at the bell for rising, he shall again make the rounds of the dormitories to light the lamps and, if necessary, wake up the monitors.

7. It is his duty to ring the bell according to the timetable of the house. He is also charged with servicing and repairing all the lamps and distributing them as needed.

8. He may not buy or sell food or accept custody of money or other objects to please the boys or their relatives.

9. He shall maintain order and strive to prevent any misconduct in the playground or inside the house. He shall not permit shouting or any loud noise during sacred services, school hours, or study periods.

10. He has charge of the keys of the dormitories, classrooms, etc.

11. Boys may receive visitors daily between one and two in the afternoon, but at no other time. This applies to both students and artisans. Women visitors must remain in the parlor and wait there for the boys to whom they wish to speak.

12. The doorkeeper shall endeavor to keep busy at all times either with his routine duties or with others that shall be entrusted to him. He shall always be courteous and affable in accepting and delivering messages. Courteousness and affability should be his outstanding traits.

N.B. The director will receive outside callers on weekdays from 9 to 11 A.M.

Likewise, the best time to see the prefect or his substitute about business, school matters, or maintenance is from 9 to 12 noon and from 2 to 5 P.M. on weekdays.

Chapter 9. *The Craftsmasters*

1. By craftsmasters we mean those who teach some trade or craft to the boys in our own workshops. Their first duty is to be punctual in their shops.

2. They should be solicitous for the welfare of the house. They should bear in mind that their most important duty is to teach their apprentices and provide steady work for them. As far as possible, they should observe silence and avoid humming during work hours. They should never allow boys to go to town for errands. When necessary, they shall ask the prefect for permission.

3. They should never make private arrangements with the boys or accept any work on their own. They must keep an accurate record of all the work done in their shops.

4. They are gravely bound to prevent idleness and any kind of foul conversation. They should immediately report any offender to the superior.

5. Both craftsmasters and pupils should stay in their own shops; they should not wander into other shops except when absolutely necessary.

6. Snacks are not permitted in the shops; these are places for serious occupation and not for recreation.

7. Work shall begin with the *Actiones* and *Ave Maria,* and shall end with the *Agimus* and *Ave Maria.* At noon and in the evening the *Angelus* shall be said before leaving the shop.

8. Artisans must be docile and submissive to their craftmasters as to their superiors. They should be very attentive and diligent in all their duties.

9. The craftsmaster or his substitute shall read these articles loudly and clearly every other week; a copy shall be prominently posted in the shop.

APPENDIX FOR THE STUDENTS [7]

Admission

1. Among the boys accepted into this house there are some who reveal aptitude for academic subjects or the liberal arts. The Oratory will do its utmost to help these boys get an education even if they lack financial means.

2. The students must faithfully obey all the rules of the house and give good example to the artisans, especially in regard to the practices of piety and to the exercise of fraternal charity.

3. No boy will be allowed to take academic subjects:

   (a) Unless he has the necessary qualifications and has excelled in the classes he has already attended.

   (b) Unless he has manifested an exemplary spirit of piety. These two conditions must be substantiated by good conduct through a short probationary period in the house.

   (c) No one will be allowed to take Latin unless he intends to become a priest. However, if after completing the Latin course he should feel called to another state of life, he shall be free to follow it.

4. Every student must be willing to perform such chores as going on errands, sweeping, carrying water or firewood, waiting at table, teaching catechism, and the like.

[7] Boys taking academic subjects were called "students" to distinguish them from the "artisans"—that is, those learning a trade. [Editor]

Chapter 1. *Religious Conduct of the Students*

1. Students must be models to the rest of the boys in carrying out their scholastic and religious duties. It would certainly be very unbecoming for them—while constantly occupied in things of the spirit—to be bettered by those daily engrossed in manual labor.

2. Students will make the Exercise for a Happy Death on the second Tuesday of each month. They should prepare for it by performing some suitable practice of piety a few days before.

3. Since all should have a regular confessor, one will be appointed especially for the students. They should not go to another without notifying the superior. This is to ensure that students frequent the sacraments and receive regular guidance from the same spiritual director. Since students are mainly occupied in things of the spirit, it stands to reason that they should receive greater spiritual assistance. An even weightier reason for having a regular confessor is that at the completion of the Latin course this confessor may competently counsel a boy about his vocation.

4. Every student should fully trust his confessor and regularly open his heart to him and follow his advice. This is most important in order that the confessor may competently suggest what is best for the boy's spiritual welfare.

Chapter 2. *Study*

1. Study periods vary according to class schedule and are binding on all.

2. In the study hall there shall be an assistant who is responsible for the attendance and diligence of the students. At each desk [8] a monitor will aid the assistant.

3. There will be a meeting every Saturday at which the assistant will report on the conduct of each student and suggest whatever may promote their intellectual and moral progress.

4. Indolent or bothersome students will be warned. If they fail to improve they will be assigned to other occupations. Time is precious; whatever hinders its full use must be done away with.

5. In order that time may be employed properly and that there may be a place in the house where the pupils may read or write undisturbed, all shall observe a rigorous silence in the study hall.

[8] Usually six or eight boys sat at each large desk or table. [Editor]

6. One devoid of the fear of God should give up study, for he would not accomplish any good. Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin. "Into a soul that plots evil wisdom enters not, nor dwells she in a body under debt of sin," says the Lord. (Wis. 1, 4)

7. Students should particularly cultivate humility. A proud student is a stupid ignoramus. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord," says the Holy Spirit. "The beginning of every sin is pride," says St. Augustine.

PART II

Disciplinary Norms

Chapter 1. *Piety*

1. Remember, my sons, that God made us to love and serve Him, our Creator, and that all the knowledge and wealth of the world would avail us nothing without the holy fear of God from which our temporal and eternal welfare depend.

2. Prayer, the sacraments, and the Word of God are the means that will keep us in the fear of God.

3. Pray fervently and frequently; never disturb those near you or pray unwillingly. It would be better not to pray at all than to pray badly. The first thing to do on awakening in the morning is to make the Sign of the Cross and to raise your mind to God by means of some ejaculatory prayer.

4. Choose a regular confessor and sincerely open your heart to him every two weeks or once a month. That great friend of youth, St. Philip Neri, recommended to his spiritual sons that they go to confession every week and to Communion even more frequently according to the advice of their confessor.

5. Assist at Mass devoutly, remembering that the church is the house of God and the place of prayer.

6. Do some spiritual reading frequently and listen attentively to sermons and other moral instruction, drawing from them some wholesome thought or maxim to put into practice during the day.

7. Give yourselves to the practice of virtue while you are young, for to put it off until later is to run the risk of being eternally lost. The virtues you should cultivate most are modesty, humility, obedience, and charity.

8. Have a special devotion to Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga who are the special protectors of this house.

9. Do not take up new devotions without your confessor's permission. St. Philip Neri's advice to his spiritual sons was: "Do not burden yourselves with too many devotions, but be faithful to those you already have."

10. Be respectful to all sacred ministers and to whatever pertains to our holy religion. If you should hear anyone talking disparagingly about it, look upon him as an enemy and flee from him.

Chapter 2. *Work*

1. My dear sons, man is born to work. God put Adam into the earthly paradise to till it. St. Paul says: "If any man will not work, neither let him eat." (2 Thess. 3, 10)

2. Work means fulfilling the duties of one's state of life, whether they consist in studying or in learning an art or a trade.

3. Remember that by working you will contribute to the welfare of your country and your Church. You will also benefit yourself spiritually if you offer your daily occupations to God.

4. Give priority to tasks demanded by obedience. Make it a rule never to neglect duties in favor of other optional tasks.

5. Give glory to God for whatever learning you may have, for He is the author of all good. Do not glory in any success, for pride is a worm that gnaws away the merit of your good works.

6. Remember that youth is the springtime of life. He who does not accustom himself to work in his youth will become an idler, to the shame of his parents and his country, and perhaps suffer the irreparable loss of his soul, since idleness will nurture all the other vices.

7. He who does not do the work that he is supposed to do steals from God and from those over him. At the end of their lives, idlers will suffer the greatest remorse for lost time.

8. Always begin your work, your study period, and your class with the *Actiones* and the *Ave Maria.* At the end say the *Agimus* and the *Ave Maria.* Say these little prayers well so that Almighty God may guide you in your work. Thus, you will also gain the indulgences granted by the Sovereign Pontiffs to those who say these prayers devoutly.

9. Commence your work in the morning with the *Angelus* and say it again at noon and at the close of day. In the evening add the *De Profundis* for the souls of the faithful departed. Recite the *Angelus* kneeling, ex-

cept on Saturday evenings and on Sundays when it is recited standing. During the Paschal season, the *Regina Coeli* is said standing.

Chapter 3. *Behavior toward Superiors*

1. The foundation of every virtue in a boy is obedience to his superiors. Therefore, accept their will as God's will and obey them willingly.
2. Be convinced that your superiors feel deeply their serious obligation of promoting your welfare in the best way they possibly can, and that in advising, commanding, and correcting you they have nothing else in view but your own good.
3. Honor and love them as representatives of God and of your parents. Keep in mind that by obeying them you obey God Himself.
4. Obey them promptly, respectfully, and cheerfully; do not try to shirk their orders. Obey them, even when their orders do not please you.
5. Open your hearts to them freely as to loving fathers who are earnestly concerned about your happiness.
6. Receive their corrections gratefully and, if necessary, humbly accept their punishment without any feeling of hatred or spite.
7. Do not find fault with the decisions of your superiors, as some boys do. It would be rank ingratitude to criticize them while they sacrifice themselves for you.
8. When you are asked by a superior regarding the conduct of some of your companions, answer to the best of your knowledge, especially when it is a matter of preventing or remedying some evil. Silence would not help your companion and would offend Almighty God.

Chapter 4. *Behavior toward Companions*

1. Respect and love your companions like so many brothers and strive to give one another good example.
2. Love one another, as our Lord enjoins, and never give scandal. He who gives scandal, whether by word or deed, is not a friend, but a murderer of the soul.
3. Whenever you can, gladly give advice and assistance to one another. During recreation let any of your companions join your conversation or your game. Never speak of the faults of anyone, unless asked by a superior. In that case, avoid exaggerations.
4. All we have comes from God. Let no one make sport of another because of his physical or moral defects, nor despise anyone on account

of his faults. What you laugh at or despise in others may someday happen to you.

5. True charity requires us to bear patiently with the defects of others and to forgive quickly when we are offended. In addition, we must never insult others, especially if they are our inferiors.

6. By all means avoid pride. The proud are odious in the eyes of God and contemptible before men.

Chapter 5. *Modesty*

1. Modesty, my dear boys, means a proper and decent manner of speaking, acting, and walking. Since this virtue is one of the best ornaments of your age, it should shine forth in all you do or say.

2. Your body and your clothing must be kept clean, and your face should always be serene and jovial; you should neither stoop nor swag lightly.

3. I especially recommend to you modesty of the eyes, for the eyes are the windows through which the devil brings sin into your heart. Walk calmly, never in a great hurry, except when necessity requires it. When your hands are not occupied, they should be kept in a becoming attitude, and at night form the habit of keeping them joined on your breast.

4. Be modest in your speech, never using uncharitable or indecent language. At your age, a reserved silence is far more becoming than forwardness and talkativeness.

5. Never criticize the actions of other people or boast about your good qualities. Receive reprimand or praise in the same way, humbling yourselves before God when reproached.

6. Avoid any act, gesture, or word which may seem rude; strive to correct your faults while you are young and endeavor to become meek and even-tempered as demanded by Christian modesty.

7. Under the heading of modesty also comes behavior at table. Remember that we are not brute animals. We do not take food merely to satisfy our appetite, but to keep our body healthy and strong as a fitting instrument by which to serve our Creator and earn our soul's true happiness.

8. Say grace before and after meals; try also to nourish your soul by silently listening to some wholesome reading during mealtime.

9. You are not allowed to eat or drink other than what the school supplies. If anyone receives any edibles or beverages, he should hand them over to the superior who will see to it that they are used in moderation.

10. Be very careful never to waste even the smallest amount of soup, bread, or anything else. He who deliberately wastes food deserves severe punishment and should greatly fear that the Lord may allow him to die of hunger.

Chapter 6. *Deportment in the House*

1. At the sound of the bell in the morning, rise promptly and dress with the utmost modesty and in silence. Then make your bed, wash up, etc.
2. Never leave the dormitory before having made your bed, combed your hair, brushed your clothes, and left your belongings in neat order.
3. At the second bell, the artisans shall go to the chapel for their morning prayers and Mass. The students, instead, will first go to the study hall and then to Mass. After Mass they shall make a brief meditation.
4. During the services be careful not to yawn, sleep, turn around, or talk to your neighbor. No one should leave the church during a ceremony or sermon without a great necessity. To disregard such matters shows indifference for the things of God, causes serious disturbance, and gives bad example to your companions.
5. After church services go quietly and in an orderly manner to where your duties call you and make sure you have all you need for your work. The students should remember that once the study period is started no one may talk, borrow, or lend things no matter what the need. All should avoid making any noises with books, feet, or in any other way. Should a real need for something arise, raise your hand and the assistant will attend to it as quickly as possible.
6. No one shall move from his place or make any noise until the bell has signaled the end of the study period.
7. After Mass, the artisans will quietly take their breakfast and then go promptly to their shop without stopping to play or fool around or, worse yet, playing truant. These transgressions shall be punished according to their gravity. It is strictly forbidden to look in or rummage through the desk or trunk of another. Permission is needed to go to the dormitory during the day.
8. Take care not to appropriate what does not belong to you, no matter how little it is worth. Should you find a lost article, give it at once to your superiors. Anyone who fails to do so and keeps what he found shall be severely punished in proportion to the gravity of the theft.

9. Outgoing or incoming mail shall be delivered to the superior. He may inspect it if he thinks such a course advisable.

10. It is strictly forbidden to keep money. It should be deposited with the prefect who will return it as needed. It is also strictly forbidden to buy, sell, or exchange anything without the superior's permission.

11. Visitors may not be brought into private sections of the house or into the dormitories. Relatives and other visitors should be interviewed in the reception room. Never remain too close to those engaged in private conversation. Do not wander into other dormitories or shops, because this greatly disturbs those who are inside or who are working. It is likewise forbidden to lock oneself in a room, scribble on walls, hammer nails, or cause damage of any kind. If anyone does any damage he must pay for the repairs. Lastly, it is forbidden to linger in the doorkeeper's office or in the kitchen, unless one has been entrusted with some particular task.

12. Be kind to all, put up with the faults of others, never give any nicknames, and never say or do anything which you would not like to have said or done to you.

Chapter 7. *Deportment outside the House*

1. Remember, my dear boys, that every Christian is bound to give good example and that no sermon is more powerful than good example.

2. When outside the house, always be reserved in your looks, in your words, and in your actions. Nothing can be more edifying than a young man who conducts himself properly. Such conduct clearly shows that he comes from a school of well-behaved Christian boys.

3. When you have to go for a walk, or to class, or on any errand outside the house, never point at any person or thing. Avoid laughing aloud, throwing stones, and jumping over ditches or trenches. Such behavior indicates bad manners.

4. If you should meet people who hold public offices, take off your hat and give them the better part of the sidewalk. Do the same with religious and with anyone else of some rank, especially if these people come to the school and you meet them there.

5. Never fail to tip your cap or hat as a sign of reverence when passing before a Catholic church or pious shrine. When passing a Church in which divine services are being conducted, be sure to keep silence or to speak so low as not to disturb those inside.

6. Whenever you enter a church first of all take holy water and make

the Sign of the Cross; bow to the altar, if there is only a crucifix or an image. If Our Lord is enclosed in the tabernacle, make a genuflection with your right knee, or on both knees, and bow profoundly if Our Lord is exposed. Be careful not to make any noise, talk, or laugh. Go to church with all due respect, or do not go at all.

7. Remember that if you do not behave properly in church, class, workshop, or on the street, besides having to render an account to Almighty God, you will also discredit the school to which you belong.

8. If at any time a companion speaks to you about things that are not proper or suggests some wrong, promptly make it known to your superior so that he may give you the necessary advice to avoid offending God.

9. Never criticize your companies, the discipline or management of the house, your superiors or their orders. Everyone is perfectly free to remain or not to remain; he would therefore only bring ridicule upon himself for not leaving a place of which he complains when he is fully at liberty to go elsewhere.

10. On their way to and from school and work, students and artisans must not make detours. On the weekly walks, they are strictly forbidden to make stops on the way, enter stores, make visits, look for amusements, or in any way fall out of line. Nor are they allowed to accept outside invitations to dinner because permission to accept such invitations will not be granted.

11. If you really wish to do something good both for yourself and for your school, always speak well of it, pointing out to others the reasons that induce the superiors to make certain arrangements for the general good of the community.

12. A reasonable and wholehearted obedience to these rules is always required of you. Violators shall be punished, but the obedient, besides the recompense they shall receive from Almighty God, will also be rewarded by their superiors according to their perseverance and diligence.

THREE THINGS ESPECIALLY TO BE AVOIDED

Though all must avoid every kind of sin, nevertheless there are three evils which, on account of their serious consequences for the young, should be particularly avoided. They are:

1. Blasphemy and the taking of the name of God in vain.
2. Impurity.
3. Stealing.

Believe me, my dear boys, a single one of these sins is enough to draw down God's anger upon the house. On the contrary, if we keep these evils far away from us, we shall have every reason to believe that God will never fail to bless us.

May God bless every boy who will be faithful to these rules. On every Sunday evening or at some other suitable time, the prefect or one appointed by him shall read some of these rules and make some brief and appropriate remarks.

THINGS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN

1. Since it is forbidden to keep money in the house, all games of chance and wagers are likewise forbidden.
2. Dangerously rough or unbecoming games are forbidden.
3. Smoking or chewing tobacco is forbidden at all times; no exceptions are to be granted. Snuff-taking is tolerated in the limits prescribed by the superiors following medical advice.
4. To go out with one's parents, relatives, or friends in order to dine outside the school or to purchase clothes is not allowed. If these objects are needed, one can either take measurements to have them bought or can order them from the shops in the house.

Appendix 17

[THESE TWO ARTICLES BY NORMAN POTTER ARE REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS THEY APPEARED IN *GOODWILL* AND IN *COMMONWEALTH*. Editor]

GOODWILL [1900]

(See Chapter 47, footnote 2)

Dom Boscoe [9]

By Norman Potter

Giovanni Boscoe was born at Murialdo di Castlennono,[10] near Turin. His devoted mother had trained him in the Love of God from earliest childhood. He began life as a shepherd-lad, and was trained from early boy-hood in extreme poverty. He slept on the floor, and had nothing but dry bread for breakfast. At the age of 15, through the generosity of a priest, who was struck by the boy's faith and simple piety, he was sent to school. In a short time his earnestness and industry enabled him to acquire a remarkable amount of theological and other learning.

In 1841 he was ordained priest, and was appointed to visit the town prisons. Here Dom Boscoe was brought face to face with so many youthful criminals, that his heart went out in pity and tenderness to them. Was it all their fault that they had sunk so low in misery and sin.

Poor, little neglected ones, who hardly knew the law, how could they be blamed for breaking it?

Soon an incident happened which we may call the start of his life's work. One day, while vesting for the Celebration, he heard the Sacristan scolding a strange boy, who had come into church, for not being able to serve the priest. "Why do you scold the boy?" said Dom Boscoe. "Bring him to me." The following conversation took place:—

"Are your parents alive?"

[9] Don Bosco. [Editor]

[10] Castelnuovo. [Editor]

"No; they are dead."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen years."

"Do you know your prayers?"

"No."

"Have you not made your First Communion? Why do you not attend Catechism."

"I am too old. My younger comrades would jest at my ignorance."

"If I teach you alone here, will you learn the Catechism?"

"Yes, willingly, if you will not beat me."

"Oh, no, we are friends."

"When shall we begin?"

"When ever you like; this morning."

"Yes, I should like it very much."

"Why not now?"

"Well, yes. Now."

From this small beginning began a work which has been wonderfully stamped with Divine approval. Henceforth, Dom Boscoe resolved to devote himself to friendless and homeless boys.

Girelli [11] soon brought new boys with him, and in less than three months they numbered more than 100.

Dom Boscoe gave the name of The Oratory to his meeting-place, to show that its existence depended entirely on prayer. Later on, when the boys and young men attending his Night School and classes numbered 300, two rooms were lent to him adjoining a House of Refuge.[12] In one of these rooms he noticed a picture of St. Francis of Sales. He thereupon decided to make St. Francis his Patron; hence the origin of The Salesians, or Salesian Fathers, as the members of the Order founded by Dom Boscoe are called.

But now that his work might be stamped with the cross, a series of trials begun. The loan of his rooms was withdrawn, and time after time he was turned out of his quarters; now from churches which were lent to him, now from rooms which he had hired, through the noise of the boys; even a field, in which he and his boys met, was withdrawn from him. But he was far from despairing. "Our good God," he said, "will not treat His children worse than He treats the birds."

He was now reduced to a field, but, even here, he was not left unmolested: the trampling of so many young feet being injurious to the

[11] The boy's name was Bartholomew Garelli. [Editor]

[12] An institution for young wayward girls called "Rifugio." [Editor]

grass. At the same time he lost his post as a director of a House of Refuge, which was his sole means of living.

All seemed hopeless: even his closest friends advised him to give up his boys, "seeing that Divine Providence gave no encouragement to his work."

"Divine Providence," he said, "has sent me these poor children, and I will never send one of them away." "If I cannot rent a place, I will build one, where there will be room for all who come. There we shall have workshops, where they will learn their trades; we shall have schools and playgrounds, and a beautiful church and many priests." When they met in the field for the last time, his face bore traces of tears. The boys saw him fall prostrate on the ground in prayer. "My God," he said, "wilt Thou forsake Thine orphans? Thy Holy will be done. Show me where to find a place for them." When he rose he met a man who told him of a shed to be let. Dom Boscoe went to see it. It was so low that in places the boys' heads touched the roof. This he rented, and here Dom Boscoe Celebrated for his boys on Easter day 1846. No less than 700 boys came to the shed.

On this spot now stands the great Oratory of Valdocco, and there stands the magnificent Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, in itself a witness to the wonderful faith of Dom Boscoe, who started it with only fourpence in his pocket.

Dom Boscoe got through a marvellous amount of work. Seven hundred boys soon flocked to the new quarters, to attend the various services, and instructions, while his night-classes were filled every night of the week. In addition to all this, he regularly visited the prisons, and the hospital where the boys were always his chief care. After a Mission he once preached at the prisons, all the boys went to their Communion. There is a wonderful story which shows the power of Dom Boscoe's influence over even hardened natures. He wished to give the boys of the prison a treat. They numbered 350. He asked to be allowed to take them for a picnic. He said that the authorities need send no soldiers to watch them, as he himself would be responsible for the safe return of all. This extraordinary request was granted, and, after giving the boys a happy day in the country, he brought them safely back, and at night not one of them was missing. Dom Boscoe wrote his own books for use at the Oratory.

As yet no boys slept at the Oratory, but after a breakdown in health, he resolved to give many of his boys a home. He now wanted to buy the house he had rented, but so exorbitant a price was asked for it, that it

was impossible. Later on, however, the price was brought down to £1,220: the whole sum to be paid within a fortnight. The house was bought, though, at the time, Dom Boscoe had not a single sovereign in his possession. No sooner had he left the owner, than he met a priest who had a large sum of money to dispose of for charitable purposes. It was handed to Dom Boscoe, and the house of Valdocco became his property.

In this Oratory now there is sleeping-room for 1,000 persons. Every useful trade is taught to the boys. The boys are divided into two classes: artizans [sic] and students. They all attend the Holy Eucharist every day. Recreation and healthy amusement is encouraged, and those who would see a happy, contented, and earnest set of boys should go to Turin, and see Dom Boscoe's Oratory. The Salesian Society was definitely formed into a Congregation in 1874. It now numbers over 3,000 members, and there are more than 200 Salesian houses in different parts of the world. Since 1875, thirty bands of missionaries have been sent from the mother-house to foreign lands: a band often numbering over 100 missionaries. There are now over half a million children under the care of the Salesians, in their different establishments.

Dom Boscoe's system was one of love. He had no punishments. He preferred to have his boys when quite young. His method was one of prevention rather than cure. His rule for all was, "Daily Eucharist, frequent Confession, frequent Communion."

Amongst the thousands of boys trained by the Salesian Fathers, not one has been known to incur judicial prosecution or penalty.

Space forbids me to speak of the wonderful cures brought by Dom Boscoe's faith and prayers.

His death was as beautiful as his life had been. All the Superiors of his Order gathered round his death-bed. Dom Rua, his Vicar-General, begged him to bless them once more. The dying Father raised his left arm (his right was paralized) and tried to bless them with it.

For an hour Dom Boscoe seemed quite unconscious. Soon after 4 a.m., the bells of the Salesian Church rang out the Angelus. At this, Dom Boscoe seemed to waken, then a smile of heavenly peace came over his face, and his soul passed away.

Men of faith are rare in our time, and in our land. May the holy life and example of Dom Boscoe lead many in our Church to devote themselves wholly to the care of homeless boys! Never were men more needed for this work than now.

THE COMMONWEALTH (Vol. VII, No. 4, April 1902)

(See Chapter 47, footnote 2)

Alabaster and Spikenard

We propose under this title to record present-day achievements of the Love of Christ relieving the stress of a dark hour.

Don Bosco of Turin
The Redemption of Boyhood
by Norman F. Potter

In a poor little cabin at Becchi, a hillside hamlet near Castelnuovo, Piedmont, Don Bosco was born on the 16th of August, 1815.

Two years later, his father, a farmer of very small means, died, leaving three helpless boys entirely dependent on the industry of his young widow. Margaret Bosco was a splendid example of a self-sacrificing, God-fearing woman, whose first care was to instil into her children's minds sentiments of charity and devotion, teaching them by word, but more by example, an unbounded confidence in God's Providence and beautiful resignation to His holy will. Like so many who have been called to do great things for God, John Bosco began life as a shepherd lad. He was endowed with a resolute will, an ardent and most enterprising spirit, as well as a marvellously retentive memory, whilst his mother's saintly training rendered his childhood conspicuous for great piety and beautiful Christian charity. As regards education he had everything against him, the poverty of the family often obliging him to give up school and to turn to field labour, but even then his leisure hours were spent reading over the few books he possessed.

A second Joseph, chosen by heaven for the guidance of a people of holier aspirations than were the ancient Egyptians, the child Bosco, when only ten years old, had a singular dream which seemed to foreshadow his great mission. Relating it afterwards to the family circle and neighbours, he expressed himself more or less in the following terms:—

"I thought I found myself in the meadow near home, in the midst of a great multitude of children at recreation. As I continued to watch them, I observed that a great many of them were doing mischief and uttering blasphemous language. I became indignant, and losing all patience, I doubled up my fists and began to thrash the offenders. At that moment,

a white-robed personage, whose face shone with a dazzling brightness, appeared amongst us and turning towards me, said: 'Not with blows, but with charity and gentleness you must draw these friends of yours to the path of virtue.' And she desired me to preach a sermon on the depravity of vice and the beauty of virtue. I tried to excuse myself, saying that I did not know how, and then I could not help bursting into tears: but she encouraged me, and told me that I had only to begin and she would help me. As I was about to obey there appeared a lady of majestic deportment, and at the same time, in place of the crowd of children I saw a multitude of beasts of every kind. At the sight of this change I was lost in astonishment; then the lady said to me: 'Behold your field of action: here is where you must work. Be humble and be strong, and what you now see being done to these animals do you likewise for my children.'

"Then the scene again changed. In a moment the animals were all transformed into lambs, and bleating and skipping, they playfully chased one another around the white-robed personage and the majestic lady.

"I felt almost beside myself with joy at seeing this, and in my excitement I awoke."

From that day John Bosco felt himself drawn to the priesthood, but it was not until several years later that he was able to quit the sheep-fold for the seminary where his more than ordinary abilities with earnestness and application acquired for him an amount of learning with extraordinary facility. On the eve of Trinity Sunday, 1841, John Bosco was ordained. Soon after his Ordination the young priest went to Turin, where he entered on the obligations of his sacred Ministry with the zeal of an apostle. One of his duties was to accompany his friend and director, Don Cafasso, on his visits to the town prison, where the sight of a large number of boy prisoners, surrounded as they were by the horrors of gaol life, greatly shocked and distressed him. Poor children who hardly knew the law, how could they be blamed for breaking it? Yet here they were surrounded by criminals older and more hardened than themselves. Many of them had no home but the prison, which they sometimes left only to return again in a few days. This terrible vision haunted Don Bosco night and day, and it became his chief desire to find some remedy for this awful state of things. A simple incident was in the Providence of God the start of his life's work. A ragged boy had wandered into church while Don Bosco was vesting, and the sacristan being in need of a server, had asked the young urchin to serve; but, besides not understanding what to do, he did not even know the simplest prayer. With the

teaching of this little fellow, Bartholomew Garelli, the great work of the Salesian Congregation, now a world-wide order, with over a half a million boys under its care, started.

Bartholomew came from time to time, and with him a number of friends, to be instructed in the Catholic Faith, and to enjoy some healthy amusement. As the number of his pupils increased, Don Bosco varied his programme, and instead of half-an-hour's "Christian Doctrine," he soon found the means of passing the Sundays and holidays almost entirely in the boys' company. He soon obtained a regular attendance by means of small presents and frequent walks through country scenery to some famous or favourite spot in the environs of Turin. On these occasions a luncheon, even if a frugal meal, was always forthcoming.

In a few months the young disciples of the "Oratory" (Don Bosco called these reunions by this name, after the example, no doubt, of St. Philip, and because their existence depended on prayer) had become quite a regiment; hundreds and hundreds of poor children crowded to the appointed place of meeting, all ready to go wherever their young master proposed to lead them. They grew obedient to his orders, happy in his presence. Their habitual rudeness was soon thrown aside; they became attached to their Benefactor, and began to vie with one another to win a word of praise, a look of encouragement, or a smile of approbation. The great secret of Don Bosco's success with these unruly urchins must be sought for in his extraordinary paternal benevolence, his ever-watchful and most motherly solicitude in providing for the wants of each and all, his never-wearying patience, his never-changing sweetness, and, above all, that entire sacrifice of self for the love of his fellow-creatures, which only the teachings of our Blessed Saviour can inspire. In the autumn of 1844, Don Bosco was appointed assistant Chaplain to the Refugio or Refuge, a home for Penitents.

Having established his residence at the Refuge, Don Bosco's anxiety for his poor boys was painfully augmented by the fact that he could get no site whereon to continue the Oratory. Determined, however, as he was, not to abandon his children, he resolved to receive them in his own room, till Providence should open to him a more suitable locale.

Accordingly, on the second Sunday of October, 1844, he announced to them, as they assembled for the last time in St. Francis of Assisi's, that henceforth the Oratory would be held at the Refuge in Valdocco. Here two large rooms were converted into a temporary chapel, the first chapel of the Oratory, which was blessed by Don Bosco under the patronage of St. Francis of Sales in order to keep constantly before his disciples the beautiful example of gentleness, patience and sweetness of which this

great saint was so striking an example. Thus accommodation was afforded for some hundreds of boys who flocked around Don Bosco glad to spend their evenings and holidays in his company, and to learn from his lips the saving truths of the Christian religion and to be initiated in the mysteries of reading, writing and arithmetic. But that his work might be stamped with the Sign of the Cross, a series of persecutions and difficulties now arose. Turned out of his quarters through the noise of his boys, Don Bosco obtained permission for the use of St. Martin's Church for his religious instruction. Hardly, however, had he started here when he was again turned out, owing to the damage, supposed or real, inflicted by some of the young *protegés;* and thus amidst trial and persecutions he persevered, turned away from church after church, deprived of house and home, he was at last compelled to seek a refuge in the green meadows around Turin. Here, in the open air, Don Bosco might be seen with his crowds of boys around him, now instructing them, now hearing their confessions, or joining in hymns and prayers which he had taught them. Yet not even here was he unmolested. It was not long before he found himself turned out of even this poor field—the complaint of the owners being that the trampling of the children's feet injured the roots of the grass! Considering the apparent hopelessness of his affairs, his friends advised him to give up his undertaking. "Keep about twenty of the smallest boys," they said, "and send away the rest. You cannot do what is impossible. Divine Providence seems to show plainly that It does not wish for your work." "Divine Providence!" exclaimed Don Bosco; "Divine Providence has sent me these poor children, and, be assured, never will I abandon one of them! Since nobody will let me hire a place where they can assemble, I will build one with God's help! There we shall have workshops, where they will learn trades; large playgrounds and schools, and we shall also have a beautiful Church with many priests." His friends thought him mad, and another period of intense and severe trial was undergone. "My God, my God," he prayed, "Wilt Thou then forsake these Thy children? Make known to me Thy Holy Will." Scarcely had he uttered these words when a man came to him and said he had a shed he would let. So rough was this humble place the boys' heads struck the rafters, yet in a short time the floor was dug deeper and well-boarded. So now, at last he had a chapel and a playground as well. By this time no less than 700 boys now regularly attended the Oratory. Yet all these were only "externs," and daily experience showed that if the work was to be lasting more was necessary. He must have a Home. Don Bosco was now joined in his work by his saintly mother, and the first inmate of his future home was now sent in the person of a poor, homeless orphan,

who begged for bread and shelter. A mattress was arranged by Don Bosco's mother in their simple homely kitchen. Here was the first boarder of the Salesian Oratory at Turin which now holds 1,000 boys.

From this humble beginning sprang technical schools and workshops, which were rapidly built and furnished with the expenditure of immense sums, and such was the faith and confidence in Divine Providence that no serious pecuniary difficulties were encountered. But space forbids us to dwell upon the marvellous growth of his institutions. Don Bosco was, above all, a man of prayer and heroic faith, yet, none the less, a practical and far-seeing organiser. The only way to make his work continuous was to form the helpers he had gathered around him into a congregation bound by the ordinary rules of poverty, chastity and obedience, and into his order should come, as God gave vocation, some of his own boys. Amongst the children attending his numerous catechisms was little Michael Rua, who, though not yet 12 years, was raised to the dignity of director of a catechism class. This devoted boy has since become the vicar-general of the whole Salesian Society, and in a marvellous way is consolidating the gigantic work which Don Bosco started. The present sketch would be incomplete without some slight reference to Don Bosco's method of education. He was the first to define and act on the preventive method.[13]

The Teacher, in Don Bosco's opinion, should be father, adviser, friend, more than master, and should aim to gain the child's assistance in united efforts to achieve the same end—his improvement. Thus baffling evil makes it unsuccessful; natural inclinations are directed and fixed in the strict path of virtue, which, if neglected, might follow the broad path of vice; faults and consequent punishment are prevented. Infinite gentleness, unalterable patience, vigilant attention and ceaseless watching, are essential in the masters. Carrying out the preventive system exacts a course of action in accordance with St. Paul's saying "Charity is patient, is kind, suffers all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." The master should completely belong to his pupils, devote his time to precede, assist, and follow them everywhere, or depute others equally capable to do so, never leaving them alone nor allowing idleness. With this method it is difficult for bad companions to find occasion to corrupt innocence.

Don Bosco concealed this surveillance from the knowledge of its objects, and called the masters who, with him presided at recreation, in workshops, or classrooms, assistants—not superintendents. They mixed among the groups of boys during their play; nothing escaped notice.

[13] *See* Chapters 47 and 48. [Editor]

His express instructions regarding punishments are: "As far as possible avoid punishing; when absolutely necessary, try to gain love, before inspiring fear; the suppression of a token of kindness is disapproval, but a disapproval which incites emulation, revives courage, and never degrades. To children, punishment is what is meant as punishment; with some pupils a cold glance is more effective than a blow.

"Praise when merited, blame when deserved, are recompense and punishment. Except in rare instances, correction should be privately given with patience and prudence; so that, with the aid of reason and religion, the culprit may fully understand his fault. Some pupils do not feel spite, nor nurse revenge for punishment; but the masters who observe them closely, know what bitter resentment is felt, above all, for punishment wounding self-love; they forget chastisement from their parents, but never that inflicted by the professors: and many instances are known of brutal revenge in old age for some justifiable chastisement incurred in school. On the contrary, the master who discreetly and kindly admonishes, awakens gratitude, is no longer a master but a friend, wishing to improve and preserve his pupil from punishment and dishonour. To strike, to place in a painful position, pull the ears, etc., should be absolutely forbidden, both because disapproved by law, and that it irritates and lowers the children's characters. The masters should clearly teach the rules, as well as rewards and penalties instituted as safeguards, so that a boy cannot excuse himself under the plea of 'I did not know.' "

"During the forty years in which I endeavoured to practise this system (Don Bosco wrote in 1877), I do not remember to have used formal punishment, and with God's grace I have always obtained, and from apparently hopeless children, not alone what duty exacted, but what my wish simply expressed. I have seen some so convinced of their faults and the justice of punishment that they met it cheerfully."

"Instruction is but an accessory, like a game, knowledge never makes a man, because it does not directly touch the heart. It gives it more power in the exercise of good or evil; but alone it is an indifferent weapon, wanting guidance."

But what is Don Bosco's secret? He has written it in his rules. "Frequent Confession, frequent Communion, daily Eucharist: these are the pillars which should sustain the whole edifice of education." In all the Salesian institutions there are daily communicants, and during the community Eucharist some of the Fathers are at the command of penitents.

Don Bosco's pupil, Don Giordani, relates the following:—

Not long ago, an English Cabinet Minister visited a Turin institution, and was brought into a large hall in which five hundred boys were at

study. He was astonished at the perfect silence and laborious attention without constraint. His surprise increased on hearing a year had passed without discipline having been infringed, or punishment inflicted.

"Is it possible? How do you manage it?" he asked, and turned to charge his secretary to note the answer.

"My lord," said the superior, "we possess a means unknown to you."

"What?"

"A secret revealed only to Catholics."

"You jest Reverend Father: nevertheless my question was serious."

"Frequent Confession, frequent Communion, daily Mass, to be practised regularly and frequently by us and our children. That is our method."

Don Bosco died Jan. 31st, 1888, aged 72 years. But his work lives on. More than 200 different Houses have been founded in all parts of the world. Of all the boys who have been trained in Salesian Institutions not one has been known to suffer prosecution; the vast work lives on, flourishes and is increasing, and, best of all, is carried on by the boys themselves. Don Bosco never lost an opportunity of inspiring his boys with the noble aim of extending the work by means of the boys themselves. Each was to be a zealous missionary. Don Bosco's boys have gone out in hundreds as foreign missionaries to the lepers and to the wildest regions of South America.

May God raise up men filled with the spirit of Don Bosco in this England of ours. No country surely ever needed them more.

Appendix 18

ASSAULT ON FATHER JAMES MARGOTTI (Editor of *L'Armonia*)

(See Chapter 49, footnote 3)

On January 28, 1856 around 9:30 P.M., Father Margotti was returning as usual to his apartment in the Birago Building in Via della Zecca. At the intersection of Via Vanchiglia and Via della Zecca, outside the Progresso Café, an assailant suddenly dealt him a heavy blow on the head with a weighty cane and knocked him down unconscious. He then fled, leaving behind his cane. Shortly afterward a passerby noticed the priest lying on the sidewalk and helped him to his feet. Father Margotti slowly regained consciousness. When he found out that he was quite close to where he lived, he begged his good samaritan to accompany him home. He thus reached his apartment where he received first aid treatment. Doctors found no serious lesion; the blow aimed at his left temple had been diverted by the priest's hat to the left ear, skinning it from top to bottom. It seemed a miracle that he had escaped fatal injuries. The cane was not an ordinary one, but a sturdy handmade cudgel of ash wood, tapering at one end and thicker at the other. Nevertheless, this murderous attempt failed. The valiant writer soon was able to resume his activities and his talented pen in defense of the Church and society.

Appendix 19

(See Chapter 51, footnote 1)

Royal Secretariat of the Grand Master of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus

Turin, February 25, 1853

By a decree of yesterday's date, His Majesty authorized payment of a subsidy of 500 lire to the boys' oratories directed by the Rev. John Bosco. You are herewith informed thereof. The order for payment will be issued shortly.

Count [Louis] Cibrario
First Secretary of His Majesty on behalf of the Order

Appendix 20

(See Chapter 51, footnote 2)

AN INJUNCTION FROM CITY HALL

City Hall, March 21, 1853

On March 5 [1853], the Police Department officially informed the Rev. John Bosco that he could not receive a building permit unless he presented a certificate signed by a licensed architect assuming all responsibility for the reconstruction of the building as approved by the building commission of this city. These measures are taken so that only competent people will be in charge of this operation.

Despite this warning, it has come to the knowledge of this department that construction continues under the direction of the contractor [Frederick] Bocca. Although the latter was served yesterday with an injunction to cease forthwith, he was seen engaged in construction work this morning and was duly charged with a violation of the building code by the municipal inspectors.

Therefore, the Rev. John Bosco, in the interests of public safety, is herewith requested to order an immediate halt to all construction work until the aforesaid certificate is duly presented, whereupon he will obtain the required authorization from the Police Department.

Moreover, in view of last year's experience, it would appear that the present contractor is not sufficiently qualified to direct building operations in a safe and efficient manner. It is therefore suggested that he be replaced.

John Notta, *Mayor*

Appendix 21

REGULATIONS FOR THE WORKSHOPS

(See Chapter 56, footnote 2)

The Craftmasters

1. It is the craftmasters' duty to teach the boys of the house the trade chosen for them by their superiors. The craftmasters should be punctual in their duties and assign work to their pupils as soon as they come in.

2. Craftmasters should show interest in the welfare of the house. They should bear in mind that their most important duty is to teach their apprentices and provide steady work for them. As far as possible, they should observe and demand silence during work hours, permitting no chattering, laughing, joking, or humming. They should never allow boys to go to town for errands. If it should be absolutely necessary to do so, they shall first ask the prefect for permission.

3. They should never make private arrangements with the boys or accept any work on their own. They must keep an accurate record of all the orders filled by their shops.

4. They are gravely bound to prevent any kind of foul language. They should immediately report any offender to the superior.

5. Both craftmasters and pupils should stay in their own shops; they should not wander into other shops except when absolutely necessary.

6. Smoking, playing, and drinking are forbidden; these places are for work only and not for recreation.

7. Work shall begin with the *Actiones* and *Ave Maria.* At noon the *Angelus* shall be recited before leaving the shop.

8. Artisans must be docile and submissive to their craftmasters as to their superiors. They should be very attentive and diligent in all their duties.

9. The craftmaster or his substitute shall read these rules loudly and clearly every other week; a copy shall be prominently posted in the shop.

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M.M. Mamma Margaret
S.C. Salesian Congregation

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