

PART

III

*The Third Decade 1846 to 1856**

Chapter 40

A Typical Sunday

The new church

Eventhough this new church was really a hovel,¹ still, since we held our lease by a formal contract, we were freed from the anxiety and the grievous inconvenience of having to move so often from one place to another. To me it seemed then truly to be the place of which I had dreamed and seen written: *Haec est domus mea, inde gloria mea.*² Heaven, however, had other plans.

The house close beside us caused no little difficulty: it was a house of ill fame; and there were difficulties from the Gardener's Inn, now called the Bellezza house,³ where all the good-time Charlies of the city congregated, especially on feast days. Nevertheless, we were able to overcome all the problems and began to hold our meetings regularly.

When our work was done,⁴ the archbishop on April granted the faculty of blessing and consecrating that humble building for divine worship. That was done on Sunday, April 1846.⁵ To show his satisfaction the archbishop renewed the faculty already granted while we were at the Refuge to have sung Masses; to offer triduums, novenas, and retreats; to admit to confirmation and to holy communion;⁶ and to certify that *all those who regularly attended our programme had fulfilled their Easter duty.*⁷

A regular meeting place, the signs of the archbishop's approval, our solemn ceremonies, the music, the noise from our play garden⁸ attracted children from all directions. Several priests began to drift back.⁹ Amongst those who helped in our work should be noted Dr Joseph Trivero,¹⁰ Dr Hyacinth Carpano,¹¹ Dr John Vola,¹² Dr Robert Murialdo,¹³ and the intrepid Dr Borrelli.

This is how we arranged our functions. The church was opened early in the morning on holy days, and we heard confessions until it was time for Mass, which was scheduled for eight o'clock. Often, because there were so many for confession, Mass had to be put off till nine or even later. One of the priests, when they were present, assisted,

and the prayers were recited in alternating choirs. Those who were prepared went to holy communion during Mass.

When Mass was over and the vestments put away, I stood up on a low rostrum to explain the gospel. Then this was changed in order to begin a regular presentation of Bible history. These narratives were presented in simple and popular language, vividly portraying the customs of the times, the places, the geographical names and locations. This pleased very much the youngest, the adults,¹⁴ and even the priests who were present. After the instruction, there were classes till noon.¹⁵

At one o'clock in the p.m. recreation began, with bocce, stilts, rifles, wooden swords,¹⁶ and our first gymnastics equipment. At two-thirty we started catechism. On the whole, ignorance abounded. Many times I began to sing the *Ave Maria*, but not one of the approximately four hundred youngsters present could continue if I stopped.

After catechism was over, since we were not yet able to sing vespers, we recited the rosary. Later we began to sing *Ave Maris Stella*, then the Magnificat, then *Dixit*, and on to the other psalms, and finally an antiphon.¹⁷ In the space of a year, we had become capable of singing the whole vespers of our Lady. These practices were followed by a short sermon, usually a story in which some virtue or vice was personified. It all concluded with the singing of the litanies¹⁸ and with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

When we came out of church, there was a period of free time for each to do as he pleased. Some continued their catechism class, some practised their singing, some worked at their reading. Most of them, however, jumped about, ran, and enjoyed themselves in various games and pastimes. All those exploits of jumping, running, juggling, tightrope walking, stick balancing that I had learned long before from acrobats, were practised under my instruction. In this way I could control that crowd, which, in the main, could be described thus: "Like a horse or a mule, without understanding."¹⁹

I must say, however, that despite their great ignorance I always admired the great respect they had for everything in church and for the sacred ministers, and their eagerness to learn more about their religion.²⁰

I made use of that unorganized recreation period to introduce my pupils quietly to thoughts of religion and use of the holy sacraments. To one I might whisper²¹ a recommendation to be more obedient, to be more prompt in attending to his duty; to another I would suggest regular attendance at catechism, or at confession, or so on. In this way these play periods provided me with an opportune means of making personal contact with a crowd of youngsters who on Saturday evening or Sunday morning, would willingly come for confession.

Sometimes I would even call them away from their games to lead them to confession when I had seen some resistance to that important obligation. I will mention one case out of many.

One youngster had been constantly reminded about his Easter duty. Every Sunday he promised to do it, but then he never kept his word. One feast day when our devotions were over, he was in the thick of the games, running and jumping everywhere and bathed in perspiration, his face flushed; he no longer knew whether he was in this world or in the other. I stopped him in his tracks and asked him to help me with something in the sacristy. He wanted to come just as he was, in shirt sleeves.

"No," I told him, "put on your jacket and come."

When we got to the sacristy, I led him to the apse²² and said, "Kneel on this prie-dieu."

He did, but he wanted to move the kneeler.

"No," I replied. "Leave everything as it is."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"Make your confession."²³

"I'm not ready."

"I know."

"What then?"

"Then get ready, and I'll hear your confession."

"Fine, that's fine," he exclaimed. "I really need it. You did well to catch me like this; otherwise I wouldn't have come, out of fear of my companions."²⁴

While he prepared, I read part of my breviary. Then he made a good confession and a devout thanksgiving. From that time on, he was always amongst the most diligent boys in fulfilling his religious duties. He used to tell the story to his companions, concluding thus: "Don Bosco used a clever stratagem to cage the blackbird."

As night fell, we all returned to church when the bell rang. There we said a few prayers or recited the rosary and the Angelus, and everything ended with the singing of the "Praised for ever be."²⁵

As they left the church, I went in their midst and accompanied them while they sang and shouted. When we reached the Rondo,²⁶ we would sing a verse from some hymn. Then I would invite them back for the following Sunday, and with a loud chorus of "good nights" all round, each went his way.

Quite unusual was the scene of the departure from the Oratory.²⁷ As they came out of church, each would wish the others good night a thousand times without making any move to leave his companions.

"Off home with you," I would urge them repeatedly. "It's getting late. Your people are waiting for you." To no avail. I had to let them gather round. Six of the strongest made a kind of seat by linking hands, and on this improvised throne I had to sit. Then they organised a procession, carrying Don Bosco over the heads of the tallest boys on that platform of arms, and wended their way with laughter, song, and yelling to the roundabout commonly called the Rondo. There they sang some more hymns and ended with a solemn rendition of "Praised for ever be."

When they finally settled into a deep silence, I was able to wish them all a good night and a happy week. They all answered as loud as they could, "Good night!" And then I was let down from my throne.²⁸ Each headed for his

own family, while some of the oldest accompanied me as far as my home;²⁹ I would be half dead with fatigue.

Notes

1. The Pinaridi chapel has been called the Bethlehem of the Salesian Family because of its poverty and because of what began in that miserable location. The Chapel of the Resurrection, usually called the Pinaridi chapel, now stands on the site. It remains the center, both geometrically and spiritually, of the Salesian motherhouse.

2. The phrase is quoted slightly differently here than earlier. Don Bosco seems to have seen this slogan in three different places, at three different times, and in slightly different forms. The first time was in the dream narrated in chapter 31. The second occasion is this one, connected with the Pinaridi chapel, which seems to have led him, at this point, to believe that it must be the place he had seen earlier. More than thirty years later, after the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians had been built, he was reading over a draft of the *Memoirs*, and he wrote in the margin, "Heaven, however, had other plans."

The third time, he read the inscription in a dream on the front of a house capable of accommodating two hundred boys. This house later replaced the Pinaridi house next to the Church of Saint Francis de Sales. On this third occasion, the wording ran, *Hic nomen meum, hinc inde exhibit gloria mea* ["Here is my name; from this side and that my glory will go forth"]. *Hinc . . . inde*—from this side and that side of what? From either side of via della Giardiniera, which ran through the property that eventually belonged to the Oratory and which was wiped out in 1865 in connection with the building of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. On one side of via della Giardiniera was the new-born Oratory, and on the other was "the field of the dream" where the basilica would later rise (BM III, 323).

3. See chapter 39, note 1. The widow Teresa Bellezza owned the land and house on the west side of the Pinaridi property. She rented the rooms to several tenants, one of whom ran the tavern called the Gardener's Inn (*Albergo della Giardiniera*): this took its name from the street on which it was located (or, possibly, vice versa). It is not clear whether the tavern was directly involved in the prostitution or whether that was the business of one or more of the other tenants—See also chapter 54.

4. The contract reveals the extent of the shed's transformation as it was turned into a chapel (Giraudi, p. 68). The amount of work involved is most unlikely to have been completed in just a week—Holy Week, at that. If Don Bosco and Pinaridi made an oral agreement in mid-March, we have a reasonable amount of time. See chapter 39, note 2, on the dating of these events; Giraudo and Biancardi are sure that the work began at the end of March (p. 156).

According to Father John Baptist Francesia (*Vita breve a popolare del venerabile Giovanni Bosco* [Turin: SKI, 1925], p. 118), who began to frequent the Oratory in 1850 and knew some of the young men involved, much of the renovation work was done by Don Bosco and the boys themselves; many of them were construction workers, after all.

The long shed was divided into three rooms. The main one was the chapel, about fifty feet in length. Behind it (moving eastward) were a little sacristy, which could be entered through either the chapel or an external door, and a storage room (for the recreation equipment) with access only from the courtyard. The north wall of the chapel contained seven tiny windows; each of the two small rooms had one window.

5. Don Bosco leaves both dates blank. He must have expected Father Berto to find the archbishop's rescript so that he could supply the dates. The chancery document is dated April 10, Good Friday. A comment after the notes discusses the problem of the actual date of blessing.

6. "To admit [the boys] to confirmation and to [first] holy communion" meant that Don Bosco was entitled to certify to the pastors of the parishes wherein they resided that these youngsters had been properly catechized and could be admitted to these rites along with the other young people of the parish.

7. The obligation of every Catholic who is of age to receive the Eucharist at least once during the Easter season was one of the gravest in Church law. This was generally to be done in one's own parish church. Prior to the codification of canon law in 1917, the period for fulfilling this law varied from place to place; generally it ran from Palm Sunday to the Sunday after Easter, but in some places it was extended, e.g. to begin on Ash Wednesday or to end on Ascension Thursday. The penalty for failure to receive was severe: in effect, the person was not to be regarded as a Catholic. (*Catholic Encyclopedia* [New York, 1911], XI, 517) Most of this strictness is gone today, but the obligation remains (canon 920).

Consequently Don Bosco emphasized this faculty as most significant. When he later approached the Holy See to seek approval for the Salesian Society, he cited the granting of this privilege as the first official recognition of his emergent congregation.

8. This "garden" was just a bare field on the north side of the chapel; if it had grass when the Oratory arrived, it surely did not have it for long. When he spoke to certain audiences or wrote to civil authorities, Don Bosco almost never used the word "courtyard" to designate the playground. The term "play garden" evoked certain children's schools in fashion at the time, including Froebel's kindergartens.

9. When it was commonly believed that Don Bosco was insane, or at best, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, all his helpers withdrew except the "intrepid" father Borel.

10. Father Trivero (1816?-1891) came from the Biella area, some forty miles north-northeast of Turin in the Alpine foothills. His family served the royal household, and he became guardian of the chapel of the Holy Shroud (which belonged to the royal family) in the cathedral of Turin. (Stella, *LW*, p. 87)

11. Father Carpano (1821-1894) was a kind and brilliant priest, ordained in 1844, after which he studied at the Convitto. Father Cafasso directed him to Don Bosco, to whom he was a great help because of his abilities as a preacher, a catechist, and an academic teacher. He zealously visited the jails and took into his own home newly released delinquents while they hunted for jobs. He seems to have become discouraged and disappeared during the most trying days of the wandering Oratory, March 1846 (BM II, 334). But when Don Bosco fell ill in July, he was at Father Borel's side to hold the fort, and he was steadfast thereafter with both time and money. (See references in BM II-IV.)

12. There were three learned priests named Vola in Turin at this time: John Baptist, John Ignatius, and Joseph. According to Ceria (MO, p. 174, n. 29), it was the last who worked with Don Bosco; it was, instead, John Ignatius Vola (170,8-1858), whose biography by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi was published in the March-April 1865 issue of the *Catholic Readings*.

13. Father Robert Murialdo (1815-1883) was the cousin of Saint Leonard Murialdo (1828-1900), founder of the Pious Congregation of Saint Joseph. They were of noble blood. Both were good friends and helpers of Don Bosco. Robert, in particular, became heavily involved in Don Bosco's projects for some years. He was also director of Father Merla's Family of Saint Peter. On Saint Leonard Murialdo, see NCE X. 83.

14. A reference either to the wide age-range of Don Bosco's "boys," i.e. from about seven to over twenty-one years old, or to the laymen who helped him (see chapter 42).

15. The classes were mainly for the three Rs. At noon the boys went home for a bite to eat, and Don Bosco and his helpers got a hit of rest.

16. The rifles, too, were wooden. In the last years of the 1840s, relations between the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Austrian Empire were increasingly strained. More and more Italians from all over the peninsula looked to King Charles Albert for national leadership, for some concrete steps toward throwing Austria out of Venetia, Lombardy, Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and Emilia-Romagna (see introduction and chapter 48). War was in the air, especially in the capital. Naturally the boys loved to play soldiers, the "Italians" challenging the "Austrians." Reluctantly, Don Bosco put up with this game that the boys so loved.

These games continued until they reached their height during the First War of Independence (1848-1849). The most famous battle in the history of the Oratory saw the boys, in their thoughtless excitement, sweep to a victory over the lettuce, beans, and herbs of Mama Margaret's garden, an extensive space in front of the house. The poor woman was so distressed that she was ready to pack for Becchi; fortunately her son was able to convince her to accept the loss and start her garden over again. But not long after, the garden was eliminated in favor of more playground space. (BM III. 310-311)

17. Don Bosco was teaching the boys to sing evening prayer from the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin *hi plainchant*.

The *Ave Maris Stella* is a Marian hymn of seven stanzas. The Magnificat is Mary's hymn of praise (Luke 1:46-55), which is sung or said every evening as part of vespers.

Five psalms formed the core of morning and evening prayer. The first psalm of evening prayer was Psalm 110, whose first words in Latin are *Dixit Dominus*. The others were Psalms 113, 122, 127, and 147:12-20.

The psalms and the Magnificat are each introduced by an antiphon, a scriptural or patristic verse which is repeated at the end.

18. He probably means the Litany of Loreto (the Litany of the Blessed Virgin), a series of invocations beseeching Mary and the saints to pray for the suppliants.

19. Psalm 32:9, which Don Bosco quotes in Latin: *Sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus*.

20. Don Bosco's ability to inspire these unlettered boys and young men with such sentiments was unusual at that time and place.

21. Literally, *con una parola nell'orecchio*, a favorite little device of Don Bosco to catch a boy at ease and give him an encouraging word, or a conscience-stirring one, as the situation required.

22. The area of the church behind the main altar. Don Bosco, of course, had surmised that the reason why he did not make his Easter communion was that some grave sin was on his conscience. The boy at least had the respect not to receive the Sacrament sacrilegiously.

24. Out of fear for what they would think or say of him. On human respect, see also chapter 49.

25. This is a short quatrain which they sang in Italian:

Praised forever be

the names of Jesus and Mary.

Praised forever be

the name of Jesus, the Word Incarnate.

26. An open circular space, where the corso Regina Margherita is met by corso Valdocco, corso Principe Eugenic, and via Cigna. It gained notoriety because public hangings were carried out in this prominent spot. The city has erected there a statue of Saint Joseph Cafasso with a condemned man as a moving tribute to his charismatic priestly ministry.

27. With a touch of repetition, Don Bosco now proceeds to give more details of the weekly departure rites. Ceria (MO, pp. 177-178) offers no explanation for the repetition. One may suppose that Don Bosco added it to the Berto manuscript during revision.

28. A scene of this nature was reproduced on a great banner near the main entrance to Saint Peter's Basilica during Don Bosco's beatification ceremonies (June 2, 1929). It showed Don Bosco being carried triumphantly in an armchair by a jubilant group of his pupils. The background depicted the Piedmontese countryside. A Latin couplet read:

Sustollunt hwneris festo clamore Joannem

Laetantesjuven.es, quos alit unus amor.

Inspired by a single love, cheering youths

Bear John upon their shoulders with festive shouts.

29. Until he fell ill in July (chapter 43), Don Bosco still lived at the Refuge, which was a block north of the Rondo. The oratory routine resumed after he returned in the fall, and possibly this leave-taking ritual did too; then the walk home would have been three blocks.

Comment on the Blessing of the Pinaridi Chapel

The day of the new chapel's blessing was a memorable one in Don Bosco's life and the progress of his work. So the exact date is of interest to Salesians. At the end of the preceding chapter, he

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said that the Oratory moved into the Pinaridi chapel on Easter Sunday, April 12. Now he seems to imply that the transformed shed was blessed on that day. Around 1854, in the already mentioned "Brief History of the Oratory," he recalled, first, that "on

Easter Sunday the new chapel was opened," and a bit further on, that "in 1846 on a Sunday in April the church was blessed." Ceria therefore concludes that both opening and blessing took place on the same day, Easter Sunday (MO, pp. 172-173).

Ceria's interpretation fails to explain why Don Bosco would have left the date of consecration blank here, having given the date of opening just a few lines above. It also ignores the vagueness of the second reference in the "Brief History."

Bonetti's *History of the Oratory*, published in serial form under Don Bosco's editorial eye, gives us another record of these events in the *Salesian Bulletin* (October 1879). After describing the Oratory's move to its new chapel on April 12, Bonetti continued: "Don Bosco that same morning blessed and dedicated to divine worship the modest building and celebrated holy Mass, assisted by us and the neighbors." By "us" Bonetti meant the old-time Oratory boys, on whose recollections he based the whole narrative. Bonetti himself did not come to the Oratory until 1855. Lemoyne follows Bonetti, adding some details from another source (BM II, 334).

A discrepancy on the date of the blessing remains. Archbishop Fransoni had delegated Father Borel to perform the ceremony. On the back of the archbishop's decree, Father Borel wrote, "The undersigned came to bless the Oratory on April 13, the second day of Easter." Lemoyne was aware of this; he left a note on a printed copy of Bonetti's account in which he proposed to investigate further. Evidently he never got to it.

We have two irreconcilable statements. Other sources of information are lacking. In view of the immediate necessity, Don Bosco may have been authorized to bless the church privately on Easter Sunday, while Father Borel performed the solemn public ritual the following day. This solution respects Don Bosco's assertions. But a semipublic oratory, like this chapel, need not be blessed for it to be used for divine worship. It is only required that the local bishop declare it a place suitable for divine worship (1917 canons 1192, 2, and 1193).

Or Don Bosco may have simply given the premises the customary Easter blessing for houses.

Or again, Don Bosco may be mistaken regarding the date of the blessing. In view of his repeated problems with dates and Father Borel's clear statement, this is the most likely solution.

Chapter

41

The King Saves the Oratory

Cavour, again • The city council • The police

In spite of the order, discipline, and tranquility that reigned in the Oratory, Marquis Cavour, vicar of the city,¹ maintained that our assemblies had dangerous aims. Knowing that I had always proceeded with the consent of the archbishop, he called a city council meeting at the archbishop's residence because that prelate was rather ill just then.

The city council was a select group of municipal department heads. In their hands rested the whole power of the civil administration. The council's head, called the council president, the first councilor, or also the vicar of the city, was more powerful than the mayor.

Said the archbishop: "When I saw all those dignitaries assembled in that hall, I thought I was at the last judgement"

There was much discussion for and against, but in the end they decided that these meetings absolutely should be blocked and dispersed because they threatened public order.

One member of the council was Count Joseph Provana of Collegno, our outstanding benefactor.² At that time he was comptroller general, or minister of finance, in King Charles Albert's, government. Many times he had sent me donations both on his own behalf and on behalf of our sovereign. This prince was very pleased to hear all about the Oratory. When we had a celebration of any kind he would gladly read the account which I would send him in writing, or which Count Collegno would give him orally. Many a time he informed me how much he esteemed this kind of the priestly ministry, comparing it to work in the foreign missions. He expressed a sincere wish that every city and province in his kingdom should establish similar institutions. At New Year's, he always used to send me a subsidy of 300 lire with this greeting: "For Don Bosco's little rascals."³

When he found out that the council was threatening to ban our meetings, he charged Count Collegno to communicate his will in these words: "It is my wish that these assemblies be promoted and protected. If there is danger of disorders, ways should be studied to forestall them and prevent them."

The count had listened in silence to the whole lively debate. When he observed that they were resolved on the banning order and final break-up. He got to his feet and requested the floor. He conveyed the sovereign's wishes and let them know that the king meant to protect that microscopic work.

These words silenced the vicar and silenced the city council. Without delay the vicar ordered me to appear again, continued his menacing tone, and told me I was obstinate.⁴ He concluded with these well-meant words: "I

have no wish to harm anybody. You work with good intentions, but what you're doing is fraught with danger. Since I have a duty to safeguard public order, I'm going to send men to watch you and your meetings. Should the slightest thing compromise you, I'll immediately scatter your rascals;⁵ and you'll give me an account of what's coming up in the future."

Perhaps it was pressure he was subject to, perhaps it was some illness he was battling. In fact, that was the last time that Vicar Cavour went to city hall. He was stricken with very painful gout, and within a few months he was dead.⁶

But for the six months that he lived,⁷ every Sunday he sent some agents or policemen to spend the whole day with us, watching all that was said or done in church or outside it.

"Well." Marquis Cayour said to one of these guards, "what did you see and hear in the midst of that rabble?"

"Lord Marquis, we saw a huge crowd of boys enjoying themselves in a thousand ways. In church we heard some hair-raising sermons. They said so many things about hell and devils that it made me want to go to confession."⁸

"And what about politics?"

"Politics weren't even mentioned. Those boys wouldn't understand anything about politics. Now if you were to start a discussion about bread and butter, that is a subject each of them would be qualified to speak about."

When Cavour died, no one else at city hall bothered us. In fact, whenever there has been an occasion the Turin authorities were always favourable to us until 1877.⁹

Notes

1. Vicar of the king as regards the maintenance of civil order: chief of the secret police. According to Thayer (I, 42), the vicar met daily with the king to inform him of anything of interest, including gossip and suspicions, that his agents had reported to him. Cavour "accepted unpopularity as a part of his trade, conscious that, in hunting down political plotters, was serving his king and country, and feeling well repaid Charles Albert's confidence."

2. Count Collegno (1785-1854) and his family are dear to Sale-Hens. *They* were always friends of Don Bosco and support-of his work. They still treasure as a precious relic a copy the 1852 edition of *The Companion of Youth*, which Don gave to the count's young son as a first communion souvenir in 1860, The counts are mentioned often in BM II-XII.

3. While Don Bosco always held the royal family in very high regard, he had a special affection for Charles Albert (1798-1849). On at least one occasion he attributed to the royal a major role in the founding of the Salesian Congregation (BM XV, 341). This chapter offers ample testimony of the king's gracious and even necessary assistance.

4. In the circumstances, one may wonder who was being obstinate. But we should not be too hard on the marquis. He must have had secret accusations from people who were either annoyed that so many young boys were enticed away from their influence, or who got fainthearted when they saw Don Bosco's "army" practicing with their wooden rifles and swords and obeying his commands so readily. Certainly Cavour betrayed their sentiments in the ensuing conversation.

5. Don Bosco puts in Cavour's mouth a less uncomplimentary term than he did in the earlier conversation (when the boys were "scoundrels"). Cavour later referred to them as "those ragamuffins whom Don Bosco loves to call himself the, chief of."

6. Don Bosco's memory is at fault here. Cavour died on June 15, 1850, three years after his retirement.

7. Just when these meetings took place is not clear. The "six months" refers, broadly, to Cavour's remaining time as vicar, until illness and the changing political atmosphere compelled him to leave public life. He served as vicar from June 27, 1835 to June 17, 1847. When he retired, the guards were called off.

During the marquis's last illness, through the intercession of a mutual friend, Don Bosco was able to visit him and soothe his ruffled feathers. When he was ready to leave, the marquis handed him two hundred lire, quite a big chunk of money. He paid several more visits to the ailing man. We assume that it was during these visits to the family mansion that Don Bosco became acquainted with Gustavo and Camillo Cavour.

8. Father Julius Barberis (1847-1927), the Salesians' first master of novices (1874-1900), was a confidant of Don Bosco. Happily, he also kept a daily chronicle of significant events and conversations at the Oratory up till the transfer of the novitiate from Valdocco in 1879. On December 27, 1877, he recorded a conversation he had with Don Bosco about the early days of the Oratory. Among other things, Don Bosco said:

I'd especially like to have a painting showing . . . several hundred lads docilely hanging on my words, with six uniformed policemen, two by two, standing stiffly at attention in different spots of the church, arms folded, listening to my sermon. They were a great help in supervising the boys, although they were there to spy *on* me. The painting might be even more interesting if it showed the policemen wiping away a furtive tear with the backs of their hands or muffling their faces in their handkerchiefs to hide their emotions. Or they could be shown kneeling among the boys who thronged by my confessional, waiting their turn. My sermons, you see, were directed more to them than to the boys, because I spoke about the four last things: sin, death, judgment and hell. (BM XIII, 314).

9. Until 1877, the city granted the Oratory an annual subsidy of three hundred lire. Starting in 1878, the municipal authorities neither granted a subsidy nor showed their previous favor. Don Bosco added "until 1877" in Father Berto's copy of the text.

The ending of the subsidy to the Oratory may have been linked with the transition of national political power from the liberals of the Right, who supported Cavour's policy of a free Church in a free State, to the more radical liberals of the Left, who were quite decidedly anticlerical. This shift occurred in 1876. See Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp. 81-88.

Chapter 42

Beginning the Night School

Sunday school • Night school

At St Francis of Assisi, I was already conscious of the need for some kind of school. Some children who are already advanced in years are still completely ignorant of the truths of the faith. For these, verbal instruction would prove long and mostly tedious. They quickly would stop coining. We did try to give them some lessons, but we were beaten by lack of space and of teachers ready to help us. At the Refuge and later at the Moretta house, we started a regular Sunday school,¹ and when we came to Valdocco² we also started a regular night school.

As we wanted to get some good result, we took just one subject at a time. For example, one or two Sundays were devoted to going over and over the alphabet and the structure of syllables. Then we started right off on the small catechism and, syllable by syllable, pupils were taught to read one or two of the first catechism questions. That served as a lesson for the week.

The following Sunday that work was reviewed and a few more questions and answers were added. In this way in about eight weeks I could succeed in getting some to read and study on their own a whole page of catechism. This was a great time-saver. With the other method, the older boys would have had to come to catechism for some years before they could be properly prepared just for confession. The Sunday school project was a boon to many. But that was not enough: not a few of the slower pupils forgot what they had learned the previous Sunday. It was then that we introduced night courses. We had begun them at the distinguished Fr Aporti,¹¹ Boncompagni,¹² Dr Peter Baricco,¹³ Prof. Joseph Rayneri,¹⁴ all applauded the experiment.

The success of the Sunday and night courses encouraged us to introduce arithmetic and art to our classes in reading and writing. These schools were the first of their kind in these parts.¹⁵ Everybody talked of them as a great innovation. We often had visits from professors and other persons of distinction. Even the city sent a deputation under the direction of Comm. Joseph Dupre¹⁶ to see for themselves if the results of our night school were as good as they were reported to be. They themselves examined the boys in pronunciation, arithmetic, and recitation. They found it hard to explain [how young men] who were illiterate until they were 18 and even 20 years of age had progressed so well in manners and instruction in a few [months].¹⁷ After seeing such a great number of young adults gathering at night to go to school instead of roaming the streets, those gentlemen left full of enthusiasm. When they reported back to the full city council, an annual prize of three hundred francs was assigned to the Oratory. This prize was given every year up to 1878¹⁸ when, for some reason that could never be learned, it was withheld and given to another institute.¹⁹

At that time, Chev. Gonella,²⁰ whose zeal and charity are leaving a glorious and imperishable memory in Turin, was director of the work called the Schools for the Poor.²¹ He often came to visit us, and a year later (1847) he introduced the same kind of schools and the same methods in the work entrusted to him. And when he reported everything to the administrators of that work, in full session they voted an award of a thousand francs for our schools.²² The city government followed his example, and within a few years night schools were established in all the principal cities of Piedmont.

Another need showed up: a prayer book suitable for the times. There is no shortage of prayer books which have

been put together by excellent people and are available to everyone. But, on the whole, these books were written for educated people, for adults, and most of them could be used by Catholics, Jews, or Protestants. Seeing how insidious heresy was spreading quietly every day,²³ I undertook to compile a book suitable for the young, adapted to their religious ideas, based on the Bible, and setting out the foundations of the Catholic religion clearly and concisely. This was *The Companion of Youth*.²⁴

I had to do the same thing to teach arithmetic and the metric system. True, the metric system did not become obligatory until 1850, but it was introduced in the schools in 1846.²⁵ Though it was introduced by law in the schools, there were in fact no textbooks. I supplied this need with a booklet entitled *The Metric System Simplified*.²⁶

Notes

1. Besides catechism, the boys who wanted it were taught to read, write, and work with numbers (see chapter 35).
2. To the Pinar di house; the Moretta house and the Refuge were also in Valdocco.
3. Piedmont had already made great strides in combating illiteracy by 1846, relative to the previous situation and to the situation in the rest of Italy. See chapter 28, note 8.
4. When Don Bosco began his hospice, his boarders were divided into two groups, the students (referred to here), and the "artisans," boys working at various trades. This set-up, in turn, became the model for the Salesian schools: academic, trade or technical, and later, agricultural.
5. One of the Melanotte brothers is the same boy who overheard Don Bosco's remarks to the housekeeper and Father Tesio at Saint Peter in Chains (chapter 34, note 6).
6. As in his earlier mention of Joseph Buzzetti, we presume that Don Bosco has singled out these past pupils because they proved reliable and because many of his Salesian readers would recognize their names.
7. Don Bosco believed that education should offer positive examples to the young; certain biblical episodes narrated without due reserve or explanation would make a bad impression. In the nineteenth century there was almost a prohibition against reading some parts of the Old Testament for this reason. Don Bosco believed this even more of secular history and literature.

Many parts of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, require commentaries in order to be understood. In recent years an emphasis on the study of the scriptures, the abundance of good translations and commentaries, ecumenism, the liturgical reform, and a return to biblical preaching have opened up the riches of the whole Bible to Catholics (as well as other Christians) in a new way.
8. A striking feature of Don Bosco's *Bible History for Schools* was that, in narrating episodes from both the Old and the New Testament, he took every opportunity to show how the truths of the Catholic Faith and liturgical practice are solidly founded on the Bible. One of his purposes, already hinted at when he chose Saint Francis de Sales as his patron, was to refute the Protestant teaching that the Catholic Church had invented certain dogmas and imposed excesses in external worship. His

purpose was neither polemic nor subterfuge; he simply wanted to take advantage of an opportunity to touch on such questions.

9. *Storia sacra ad uso delle scuole* was published in 1847, revised in 1853, and reprinted twenty-four times by 1900 (BM II, 312). Long after Don Bosco died, it was still considered one of the best Bible histories for school use. Modern biblical and historical studies now render much of it outdated.

10. Don Bosco uses here *gioventu*, youth of both sexes.

11. Father Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858), from the province of Mantua, was a controversial educator; over the objections of the archbishop. King Charles Albert appointed him a professor at the University of Turin and required his courses for teacher certification. He was rector of the university from 1855 to 1858, and Victor Emmanuel II named him a senator in 1849. Aporti deserves the credit for establishing kindergartens in Italy, though there was a kindergarten already in Turin, established by Marquis Barolo in 1825. While not agreeing with Father Aporti on a number of pedagogical issues, Don Bosco won his confidence and helped him a great deal. See various references to him in BM II-VI, especially II, 148-149 and 165-172; *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1907). I, 624.

12. Count Charles Boncompagni (1804-1880) was a lawyer and Statesman from Turin. In 1848 he sponsored an education reform law which was the first step toward establishing State control of schooling; it was fiercely opposed by the clergy (Stella, *EcSo*, p. 231). This law prepared the way for the more sweeping reforms of the 1859 Casati Law. The count played a major role in the Piedmontese annexation of

Tuscany and Modena in 1859-1860.

13. Father Peter Baricco (1819-1887), doctor of theology, was deputy mayor of Turin for many years.

14. Father Joseph Rayneri was a professor of pedagogy and of philosophical anthropology at the Royal University of Turin. He used to advise his students, "If you want to see pedagogy in action, go to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and watch Don Bosco" (BM III, 21). He was a close friend of the Salesians and taught several of them in the university. Lemoyne sometimes calls him "Raineri"; Stella gives his name as John Anthony, rather than Joseph (*EcSo* 640).

15. This refers to night courses conducted for young workers; see chapter 35, note II.

16. Chevalier Joseph Louis Dupre (d. 1884) was a prominent Turinese banker and philanthropist and a city councilor (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 80-81, 87-88). He served on Don Bosco's lottery committee in 1851-1858 (chapter 55) and helped the Oratory in many other ways. "Comm." is the abbreviation for *Commendatore*, one of the ranks of knighthood.

17. Ceria supplied the bracketed words, which were apparently omitted in a note hastily added to the copy.

18. As in the earlier case (chapter 41), Don Bosco wrote "up to 1878" and the rest in the copy. The original sentence had ended with "... every year up to the present."

19. This "other institute" was the School for Artisans (*Collegio degli Artegianelli*), founded in Valdocco in 1863. This was one of the projects of the Charitable Society for Orphaned and abandoned Youngsters, started by Fathers John Cocchi and Robert Murialdo and two other priests in 1850. Unlike the Oratory, the School of Artisans had the royal license called the *exequatur*. The school's first director was Father Joseph Beririzzi (1824-1873). (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 119-120, n. 82) He was followed by Saint Leonard Murialdo, who left Don Bosco's Saint Aloysius Oratory (see chapter 47) for a sabbatical in 1865 and succeeded Father Beririzzi in 1866.

20. Chevalier Mark Gonella (1822-1886), a banker, was one of on Bosco's outstanding benefactors. See MB XX for various references to him.

21. The Schools for the Poor (*Lai Regia Opera della Mendicita Istruita*, usually shortened to *La Mendicita Istruita*), was a movement aimed at educating the masses in religion, trades and academic subjects. It was founded in 1743 by the abbot of Gressio (a village near Mondovi, south of Turin near the border with Liguria) and by Brother Fontana, an Oratorian. When Victor Amadeus III legally recognized the work in 1776, it added "Royal" to its name. King Charles Felix invited the Christian Brothers (De La Salle Brothers) to Turin in 1824 to take over its schools for boys; a congregation of sisters ran the schools for girls. There was so much hunger for basic schooling that these schools could never take in all the applicants to them. (P. Carrera, *Cenni sulla Reggia Opera della Mendicita Istruita* (Turin: Bono, 1878); Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 61-65)

22. The funds were granted in 1850 when Don Bosco applied for them (MB XVII, 853).

23. *Don Bosco faults these prayer books with being too general and virtually ignoring doctrine. One of his concerns was always that Catholic doctrine should be clearly presented.*

Italy was a Catholic nation, and Catholicism was the only legal religion in the peninsula until Charles Albert granted a constitution to his subjects in 1848. While he was ever cordial with individuals of any faith or of no faith, in that pre-ecumenical age Don Bosco never compromised in condemning and combating Protestantism.

24. We notice almost the same purpose as with the *Bible History. Il Giovani Provedutto per la pratica dei suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pieta* (The Companion of Youth), 352 pages, appeared from the Paravia Press of Turin in 1847 and was warmly received. It included quite a bit of material from pamphlets which Don Bosco had published earlier, such as devotions to the Seven Sorrows of Mary, to Saint Aloysius, and to the Guardian Angels (see chapter 43, note I).

The Companion of Youth was reprinted twice that year, selling twenty thousand copies. During Don Bosco's lifetime the manual ran through 122 printings of about fifty thousand copies each in at least three editions (cf. Aubry, p. 73, n. I, as cited below). The 1863 edition had grown to 430 pages, and the 1885 had 520 pages.

In 1934 Sisto Colombo (*S. Giovanni Bosco, 1815-1888* (Turin: SEI), p.110) wrote:

Anyone proposing to *write* the history of religious devotion and worship in Italy in the last century must consider this book. There is in it no trace of Jansenistic rigorism or of superstition. It appeals to the heart, recalls the pure sources of Christian life, and fosters frequent reception of the sacraments. Some might classify this as a new approach, but really it is a prudent return to the classic teaching of old.

In LW, Stella evaluated it as a book that at first seems to be just "simply a manual of prayers and practical devotions"; but in fact

Don Bosco intended it to serve as a method and way of life. This aim applies to its various parts: the devotional part; the earlier part explaining the religious way to understand one's own existence, creation, growth from adolescence on, and the daily manifestations of life; and the *Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion*, a piece of apologetics published as *Warnings to Catholics* in 1850 and inserted into the *Companion of Youth* the following year. (P. 267)

References to *Il Ciovane Proveduto* are, of course, numerous in Stella's *ReCa*; there are scattered references in Desramaut's *SpLife*; and Aubry includes excerpts, with a short introduction, in *The Spiritual Writings of Saint John Bosco* (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1984), pp. 73-80.

25. Trade within the Kingdom of Sardinia —not to mention the rest of Italy, or Italian trade with the rest of the world — was seriously hampered by the lack of a uniform system of weights and measures.

Napoleon introduced the metric system to all of the French Empire, but the Restoration also restored the earlier economic chaos. Gradually the benefits of uniformity became evident. In September 1845 King Charles Albert by royal decree abolished all the ancient local Piedmontese systems and adopted the metric system. It was to be introduced over a four-year period and come into full operation on January 1, 1850; in the meantime, the people had to be educated in the new system.

26. Marchioness Barolo appreciated Don Bosco's work in teaching the metric system at the Refuge (chapter 38). His textbook, *Il sistema metrico decimale ridotto a semplicità* (Turin: Paravia, 1846), was successful enough to go through eight printings, including an expanded edition. (BM II, 374-379)

Don Bosco went further. In 1849 he wrote and produced a three-act comedy. *The Metric System*. Father Aporti and various other celebrities came to see it performed. They said that he could not have conceived a more effective means of popularizing the metric system, because humor would help it catch on. The entire sketch may be found in MB III, 623-652.

Chapter 43

A Serious Illness

Sickness and recovery • Planning to stay at Valdocco

My many commitments in the prisons, the Cottolengo Hospital, the Refuge, the Oratory, and the schools meant I had to work at night to compile the booklets that I absolutely needed.¹ On account of that, my already frail health² deteriorated to such a degree that the doctors advised me to stop all my activities. Doctor Borrelli, who loved me dearly, for my own good sent me to spend some time with the parish priest of Sassi.³ I rested during the week and went back to work at the Oratory on Sunday. But that was not enough. The youngsters came in crowds to see me; the boys from the village came too.⁴ So I was busier than in Turin, while I was causing a great deal of inconvenience to my little friends.

Not only those who attended the Oratory hastened, one could say, every day, to Sassi, but also the pupils of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁵ This episode is one of many. A retreat was being preached to the students in the St Barbara Schools,⁶ which were under the care of these same religious. As I was confessor to a great number of the boys, they came in a body to the Oratory looking for me at the end of the retreat. Not finding me there, they set out at once for Sassi, two and a half miles from Turin.⁷ It was raining. The boys were not sure of the way and went wandering about the fields, meadows, and vineyards looking for Don Bosco. Eventually about four hundred of them, all worn out by their hike and by hunger, bathed in perspiration and covered with dirt, and mud too, showed up and asked to go to confession.

"We've made the retreat," they said. "We want to be good. We all want to make a general confession. So we got our teachers' permission to come here."

They were told to return at once to their college in order to keep their teachers and families from worrying, but they insisted that they wanted to go to confession. The local school master, the parish priest, his assistant, and I heard as many as we could, but we would have needed at least fifteen confessors.

But how to restore, or rather to appease, the appetite of that multitude? That good parish priest (it was Dr Abbondioli) gave those pilgrims all the food he had: bread, polenta,⁸ beans, rice, potatoes, cheese, fruit - everything was provided for them.

Imagine the consternation when the preachers, teachers, and some prominent persons invited for the closing of the retreat arrived for Mass and the general communion and found not one pupil in the college! It was a real mess. Measures were taken to ensure that it would never happen again.

Back home again, I was exhausted and took to my bed.⁹ I had bronchitis, combined with coughing and violent inflammation.¹⁰ A week later, I was judged to be at death's door. I had received holy Viaticum and the anointing of the sick. I think that just then I was ready to die, I was sorry to abandon my youngsters, but I was happy that before I departed I had given a solid foundation to the Oratory.¹¹

When the news spread that my illness was grave, the show of widespread, serious regret could not have been greater. Constant streams of tearful youngsters came knocking at the door to inquire about my health. The more they were told, the more they wanted to know. I heard the conversations between them and the housekeeper.¹² and I was deeply moved by them. I heard later what their affection for me had moved them to do. Without prompting they prayed, fasted, went to Masses, and received holy communion. In turns they prayed all night and day for me before image of Our Lady of Consolation.¹³ In the morning lit special candles for me, and until the late evening large numbers were always praying and imploring the august of God to preserve their poor Don Bosco.

Some made vows to recite the whole rosary for a month others for a year, some for their whole lives. There were some who promised to fast on bread and water for months years, and even their whole lives, I know that some bricklayer apprentices fasted on bread and water for entire weeks, without lessening from morning to evening their heavy work. In fact, when they had any bit of free time they rushed to spend it before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

God heard their prayers. It was a Saturday evening, and it was believed that it would be the last night of my life. So said the doctors who came to see me, and so was I convinced myself. I had no strength left because of a continuous loss of blood. Late in the night I grew drowsy and slept. When I woke I was out of danger. Next morning when Doctor Botta and Doctor Caffasso examined me, they told me go thank Our Lady of Consolation for the grace received.¹⁴

My boys could not believe it if they did not see me. They saw me in fact soon after, when I went with my walking stick to the Oratory. The emotion can be imagined but nor easily described. A *Te Deum* was sung. There were a thousand acclamations and indescribable enthusiasm.

One of the first things to be done was to change into something manageable all the vows and promises which many had made without due thought when my life was in danger.

This illness overtook me at the beginning of July 1846, just at the time I was due to leave the Refuge and move elsewhere.¹⁵

I went home to Murialdo to spend some months of convalescence with my family.¹⁶ I would have stayed longer there in my home town, but the youngsters began to turn up in crowds to see me, indicating that it was no longer possible to enjoy either rest or tranquillity.

Everyone advised me to get away from Turin for a few years and go to some unknown place to recover my former health. Fr Caffasso and the archbishop were of this opinion. But that seemed too drastic to me; it was agreed that I could return to the Oratory provided that for a couple of years I would refrain from hearing confessions and preaching. I disobeyed.¹⁷

When I got back to the Oratory, I continued to work as before, and for 27 years I had no need of either doctors or medicine.¹⁸ This leads me to believe that work does no damage to bodily health.

Notes

1. Indirectly Don Bosco has documented his prodigious work He was a very busy writer during this period 1844-1847.

Besides the three works treated in the preceding chapter and the biography of Comollo (chapter 10, note 12), he published seven other textbooks, prayer books, and even agricultural advice:

Corona dei sette dolori di Maria [The Seven Sorrows of Mary] (Speirani and Ferrero, 1844). 42 pages (BM II, 157-158)

Cenni istruttivi di perfeziane [Brief Advice on Christian Perfection] (1844), 82 pages

Storia ecclesiastica, ad uso delle scuole, utile ad ogni stata di persone [Church History for Schools] (Speirani and Ferrero, 1845). 398 pages (BM II, 257-261; III. 215-220)

Il divoto dell'Angelo custode [Devotion to the Guardian Angel] (Turin: Paravia. 1845). 72 pages (BM II, 207-211)

Le sei Domeniche e la novena in onore di S. Luigi Gonzaga, con un cenno della vita del medesimo Santo (Six Sundays and a Novena in Honor of Saint Aloysius, with a Brief Biography) (Speirani and Ferrero, 1846), 46 pages (BM II, 281-285)

L'enologo Italiano [Italian Wine-making] (1846), 150 pages (BM II, 367-308)

Esercizio della devozione alla misericordia di Dio [The Practice of Devotion to God's Mercy] (Turin: Botta, 1846),

Finally, when he established the Company of Saint Aloysius in 1847 (see chapter 45), he drew up and published its regulations: *Regolamento della Compagnia di S. Luigi*: (BM III, 148-149, 459).

2. As we have already seen, Don Bosco's once-strong constitution was broken by his rigorous asceticism and, probably, emotional pressure in the seminary (chapter 22).

3. Father Peter Abbondioli (1812-1893) was a friend and supporter of Don Bosco for many years {cf. BM V, 29}.

4. This is another testimony that Don Bosco inadvertently let slip. He really was a magnet where boys were concerned.

5. The De La Salle Christian Brothers were prominent in the schools of Turin, directing the Schools for the Poor and other institutions.

6. These were schools run by the city.

7. From the city center, that is.

8. Polenta is a staple of the Piedmontese diet. It is a mush composed mostly of cornmeal.

9. Don Bosco was still living at the Refuge and ministering at the Barolo institutions.

10. He began, coughing up blood some weeks before; that, and the symptoms which he names, indicate that he probably had pleurisy (T. Bosco, BN, pp. 153-154). For extended discussion of Don Bosco's health, see Molineris, *Don Bosco* pp. 312-337, 365-371; Molineris, *Vita episodica di Don Bosco* (Castelnuovo Don Bosco, 1974), pp. 421-445.

11. A solid foundation? The Oratory had moved into Pinardi's shed but three months before. Even if the shed was now a chapel, it was still "really a hovel," as he put it in the first line of chapter 40. Of Don Bosco's certainty that this latest move firmly established the Oratory, Giraudi remarks, "What courage, what faith on Don Bosco's part! Having led his youngsters to that poor shelter, he knew that he had reached his goal and said he had put the Oratory on 'a solid foundation'" (p. 75). See BM II, 387.

12. The marchioness provided a man-servant for her chaplains. Francesia confirms these visits and adds that Mama Margaret came to be with her son (*Vita breve e popolare*, pp. 123-124).

13. The boys kept their vigil at the Church of Our Lady of Consolation, the title by which the Virgin Mary is specially revered in Turin.

14. Don Bosco omits much of the drama of the case (cf. BM II, 384-385). It is unlikely that Doctor Ca[f]fasso was related to Father Cafasso.

15. It was probably on the first Sunday of the month (July 5) (that he collapsed, after a long, hot day's work. He was due to leave the Refuge at the end of August (BM II, 364; Giraud and Biancardi, pp. 118, 164).

16. From August to November. While he was away, his collaborators looked after the Oratory under the direction of Father Borel. Meanwhile, the marchioness had Don Bosco's room at the Refuge cleared out, and Father Borel fitted up a modest room for him in Pinardi's house; in June Don Bosco (with Father Cafasso's financial backing) had begun to rent the rooms of the top floor from Soave as the tenants' leases expired one by one (see chapter 44, note 2).

17. The earlier attitude of complete detachment from his own will and abandonment to his spiritual director's advice has been mitigated (cf. chapter 30).

18. He fell seriously ill in 1871-1872 (BM X, 122-156).

Chapter 44

Mama Margaret Moves to Valdocco

Permanent residence at the Valdocco Oratory

After convalescing for several months at home, I felt I could return to my beloved sons. Every day many of them were coming to see me or were writing to me, urging me to come back to them soon. But where could I find lodging? I had been sent away from the Refuge. What means did I have to keep my work going, work that was daily becoming more demanding and expensive? How was I to support myself and the persons who were indispensable to me?¹

At that time, two rooms fell vacant in the Pinaridi house,² and these were rented as a dwelling for me and my mother.

"Mother," I said to her one day, "I should take up residence in Valdocco, but considering the people who live in that house, I can't take anyone with me but you."³

She knew what I was hinting at and replied straightaway, "If you think such a move is God's will, I'm ready to go right now."

My mother made a great sacrifice. At home, even though we were not well off, she was in charge of everything, everyone loved her, and to young and old she was a queen.⁴

We sent ahead some of the more necessary items, and together with my things from the Refuge, these were delivered at our new lodgings. My mother filled a hamper with linen and other things we would need. I took my breviary, a missal, and some of the more important (books)⁵ and copybooks. This was our entire fortune. On foot, we set from Becchi towards Turin.⁶ We made a short stop at Chieri, and on the evening of 3 November 1846, we arrived at Valdocco.

When my mother laid eyes on those barren rooms, she said jokingly, "At home I had so many worries about administration and direction. Here I'll be much more at ease: I have nothing to manage, nobody to command."

But how were we to live? What were we to eat? How could we pay the rent and supply the needs of the many children who constantly asked for bread, shoes, clothes, or shirts, which they needed to go to work? From home we had brought some wine, millet, beans, grain, and so forth. To meet initial expenses, I had sold part of a field and a vineyard. My mother sent for her wedding trousseau, which up to then she had jealously preserved intact. From some of her dresses we made chasubles; from the linen we made, amices, purificators, surplices, albs, and towels.⁷ Everything passed through the hands of Mrs. Margaret Gastaldi,⁸ who since then has helped look after the needs of the Oratory.

My mother also had a little gold necklace and some rings they were quickly sold to buy braid and trimmings for the sacred vestments. My mother was always in good humour. One evening, she laughingly sang to me:

*Woe to the world if it should learn
We're just penniless strangers!*

When our domestic affairs were somewhat organised, I rented another room, which was intended for a sacristy. As we lacked classrooms, for the time being we had to use the kitchen or my room.

But the students— prime little rascals — either destroyed everything or put everything topsy-turvy. When we started, some classes met in the sacristy, in the apse, or in other parts of the church. But the noise, the singing, the coming and going of one group disturbed whatever the other groups were trying to do. After a few months, we were to rent two other rooms and so organise our night classes better.⁹ As was said above,¹⁰ during the winter of 1846-7 we got excellent scholastic results.* Every evening we had an average of three hundred pupils. In addition to the academic side, the classes were animated by plainchant and vocal music, which we have always cultivated.

Notes

1. By the end of August 1846, just the rent for chapel, play yards, and rooms totaled six hundred lire per year. Besides that, Don Bosco's expenses included equipment, supplies, fuel, and furnishings for the Oratory; food, clothing, and other assistance for needy hoys; and his personal needs. Father Borel was the treasurer, and his notebooks give us a great deal of information about expenses and benefactors. Father Cafasso gave huge sums of money openly; Marchioness Barolo did so anonymously, despite her earlier promise. See BM II, 364, 389-390; Stella, *EcSo*; Girardo and Biancardi, p. 166.

2. As leases expired, Don Bosco bought them up from Pancrazio Soave at double the previous rate - not only because he wanted more space but also because most of the tenants were of an unsavory sort (some of them apparently were prostitutes)(see chapters 50 and 54). As early as June 5 he had already leased the three easternmost rooms on the second floor of the house at five lire per room per month; the lease ran from July 1, 1846, to January 1, 1849. Before he left for Becchi at the beginning of August, he secured a fourth room on the same floor, subleasing from one of Soave's tenants, Peter Clapie (BM 11, 364-365, 388; Girardo and Biancardi, pp. 163, 166).

Don Bosco implies at first that he had no thought of living in these rooms. He told Soave he would not use them until he had the whole house. Further down he reveals that he dared not live there as long as disreputable persons occupied the rest of the building, lest he cause scandal and harm to his good name.

3. An almost Franciscan simplicity marks both the events and the style of this chapter: the son's invitation and his mother's acceptance; the silent, detached departure and journey on foot; the entry into the empty house; Mama Margaret's calm and generous surrender of her wedding trousseau; her light-hearted singing -all these make a chapter of rare beauty.

Don Bosco did his sons and daughters a service in preserving these moments for us, as did the artist who portrayed in the sacristy of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians the two pilgrims arriving at Valdocco.

4. Margaret was living with Joseph and his family in Becchi. Anthony and his family now lived in a little house next to

Joseph's, on the site occupied since 1915 by the chapel of Mary Help of Christians. And, of course, Margaret was fifty-eight years old and knew nothing of the great city.

5. Ceria supplies the apparently missing word.

6. They had to walk some eighteen miles. Chieri was about halfway.

7. These are some of the various vestments and linens used in the Catholic liturgy, especially the Mass.

The chasuble is a large, flowing outer garment worn at Mass by a priest or bishop. It may be of white, green, violet, red, or gold, depending on the liturgical color of the day. Prior to Vatican II (1962-1965), black was also used, and the chasuble was usually much smaller and boxish in shape.

The amice is a white linen rectangle with two strings which the priest or other minister wears over his shoulders and around his neck beneath the alb. Its main purpose is to protect the more valuable outer garments from stains. It is less commonly used today than formerly.

Purificators are linen pieces used to wipe the chalice clean *before* and after use.

The alb is a sleeved white linen vestment which covers the entire body, worn over the minister's ordinary garments (and the amice) and beneath the outer ritual vestments. It is modeled on the Roman tunic.

Surplices are knee-length, loose-fitting, sleeved white linen vestments, worn by ministers or choir members over a cassock or choir robe. A shorter (waist-length) form of this vestment, technically called a *cotta*, is commonly used.

White linen towels are used after ritual washings, e.g. of the celebrant's hands at Mass.

8. Don Bosco calls Mrs. Gastaldi by the more distinguished *madama* rather than *signora*; she was the mother of the future archbishop, Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. Not only did she care for the church linens, but she and other pious ladies also washed and mended the boys' clothes (BM III, 178-179). The canon was a close friend of Don Bosco in these years.

9. On December 1, 1846, Don Bosco obtained use of the whole house and grounds from Soave for 710 lire per year, with a 59-lire bonus thrown in. In addition Soave could continue to operate his starch-making business on the ground floor until March 1, 1847. The lease was to expire at the same time as that of the upper-floor rooms (at the end of 1848). (BM II, 418-419) This time Don Bosco signed the contract himself, which indicates a certain amount of financial security.

Lemoyne, who got his information from well-informed sources, describes how Don Bosco conducted these classes: It was a wonderful sight, every night, to see the rooms in the Pinaridi house all lit up and full of boys and young men. ... In one room they could be seen standing before large charts on the wall, or else with books in hand. In other rooms they sat at desks practicing writing, while others knelt or sat on the floor before plain benches used as desks, and scribbled large letters in their exercise books.

From time to time Don Bosco, to see that order was maintained, would appear on the balcony, glance over the classes, and then go down to the ground floor. . . . The Christian Brothers enjoyed coming to Valdocco in the evening to observe him and study his method of teaching so many boys at one and the same time. (BM II, 436)

10. Chapter 42.

11. A regulation from the ministry of education allowed a maximum of seventy pupils per class (T. Bosco, *Mem*, p. 162, n. 2).

12. Two priests named Musso were collaborating with Don Bosco at this time: Canon Musso, an elementary teacher, and Father John Baptist Musso (d. 1887), a secondary teacher. Don Bosco seems to be referring to the latter (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 172, 636).

Father Chiaves, besides being a secondary school teacher, was a doctor of theology; hence his double title. In 1848 he and Father Carpano helped Don Bosco with a journalistic experiment, *L'Amico della gioventu* (The Friend of Youth)

(Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 172, 344). Don Bosco engaged him to tutor Buzzetti, Gastini, Bellia, and Reviglio (his four most promising students) in Italian in 1849, and in 1850 to prep them for their examination for admission to the clerical habit (BM III, 385-386; IV, 97). A man of practical talents as well, Father Chiaves prepared the fireworks display for the celebration of the dedication of the new Church of Saint Francis de Sales in 1853 (BM IV, 307). Much loved by the boys, he was still helping out at least until 1853 (BM IV, 380).

* Let it be remembered that the first night school set up in Turin was the one opened at the Moretta house in November 1845. We could take only two hundred students into three rooms, or classes.¹¹ The good results from the school prompted us to reopen it the following year as soon as we had fixed quarters in Valdocco.

Amongst those who helped in the night school and taught the young men speech through the use of skits and little plays. Prof. Dr Chiaves, Father Musso,¹² and Dr Hyacinth Carpano must be remembered.

Chapter 45

The Company of Saint Aloysius

Regulations for the oratories • Company of the feast of St Aloysius • Visit of Archbishop Fransoni

When we got firmly settled at Valdocco, I gave my full attention to promoting the things that could work to preserve our unity of spirit, discipline, and administration. In the first place, I drew up a set of regulations in which I simply set down what was being done at the Oratory, and the standard way in which things ought to be done. Since this has been printed elsewhere, anyone can read it as he wishes.¹

This little Rule brought this notable advantage: Everybody knew what was expected of him, and since I used to let each one be responsible for his own charge, each *took* care to know and to perform his appointed duties.

Many bishops and parish priests asked for copies, studied them, and adopted them when they introduced the work of the oratories to the cities and villages of their respective dioceses.

When the framework for the smooth running and administration of the Oratory had been set up, it was necessary to encourage piety by means of a set of standard practices. We did this by starting the *Company of St Aloysius*. The Regulations were drawn up in a style that I believed suitable for young people.² I sent them to the archbishop. Having read them, he passed them on to others who studied them and then reported back to him. He praised and approved them, and he granted special indulgences on the date.³ These Regulations can be read elsewhere.⁴

The Company of St Aloysius caused great enthusiasm amongst our youngsters: they all wanted to enroll in it. Two conditions were demanded for membership: good example in and out of church; and avoidance of bad talk and frequent reception of the holy sacraments. A very notable improvement in morality⁵ was soon evident.

To encourage all the boys to celebrate the six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius,⁶ we bought a statue of the saint and had a banner made. The boys were given the opportunity of going to confession at any time of day, evening, or night. Because hardly any of them had yet been confirmed, they were prepared to receive that sacrament⁷ on the feast of St Aloysius.

What a crowd! With the help of various priests and gentlemen, however, they were prepared and all was in readiness for the saint's feast day.* It was the first (time)⁴ that celebrations of this kind were held at the Oratory, and it was also the first time the archbishop came to visit us.

In front of our little church was erected a kind of pavilion under which we received the archbishop. I read something appropriate for the occasion. Then some of the boys put on a little comedy entitled *Napoleon's Corporal*.¹⁵ It was just a caricature of a corporal who, t*o express his surprise at that solemnity, came out with a

thousand pleasantries. That made the prelate laugh a great deal and he really enjoyed it; he said that he had never laughed so much in his life. He responded very kindly to all, expressing the great consolation which our institution gave him. He praised us and encouraged us to persevere and thanked us for the cordial welcome which we had given him.

He celebrated holy Mass¹⁶ and gave holy communion to more than three hundred youngsters; then he administered the sacrament of confirmation.¹⁷ It was on that occasion that the archbishop, just as the mitre was being put on his head, forgot that he was not in the cathedral; he raised his head too quickly and banged into the church ceiling. That amused him and all those present. He often used to relate this incident with pleasure, thus recalling our meetings.¹⁸ Father Rosmini said that it reminded him of similar happenings in the countries and churches of the foreign missions.¹⁹

I must add that two canons from the cathedral and many other churchmen came to assist the archbishop at these sacred ceremonies. When the ceremony ended, we wrote a record of the event, noting who had administered the sacrament and the name of the sponsor,²⁰ and the place and day. Then the certificates were collected, sorted according to the various parishes, and passed on to the diocesan chancery to be sent to the parish priests concerned.²¹

Notes

1. The complete text is published in BM III, 441-453. One may note in it the intention, prudently veiled, of laying the groundwork for the formation of a religious congregation. For example, the titles given to the priest-superiors of the Oratory correspond to those later assigned to the superiors of Salesian houses. Even the spirit which should animate such a society may be discerned.

These Regulations, drafted in 1847 and touched up repeatedly in succeeding years, were printed in 1852 and again revised in 1854-1855. Important in regard to their compilation is what Don Bosco wrote in the October 1877 issue (vol. I, no. 2) of *Bibliofilo Cattolico* (The Catholic Booklover) (the title was changed to *Bollettino salesiano* (Salesian Bulletin) soon after):

Let it be remembered that the Regulations for these oratories are nothing more than a collection of observations, precepts, and maxims that many years of study and experience (1841-1855) have suggested. Journeys were undertaken; schools, institutes, penitentiaries, orphanages, and workhouses visited and their constitutions studied; the most reliable educators were consulted, whatever could help our purpose was gleaned and arranged in order, resulting in our brief Regulations.

Among these studies and consultations, Don Bosco spent eighteen days in Milan toward the end of 1850 studying Father Seraphim Allievi's flourishing Saint Aloysius Oratory (BM IV, 119-126). It was a jubilee year, and Don Bosco had been invited to preach to the boys to prepare them for the special papal indulgences (cf. chapter 4, note 8).

The festive oratories had been firmly established in Milan for a century; there were fifteen of them in the city in 1850. Among the oratories that Don Bosco studied were those of Saints Philip Neri and Charles Borromeo; among the rules, the *Regulations of the Saint Aloysius Oratory Established in Milan in 1842* (Father Allievi's) and the *Regulations for the Children of the Holy Family Oratory*. (Stella, LW, p. 105, n. 15; Giraudo and Biancardi, p. 170)

Father Allievi, whom Lemoyne describes as "a learned, zealous priest and a true apostle of youth," returned the visit in January 1862, partly to ask Don Bosco's advice about founding a religious congregation to carry on his work (BMVII, 36).

We have a souvenir of Don Bosco's 1850 trip, viz. the passport which he needed to pass from the Kingdom of Sardinia into the Austrian Empire (pictured in MO opposite p. 196). This document, precious to the Salesians who knew Don Bosco, is doubly precious now, for it gives us a description of him in his thirty-sixth year: height, 5'4"; hair and brows, dark brown; forehead, medium; eyes, brown; face, oval; complexion, olive. It adds that his profession is "elementary school teacher"! (BM IV, 120).

2. Don Bosco's use of *gioventu* indicates that this encouragement to piety is equally applicable to young women.

3. Don Bosco omitted the date. The document is dated April 12, 1847.

4. The Regulations of the Company of Saint Aloysius were published in 1847. They are reprinted in BM II, 148-149, 459.

5. "Morality" in the sense of general conduct. For these boys that would include not only language and courtesy, but also such virtues as diligence and honesty at their jobs and their school lessons, obedience at home, truthfulness, patience with one another, etc.

6. The year before (1846), Don Bosco had published a pamphlet of reflections and prayers entitled *Six Sundays and a Novena in Honor of Saint Aloysius*. These devotions served to prepare the boys (and others of the faithful) to celebrate well the feast of this secondary patron of the Oratory, which occurs on June 21; they also encouraged regular devotion to and imitation of this model for young people. The pamphlet was reprinted in June 1854 as part of the *Catholic Readings*.

7. Confirmation is one of the three sacraments by which a person is initiated into full membership in the Body of Christ the Church. (The others are baptism and the Eucharist.) By this sacrament one publicly confesses his faith and is confirmed in it by the laying on of hands and anointing with sacred chrism. The usual minister of the sacrament is the bishop.

8. Benefactors and prominent persons were enrolled as honorary members. Don Bosco had a genius for finding ways to promote his work among the upper classes and to help the boys find virtue attractive and heroic.

On Father Rosmini, see chapter 53 and chapter 54, note 9.

9. Peter Joseph De Gaudenzi (1820-1891) was the archpriest and a canon of the cathedral of Vercelli, an ancient episcopal see about forty miles northeast of Turin, near the Lombard border. (An archpriest represents the bishop and heads a college of priests. The title is rarely used nowadays.) Canon De Gaudenzi highly esteemed Don Bosco and was very generous with him. He helped promote the *Catholic Readings* and in 1851 donated 230 lire toward the building of the Church of Saint Francis de Sales (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 360, 418). Vigevano, a small city in the Lombard province of Pavia, is about fifteen miles east of Vercelli. His name recurs often in the BM. See also chapter 53.

10. Don Bosco has already alluded to the sons of Michele Benso, marquis of Cavour. Unlike their father, the brothers admired Don Bosco and his work exceedingly, often visited it, supported it, and enjoyed seeing so many boys enjoying themselves in a wholesome manner. Some think that their kindness toward Don Bosco was rooted in their distant relationship with Saint Francis de Sales; their paternal grandmother was descended from the saint's brother. Camillo had great affection for Saint Francis, and on his feast day had Mass celebrated in his honor in his private chapel. (S. Iacini, *La crisi ecclesiastica italiana da Villafranca a Porta Pia* (Bari: La Terza, 1938) p. 24).

For a sketch of the career of Count Camillo Cavour and of his relationship with Don Bosco, see the comment following the notes.

The elder brother, Gustavo (1806-1864), inherited the title of marquis. Both politically and temperamentally he was quite different from Camillo. He was also a militant and fervent Catholic.

After his wife's early death (1833), Gustavo took up philosophy and became friendly with Father Antonio Rosmini. The priest-philosopher stayed with the Cavours when he was in Turin. Gustavo sparred with the priest-author-politician Gioberti (cf. NCE VI, 492) in the newspapers and cofounded the Turinese Catholic paper *L'Armonia*. Between 1849 and his death he served in five parliaments, often strenuously opposing his brother's policies, e.g. on church matters and on the Crimean War.

On at least one occasion Gustavo taught catechism at the Oratory while Don Bosco was showing a guest around (BM IV, 23-24).

11. Cardinal Benedict Anthony Antonucci (1798-1879) was the papal nuncio at Turin from 1844 to 1850, when the Holy See broke diplomatic relations with Sardinia. In 1851 he became archbishop of Ancona, a small city on the Adriatic coast of the Papal States. He always loved and esteemed Don Bosco.

12. In view of the relationship between this Pontiff and Don Bosco, one is surprised that his election to the Chair of Peter on June 16, 1846, passes unremarked in the *Memoirs*.

13. Cardinal James Antonelli (1806-1876) was the papal undersecretary of state at the time, and secretary of state from 1852 till his death. See NCE I, 641-642; E.E.Y. Hales, *Pio Nona* (New York, 1954); and BM IV-VII, X-XII.

14. Ceria's addition.

15. Father Carpano authored and directed the skit.

16. The order of events has been inverted. Mass and confirmation preceded the entertainment.

17. After the recent liturgical reforms, confirmation is administered within Mass.

18. Two examples of the archbishop's humor regarding the Pinaridi chapel have been preserved. On this occasion he quipped sotto voce, "I must show respect for these young gentlemen and preach to them bareheaded!" Later, when he was encouraging Don Bosco's efforts to build a larger chapel, he advised him with a smile, "Make sure it's high enough so that I won't have to remove my mitre when I come to preach there." (BM III, 156) Regrettably, because of his exile he never got to come to the Church of Saint Francis de Sales.

19. The congregation of priests which Father Rosmini founded, the Institute of Charity, was active in missionary work, among other apostolates.

20. Like baptism, which it completes sacramentally, confirmation requires a sponsor, who "is to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament" (c. 892).

21. The fact of confirmation must be entered into the official record of the church where it was celebrated and onto the individual's baptismal record in his native parish.

It is also significant that, for practical purposes, Archbishop Fransoni had recognized the Oratory as a distinct and unique parish, "the parish of abandoned youth," and confirmed his support for Don Bosco's work vis-a-vis the pastors of Turin (cf. chapters 35 and 48).

Comment on Camillo Cavour

Camillo Benso, count of Cavour (1810-1861), was still a private citizen in 1847, though one known as a proponent of economic reform. His fundamental political instincts were conservative, but he ardently opposed all forms of absolutism. The establishment of a constitutional government in 1848 opened up to him a political career.

In 1850 Massimo d'Azeglio made him minister of finance; he moved cautiously for reform until he openly supported the Suardi Laws later that year; these laws, which eliminated some of the ancient social privileges of the Church, were bitterly fought by conservatives both clerical and lay. Pius IX recalled his nuncio, ending papal relations with Piedmont. Archbishop Fransoni's opposition was so adamant that he was imprisoned and eventually exiled.

Early in 1852 the moderate conservatives in parliament, led by Cavour, allied themselves with Urbano Rattazzi's moderates of the left to unseat the more conservative d'Azeglio. By the end of the year Cavour was prime minister, a position he held almost continually until his death. He pursued a policy of unifying Italy; winning for the nation a seat among the powers of Europe; encouraging industry, trade, and education; and separating Church and State. Shrewdness, courage, ability, and stamina were required to balance all the factions of government and society. More than a few persons felt that the premier also had a liberal amount of duplicity in his character (cf. Don Bosco's remarks, below).

Cavour's religious policy of "free Church in a free State" brought further legislation, including some that was anticlerical and social at the same time, such as the law suppressing monasteries and seizing their vast lands. This 1855 law prompted the excommunication of all those involved in its enactment and execution. This, of course, was exactly at the time when Don Bosco was beginning to form the Salesian Society.

Sardinia's involvement in the Crimean War brought diplomatic results for Cavour, but no territorial ones. Those had to wait until the Second War of Independence in 1859, in which France helped the Piedmontese drive the Austrians from Lombardy. At the same time Cavour's agents in the small duchies of central Italy were stirring up anti-Austrian revolts and calls for annexation by Sardinia, a policy which bore full fruit in 1860.

Meanwhile, over Cavour's objections Garibaldi and his Thousand sailed for Sicily; in a matter of weeks they brought down the Neapolitan government and threatened the Papal States. Sardinia was not ready to absorb the whole of Italy; Cavour was a moderate, a gradualist. The economic and social problems of northern and central Italy offered more than enough challenge even for his genius. Nor did he wish to take on the Church again by striking at its ancient domain; he hoped a compromise could be reached by the time Italy was ready for the next unifying step.

But Garibaldi forced the count's hand, not only by taking Naples and eyeing Rome, but by supporting republicanism. If Victor Emmanuel and Cavour did not act promptly to embrace Garibaldi's gains and keep him away from Rome, a difficult situation might become impossible. So Cavour ordered the Sardinian army south, and the king followed; they checked Garibaldi by encouraging a united Italy under one king. In the process they seized the Papal States, except the province of Rome.

Thus was the unification of Italy substantially completed; only Venetia, Trent, and Istria remained under the Austrians in the northeast, and only Lazio (Rome) remained under the Pope. Victor Emmanuel II was proclaimed king of Italy in March 1861. On two separate occasions Cavour remarked in parliament that Italy would have to have Rome as its capital.

Through all of this Don Bosco was fiercely loyal to his bishop and the Pope. Yet he kept out of politics as a matter of principle. Consequently Cavour felt that he could use Don Bosco as an intermediary with the Holy See in an attempt to

resolve the Frasoni problem in the spring of 1858. The attempt failed. (Francesco Motto, "Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli nel 1858," *Ricerche storiche salesiane* V [1986], 3-20)

Although he was friendly with Cavour and other government officials; although they supported his work with postal exemptions, gifts of many surplus, and railway passes; although they often recommended boys to him; nevertheless Don Bosco came under suspicion as what some today would call "an enemy of the State." He and the Oratory were subjected to a repeated series of searches, and in some quarters, to lasting hostility.

Don Bosco left a memo in which he describes the various house searches. He says of Cavour:

He often came to the Oratory. He enjoyed talking with the boys and loved to watch them in recreation. He even took part in church services; more than once he walked in our procession in honor of St. Aloysius, carrying a candle in one hand and a prayer book in the other as he sang the *Infensus hostis gloriae*. When I wished to speak with him [when he was a cabinet minister], he would refuse me an audience unless I came to dine with him. (ACS 132 Perquisizione, 20 quaderno, p. 94)

In the same memo he left an evaluation of Cavour: "The life of this famous politician is well known to history: pretty promises, courtesy toward everybody, then a stab in the back."

Toward the end of 1860 Don Bosco made one of his famous predictions of an approaching death: In the coming year a famous diplomat would die totally unexpectedly, to the shock of all Europe. Many guesses were ventured as to his identity, but Don Bosco would give no hints. No one thought of the relatively young and vigorous prime minister of Piedmont. (BM VI, 457) In fact, Cavour's health had been compromised by malaria contracted in the rice paddies of his estate years before. That, an indulgent diet, the relentless pressures of high office (he had through all these years kept the financial portfolio, and for most of them directed the foreign office, as well as the premiership), and the stress of political opposition in a parliament growing more fractious by the day, broke his health. He collapsed on May 29 and died on June 6, 1861.

The best English biographies of the great statesman are those of Thayer and Mack Smith; see also Woolf, pp. 435-467, or more briefly, Felix Gilbert et al., *The Norton History of Modern Europe* (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 1097-1104.

* Amongst *those* who were happy to enroll in the Company of St Aloysius are to be noted FR Antonio Rosmini,⁸ Canon Archpriest Peter De Gaudenzi (now bishop of Yigano),⁹ Camillo and Gustavo Cavour,¹⁰ Card. Antonucci (abp of Ancona),¹¹ His Holiness Pius IX," Card. Antonelli,¹³ and many others.

Chapter 46

The First Boarder

The start of the hospice • The first boarders arrive

While we worked to set up ways of supplying instruction in religion and literacy, another crying need became evident; it was urgent to make some provision for it. Many youngsters from Turin and migrants [were] quite willing to try to live hard-working and moral lives; but when they were encouraged to begin, they used to answer that they had no bread, no clothing, and no shelter where they could stay at least for a while. To accommodate at least some of those who in the evening knew not where to go, a stable was prepared where they could spend the night on a bit of straw.¹ But some of them repeatedly made off with the sheets, others with the blankets, and in the end even the straw itself was stolen and sold.

Now it happened that late one rainy evening in May [1847] a lad of fifteen showed up soaked to the skin. He asked for bread and shelter. My mother took him into the kitchen and put him near the fire; while he warmed himself and dried his clothes, she fed him a bowl of soup and some bread. As he ate, I asked him whether he had gone to school, whether he had family, and what kind of work he did.

"I'm a poor orphan," he answered me. "I've come from the Sesia valley² to look for work. I had three francs with me, but I spent them all before I could earn anything. Now I have nothing left and no one to turn to."

"Have you been admitted to first communion?" "I haven't been admitted yet."³ "And confirmation?"

"I haven't received it yet."

"Have you been to confession?"

"I've gone a few times."⁴

"Now where do you want to go?"

"I don't know. For charity's sake, let me stay in some corner of your house tonight."

At this point he broke down and cried. My mother cried with him. I was moved.

"If I could be sure you weren't a thief, I would try to put you up. But other boys stole some of the blankets, and

you might take the rest of them."

"Oh no, Sir. You needn't worry about that. I'm poor, but I've never stolen anything."

"If you wish," replied my mother, "I will put him up for tonight, and tomorrow God will provide."

"Where?" I asked.

"Here in the kitchen."

"You're risking even your pots."

"I'll see that it doesn't happen."

"Go ahead, then."⁵

The good woman, helped by the little orphan, went out and collected some bricks. With these she built four little pillars in the kitchen. On them she laid some boards and threw a big sack on top, thereby making the first bed in the Oratory.

My good mother gave the boy a little talk on the necessity of work, of trustworthiness, and of religion.⁶ Finally she invited him to say his prayers.

"I don't know any," he answered.

"You can say them with us," she told him. And so he did. That all might be secure, the kitchen was locked, and opened only in the morning.

This was the first youngster at our hospice.⁷ Very soon we had a companion for him,⁸ and then others. But during that year, hick of space prevented us from taking more than two.⁹ So passed 1847.

Convinced that for many children every effort would prove useless unless they were offered shelter,¹⁰ I set about renting more and more rooms, *even* though the cost was exorbitant."

Thus, besides the hospice, we were also able to start our school of plainchant and vocal music. Since it was the first time that music lessons were offered,¹² the first-time that music was taught in class to many pupils at the same time, there was a huge crowd. The renowned musicians Louis Rossi, Joseph Bianchi, Cerutti, and Canon Louis Nasi¹³ came eagerly every evening to help at my lessons. This contradicted the Gospel dictum that the disciple is not above his teacher:¹⁴ there was I, not knowing a millionth of what those illustrious men knew, playing the master amongst them. They came to see how the new method was applied, the same method which is practised today in our houses. In times past, any pupil who wished to learn music had to find a teacher to give him

individual lessons.¹⁵

Notes

1. There was *a* stable at the east end of the ground floor of the house (diagram in Giraudo and Biancardi, p. 157).
 2. Sesia River rises from Monte Rosa and flows 105 miles West and south, through Vercelli, and into the Po east of Casale (over forty miles TO the east of Turin)
 3. Again we meet late admission to first holy communion and an implied Jansenism.
 4. A youngster would be taught to go to confession as soon as he reached the age of reason. Neither this sacrament nor that young age (about seven years) were closely linked to holy communion, as they are now.
 5. Don Bosco's conversations with the boy and with Mama Margaret reveal to us several characteristics. First, as in his dialog with Bartholomew Garelli (chapter 28) he begins by winning a boy's confidence. Second, he comes around to what really matters, one's relationship with God. Third, his goodness is not naive; having been burned several times by untrustworthy young men, he has grown wary. Perhaps there is even a trace of discouragement.
 6. Thus Mama Margaret began a Salesian tradition which is still observed: the "good night" talk. In his treatise on the Preventive System, Don Bosco wrote; 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.
- Lemoine, himself an experienced director, says simply that this practice "yielded excellent results" (BM III, 142).
7. Don Bosco found him a job. Until winter he ate and slept at the Oratory. When his work stopped for the season, he went back to his native place, and no more is known of him. We are not so fortunate as to know his name or those of the boys who came immediately after him.
 8. Don Bosco found this youngster crying, with his head against an elm tree along corso San Massimo (now corso Regina Margherita). Already fatherless, he had suffered his mother's death just the previous day. Now the landlord had thrown him out on the street, taking the furniture in lieu of unpaid rent. Don Bosco brought him home to Mama Margaret. He was a refined young lad, so Don Bosco got him placed as a shop clerk. He did well, was promoted in his job, and always proved a credit to his benefactor. Out of respect for him, the early historians of the Oratory preserved his anonymity, and now his name has been lost to us. (BM III, 143-144)
 9. Some biographers, including Lemoine (BM III, 144), have written "seven." Don Bosco wrote "two" in the original manuscript and left "two" in the copy which he revised. In the latter, however, someone unknown wrote "seven" in purple ink above the "two." The discrepancy may merely be a matter of whom one is counting: all the guests living in the house, or just those taken in without fee: see note u, below.
 10. Cf. the first draft of the Salesian Constitutions (1858), in the chapter "Purpose of This Society":

4. Since some boys are so neglected that, unless they are sheltered, every care would be expended on them in vain, to this end every effort shall be made to open houses in which, through the assistance of Divine Providence, they will be provided with lodging, food, and clothing. While receiving religious instruction, they will also be taught some trade or craft, as is presently being done in the hospice attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. . . • (BM V, 637)

11. As we have already seen (chapter 44, note 9), by the end of 1846 Don Bosco had rented the whole Pinardi house and had use of it all by the following March. These eleven rooms were being used as kitchen, classrooms, and rooms for Don Bosco, Margaret, and some of his helpers. Thus, the limited space for needy youths.

Don Bosco took in four paying boarders in the fall of 1847. Fathers Charles Palazzolo (see chapter 16, note 12) and Peter Ponte (1821-1892) paid thirty-five and fifty lire per month, respectively (the latter was reduced to forty the following October). During the week they went about their pastoral duties (Father Ponte was one of Marchioness Barolo's chaplains), and they helped with the Oratory on Sundays and feasts. Many such boarders found it difficult to adapt to Don Bosco's asceticism; in fact, Father Ponte moved out for a while on February 29, 1848, but that seems to have been for political reasons (see chapter 52).

The third helper was the seminarian John Baptist Bertagna of Castelnuovo (1828-1905), paying fifty lire per month. He became a teacher at the Convitto and, eventually, auxiliary bishop of Turin.

Besides these clerical helpers, in October 1847 Don Bosco brought to Turin with him a cousin, Alexander Pescarmona of Castelnuovo. Mr. Pescarmona paid Don Bosco 55.5 lire per month room and board while the boy took school lessons from Professor Joseph Bonzanino in the city (see chapter 48). The boy was to stay for three years, and his father, aware of Don Bosco's need for cash, paid the whole fee in advance.

An archival register lists the numbers of boarders at the Oratory from 1847 to 1869; Stella cautions that it is not fully reliable. The names of some of the earliest house guests are provided in another register in Don Bosco's handwriting. The former shows two boarders in 1847, one in 1848, two in 1849. The latter, which generally only gives the date of entrance, shows five for 1847, ten for 1849.

See BM III, 175-176; Giraud and Biancardi, p. 175; Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 41, 175-176, 182, 373.

12. The date matches the stay at the Moretta house rather than the rental of the whole Pinardi premises. Don Bosco had been teaching the boys Gregorian chant and hymns since the first days of the Oratory. Now he was also teaching them to read music and sing parts, not just read the words and memorize a simple melody. On Don Bosco as music teacher, see BM III, 98-103.

13. Lemoyne gives Cerutti's first name at Joseph (BM III, 102) Canon Nasi was one of the priests who tried to get Don Bosco into the asylum.

14. Matthew 10:24.

15. Up till then, only when pupils had attained a certain proficiency in music through private lessons were they brought together to form a choir or orchestra under a conductor.

Chapter 47

Another Oratory

The St Aloysius Oratory • The Moretta house • Seminary land

In proportion to our efforts to extend our schools and provide instruction, the number of our pupils increased. On feast days, only some of the pupils could fit into the chapel for the ceremonies or into the playground for games. Then, always in agreement with Dr Borrelli, to meet this growing need a second oratory was opened in another quarter of the city.¹ For this purpose, we rented a small house at Porta Nuova on viale del Re,² commonly called the Avenue of the Plane Trees after the trees lining the street.

To secure that house, we had to engage in a very fierce battle with the inhabitants. It was occupied by a group of washerwomen who believed that abandoning their ancient abode would cause the end of the world. But we used a gentle approach and offered some compensation, and so a deal was struck before the belligerents reached a state of war.

Mrs Vaglianti owned that site and the play garden, which she later left in her will to Chev. Joseph Turvano.³ The rent was 450 francs.⁴ We called this new foundation Oratory of St Aloysius Gonzaga, a name by which it is still known.

Dr Borelli and I opened the new oratory on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1847-⁶ The extraordinary mob of youngsters there relieved somewhat the crowded ranks of those at Valdocco. Direction of that oratory was entrusted to Dr Hyacinth Carpano, who for several years laboured entirely gratis.⁷ The same Regulations drawn up for the institution at Valdocco were adopted at the St Aloysius Oratory, without any modifications being introduced.

In that same year, with a desire of giving shelter to a multitude of children asking for it, we bought the whole Moretta house.⁸ But when we looked into the work of adapting it to our requirements, we found the walls were not strong enough. Because of this, we thought it wiser to resell it, especially since we were offered a very attractive price.⁹

Then we acquired a section of land (.94 acre) from the Turin seminary.¹⁰ This is the site where the Church of Mary Help of Christians was later built, and the building which at present houses the workshops for our artisans."

Notes

1. Don Bosco consulted not only Father Borel but also the Murialdo cousins, other priests, and, of course, the archbishop (Stella, *EcSo*, p. 176; BM III, 186).

2. The Porta Nuova district took its name ("New Gate") from an entry through the no-longer-existent city wall. *The* area was open country with lots of trees on the fringe of the city. On a sizeable portion of empty land a few little houses were scattered.

The property already swarmed with kids on Sundays. It was a good bet that the city's future expansion would be in that direction. So the site was well chosen.

Viale del Re is now called corso Vittorio Emanuele II. The city's main railroad station, built later, is four blocks west of the oratory site.

3. Joseph Turvano, whose name comes up often in BM IV-IX, was a notary serving the Schools for the Poor, Father Cafasso, and Eton Bosco, among others; a city councilor; and secretary of the Company of Mercy, a confraternity dedicated to good works.

4. The rent was reduced after the property came to Turvano: it averaged 319 lire per year between 1856 and 1858 (Stella, *EcSo*, P- 77, "• 15)-

5. Don Bosco added the note to Father Berto's copy during revision. The cornerstone of the Church of Saint John the Evangelist was blessed in 1878 and the church completed in 1882. The Salesians have charge of the parish and run a thriving youth center and school there.

6. They assembled boys there for the first time on December 8. The official opening took place on Sunday, December 19. The archbishop's letter of authorization is dated December 18.

7. Father Carpano was succeeded at the Saint Aloysius Oratory by Father Ponte, who apparently settled his differences of 1848 with Don Bosco; he was director from 1850 till about 1854. In later years two great servants of God were in charge: Saint Leonard Murialdo from 1857 to 1865, and Blessed Louis Guanella (1843-1915) from 1875 to 1878. For a brief history of this oratory, see Girauda and Biancardi, pp. 180-181.

8. Don Bosco had been trying to get Pinardi to sell his house, 'but Pinardi wanted 80,000 lire, far more than it was worth or Don Bosco could afford. Father Moretta died in 1847, The house and land (.55 acre besides the house) were auctioned off on March 9, 1848. Don Bosco outbid everyone by offering 11,800 lire. He made a down payment of 601.75 lire on December 4, and 396.25 lire in interest. (Giraudi, pp. 49-50; Stella, *EcSo*, p. 76)

9. The resale took place within a year. Not only was Don Bosco offered a good price, but his own payments (see previous note) indicate that he was desperately short of cash. He could hardly afford the repairs required if he were to use the building as he had intended.

So he sold part of the house and land to James and Anthony Ferrero and to Juvenal Mo on April 10, 1849. He sold another part to Michael Nicco on June 1, 1850, and the remainder to the widow Mrs. Mary Ann Audagnotto on October 6, 1850. (Giraudi, p. 51)

Don Bosco bought back the house and land in 1875 and opened there the first oratory for girls, entrusting it to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. It opened in March 1876. Saint Mary Mazzarello sent seven sisters under the leadership of Sister Eliza Roncallo.

10. This was the so-called "field of the dreams" (see chapter 31), a triangular field in the angle between via della Giardiniera and via Cottolengo, across the street from the Pinardi property. It was being used as a vegetable garden at the time. Don Bosco bought it on June 20, 1850, for 7500 lire, intending to build on it.

Don Bosco had already been corresponding with Father Rosmini about the possibility of the Institute of Charity's opening a

house in Turin and helping with the work of the oratories. The seminary field offered a site for a Rosminian residence as well as a larger hospice and playground area. Those discussions did not pan out, nor did Don Bosco's plans for expansion in that direction.

Financial need compelled him to sell small pieces of the lot over the next two years. He sold about half of the field in at least five parcels for a total of at least 641078 lire. (The sources cite five sales which do not add up to half the field.)

The remaining .48 acre was sold to Father Rosmini on April 10, 1854, for 18,000 lire. Don Bosco still owed Father Rosmini 20,000 lire at four percent interest, which he had borrowed to purchase the Pinaridi house in 1851 (see chapter 54).

When Don Bosco was ready to build the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in 1863, he repurchased the Rosminian portion of the field for 1558.4 lire. With some understatement, Lemoyne remarks that the value of the land had severely depreciated. Be that as it may, anyone who adds up the various prices which Don Bosco paid and which he received cannot doubt Don Bosco's business acumen. (He also reacquired the other sections of the field which he had sold individually in 1850-1851.)

See Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 82-85; Giraudi, pp. 112, 166. 170. 176: BM JV, 87-95; V, 20, 30-31; VII, 224-228. *it*. The workshops are still there, to the left (west) of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians; shops for mechanics, electromechanics, and the graphic arts.

Chapter 48

The Revolutionary Year

*1848 • The number of artisans grows • Their way of life • Short evening exhortation * The Archbishop grants privileges • Retreats*

In this year, political events and the public mood presented a drama, the outcome of which nobody could foresee.¹ Charles Albert had granted the Constitution.² Many thought that the Constitution also granted freedom to do good or evil at will. They based this assertion on the emancipation of the Jews and Protestants, claiming as a consequence that there was no longer any distinction between Catholics and [those of] other faiths. This was true in politics, but not in matters of religion.*

Meantime, a kind of frenzy seized the minds even of youngsters; they would get together at various points in the city, in the streets and squares, believing that it was a praiseworthy to insult priests or religion. I was attacked many times at home and in the street.⁵

One day as I was teaching catechism, a harquebus shot came through the window, passing through my cassock between my arm and my ribs, and making a large hole in the wall.⁶ On another occasion, a certain well-known character attacked me with a long knife in full daylight while I stood in the middle of a group of children. It was a miracle that I was able to get away, beating a hasty retreat to the safety of my room.

Dr Borrelli was also able to escape miraculously from a pistol shot, and from the blows of a knife one time when he was mistaken for someone else.

It was, therefore, quite difficult to control such aroused young people. In that perversion of thought and ideas, as soon as we could provide additional rooms, the number of artisans was increased, coining to fifteen, all amongst the most abandoned and endangered. *1&4?*⁷

There was a big problem, however. Because we had no workshops in our institution yet, our pupils went to work and to school in Turin, with ensuing harm to morality. The companions they mixed with, the conversations they heard, and what they saw frustrated what was said to them and done for them at the Oratory. It was then that I began to give very short little sermons in the evening after prayers with a view to presenting or confirming some truth which might have been contradicted during the day.⁸

What happened to the artisans was likewise to be lamented regarding the students.⁹ Because the most advanced scholars were divided into various classes, they had to be sent to Prof. Joseph Bonzanino for grammar and to Prof. Fr Matthew Picco for rhetoric.¹⁰ These were most distinguished schools, but going to and from was fraught with danger. In the year 1856, to everyone's advantage, workshops and classes were permanently established at the Oratory itself." At that time the perversion of ideas and actions seemed such that I could no longer trust the domestic staff.¹² As a consequence my mother and I did all the housework. To my lot fell cooking, setting the

table, sweeping, chopping firewood, cutting out and making trousers, shirts, jackets, towels, sheets, and doing the necessary mending. But these things turned out very advantageous, morally speaking, for I could conveniently give the boys some advice or a friendly word as I went round handing out bread, soup, or something else.

Discerning the need to have someone come and help me in both domestic and scholastic matters in the Oratory, I began to take some (of the boys) with me into the country and others to spend the holidays at Castelnuovo, my native country.¹³ Some of them came for dinner with me, others in the evening to read or write something — always with the purpose of providing an antidote to the poisonous opinions of the day. This was done with greater or lesser frequency from 1841 to 1848. I adopted every means to pursue also my own particular objective, which was to observe, get to know, and chose some individuals who had a suitable inclination to the common life, and to take them with me into my house.¹⁴

With this same purpose, in that year (1848) I put it to a test with a little spiritual retreat.¹⁵ About fifty boys gathered at the Oratory house for it. They all ate with me; but because there were not enough beds for all, some had to sleep with their own families and return to the Oratory in the morning. This coming and going to their homes risked almost all the benefit to be reaped from the sermons and instructions which are customary on such occasions.

The retreat began on Sunday evening and finished on the following Saturday evening. It succeeded quite well. Many boys for whom I had laboured in vain for a long time really gave themselves to virtuous living. Several entered religious life; others, while continuing in the secular life, became models in their regular attendance at the Oratory. † More will be said on this point in the History of the Salesian Society."

In that same year some parish priests, especially those of Borgo Dora, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, and St Augustine,²³ complained anew to the archbishop because the sacraments were being administered in our oratories. When they did, the archbishop issued a decree giving us full faculties to prepare and present the children for confirmation and holy communion and [for them] to fulfill their Easter duty in the oratories, as long as they came regularly.

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and even for the Austrian occupation of northeastern Italy. The emancipation of non-Catholics was regarded as a step for human dignity as well as a blow to the power of the Church. Anticlericalism began to be regarded as a litmus test of one's devotion to national unity and individual conscience. As late as 1986 there was a sign in the Waldensian church at Porta Nuova reading "Protestants and Liberty."

During the spring of 1848 large mobs were demonstrating in the streets, particularly against the Jesuits, who were the staunchest defenders of the monarchy and the ancient • privileges of the Church, finally ransacking their residence and driving them into hiding; against the Convitto, which had sheltered some Jesuits; and even against the Barolo institutes, on the accusation that the marchioness was likewise harboring some of them. A mob that went for the archbishop's residence was stopped by the presence of Marquis d'Azeglio and a contingent of soldiers. The Jesuits were expelled from the kingdom, and from other parts of Italy too, soon after. (BM III, 208-210)

6. A harquebus is an ancient flintlock musket. The shot was fired over the north wall, across the twenty-six feet of the courtyard, and into the Pinardi chapel. The Pinardi building was later demolished and replaced. A sign outside the present Chapel of the Resurrection marks a window located at about the same spot as the one through which the would-be assassin fired.

Don Bosco learned the identity of the man, who had a criminal record and apparently had been hired by political radicals. He forgave him personally when he met him some time later. (BM III, 211-212).

7. According to Don Bosco's own records, there were eight such boys in residence in 1852 and fifteen in 1853, when the hospice annex was put up (Stella, *EcSo*, p. 175; cf. chapter 46, note u).

8. This little talk after night prayers is called the "good night" in Salesian houses. See chapter 46, note 6.

9. "Students" were the boys who were going to school, as distinguished from the "artisans," boys working as apprentices in some trade or as shop clerks.

10. Professor Charles Joseph Bonzanino (d. 1888) was a layman who later became a Salesian Cooperator. He taught the Oratory students, including those who became the first Salesians, for many years in his home at 20 via Barbaroux (which runs between the Cittadella Garden and *piazza* Castello).

11. Father Picco (1812-1880) also maintained a long relationship with the students of the Oratory. He lived at via San Agostino, next to the Church of Saint Augustine, where he taught the humanities course as well as rhetoric, U. By then 150 boys were boarding at the Oratory. The most advanced students still went to Father Picco for their rhetoric or humanities course. Dominic Savio was one of them. (BM V, 362)

12. Don Bosco almost repeats exactly a phrase used a few paragraphs earlier. In *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti* [A Brief History of the Salesian Congregation, and Related Explanations] (Rome: Poliglotta, 1874), Don Bosco cites a particular consequence of this "perversion." He writes:

In that year (1848) a frenzy was worked up against religious orders and congregations, and against the clergy and all Church authorities in general. This cry of fury and contempt for religion resulted in young people's turning from morality, from piety, and hence from priestly vocations. Religious institutes were being dispersed, priests were being ridiculed, some of them were thrown into prison, and others were driven into exile. How, humanly speaking, could one ever cultivate a vocation?

Yet it was necessary in times so adverse to lay the groundwork for a new religious congregation.

At that time, God made clearly known to me a new kind of army he wished to enlist, not from the well-to-do families, because they mostly sent their children to public schools or big colleges where every idea, every inclination to the priesthood was quickly snuffed. Those who worked with spade or hammer had to be chosen to take a glorious place among those going forward to the priesthood.

This is exactly what Don Bosco was doing at the Oratory and what he had to take care to protect from harmful influences either in the city streets or from his hired help.

One may note his comparison of his new congregation to an army. He admired the Jesuits and was much influenced by them. Even his name for the most pious devotees of Saint Aloysius — "Company" — echoes Saint Ignatius's name for his congregation, the Company of Jesus.

Reference to Don Bosco's hiring domestic help seems quite unusual. There was certainly too much work for him, his mother, and a few good women volunteers to manage, and eventually he had to hire others. Still later, when he had coadjutor brothers among the Salesians, they undertook much of this kind of work without any risk of compromising the enterprise.

13. In October 1847 Don Bosco began taking a few boys to spend a few days' holiday with him, his mother, and his brother's

family at their farm in Becchi. He made this an annual practice until 1864. Originally he seems to have taken the few boys who had no place else to go for a vacation. Later, the excursion became a special treat for the best boys; as Don Bosco implies here in his memoirs, it was also a chance to discern vocations.

These fall outings may be studied as a synthesis of Don Bosco's educational method. They embodied reason, religion, and kindness. They were a reward for exemplary students, a wholesome recreation, a learning experience, a means of presenting idleness, a chance for individual attention, and more. See the comment following the notes.

14. That is to say, almost from the very start of the Oratory, Don Bosco was thinking of forming a religious community around himself. We have already seen that he was personally attracted to the religious life (chapter 16).

15. Don Bosco pioneered the idea of retreats for young workers in Italy. The first retreat, for twenty boys, took place in 1847 (not 1848) and was preached by Blessed Frederick Albert (1820-1876), court chaplain at that time, later a parish priest at Lanzo Torinese, and founder of the Vincentian Sisters of Mary Immaculate, commonly known as the Albertines. He was instrumental in getting the Salesians to open a school at Lanzo in 1864. (BM III, 151-152; VII, 416)

16. He entered the Oratory in 1847, aged sixteen, and left in 1858. He became a secular priest and pastor of the Church of Saint Augustine.

17. Probably James Sarjoldi, a shoemaker who enrolled in the Oratory chapter of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in 1856 and still belonged in 1863 (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 266-367, 478).

18. A paying boarder at the Oratory in 1849 (Stella, *EcSo*, PP-176, 560).

19. Charles Gastini (1832-1902) was closely associated with the Oratory for many years. He was an apprentice barber when Don Bosco met him in 1843 and risked his neck getting the boy's first shave. Gastini became inseparably devoted to Don Bosco. "More than once," he told Father Francesia, "Don Bosco escaped my razor looking like Saint Bartholomew" (who, according to tradition, was flayed alive). He lived at the Oratory from 1847 to May 1856. Like Buzzetti, he was counted among Don Bosco's four most promising students and studied for the priesthood. After putting aside his studies because of poor health, he became a master book-binder. On one occasion in 1854 he and three others snuck out after the gate had been locked for the night, which did not escape Don Bosco's notice.

To Gastini we owe the idea of the Association of Past pupils which he suggested in 1870. He never missed a family feast at the Oratory. Known as Don Bosco's minstrel [because of his excellent singing voice and his versifying, he had an original way of expressing tender sentiments. He boasted that his verses were composed in cubic meter. Those who knew Gastini could only agree with Giraudi (p. 217): [his ideas struck all who heard him. The more novel they were, the more they were appreciated and applauded." He often repeated the refrain:

Io devo vivere / per settant'anni

A me lo disse / Papa Giovanni

I'll live to be seventy / Father John told me so.

He died on January 28, 1902, one day after turning seventy.

See MB XX; Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 177, 195, 255-256; T. Bosco, SP, pp. 138-140.

20. A shopkeeper who joined the Saint Vincent de Paul Society i at the Oratory in 1860 and was an officer in 1863 (Stella, . *EcSo*, pp. 266-267, 477-478).

21. Don Bosco brought him to the Oratory in March 1848

(Stella, *EcSo*, p. 563).

21. Don Bosco probably meant to follow the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, which run up to 1855, with *The History of the Salesian Society*, which was being founded a: that time. He never found the time to do so.

23. The parish church of Borgo Dora, to the east of Valdocco, was Saints Simon and Jude, and the pastor was Father Augustine Gattino. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church is on via del Carmine just west of piazza Savoia (which is two blocks south of Our Lady of Consolation); the pastor was Father Charles Dellaporta. The pastor of Saint Augustine's parish, Father Vincent Ponzati, had objected to Don Bosco's work for quite some time.

24. Don Bosco called the Oratory the parish church for the abandoned boys of Turin; now he had ecclesiastical recognition of his and their quasi-parochial rights.

Comment on the Fall Outings as a Synthesis of Don Bosco's Educational Method

For eighteen years (1847-1864), Don Bosco led a troupe of his boys to his faintly home at Becchi each October. While she was alive, Mama Margaret went along too. At first the boys were few: sixteen, for instance, in 1848 and twenty-seven in 1852. But by 1860 their numbers had swelled to sixty-odd youngsters, and on the last and greatest of these hikes, about a hundred went along. Fortunately, Don Bosco had seminarians to assist him from the early 1506 on.

It seems that the few boys who joined Don Bosco and his mother in those first years were simply those who had nowhere else to go for a few days vacation. Since October is the peak of the grape harvest, there would have been relatively few boys left in Turin who were in that situation. But as Don Bosco established his hospice and developed a school and shops around it, and after the First War of Independence orphaned many Piedmontese lads, he had more boys the year round. Moreover, he encouraged even those who had homes to go-to either to curtail their visit to those homes or to skip them entirely. Still other students had "summer school at the Oratory.

So by the mid-1850s as at the latest. Dun Bosco had quite a number of boys who might accompany him to Becchi. He selected those whose conduct and study had been most outstanding during thy previous year; day students also needed their parents' testimony to good behavior.

With a small group Don Bosco would head for Becchi a few days before the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (the first

Sunday in October in those days). They would prepare things at Joseph's farm, and Don Bosco would get a day or two's "breather" himself.

The main body of trekkers departed on Saturday morning. The evening before, Father Victor Alasonatti read out the roster of the lucky ones who had been selected. Thus Don Bosco and his helpers made sure that everyone maintained his best conduct even in the few days of Don Bosco's absence, and Don Bosco showed that all the Oratory superiors were involved in the choice. Nor did Don Bosco have the difficult chore of comforting or explaining to the disappointed—there was the prefect of discipline (Father Alasonatti) right on the spot!

The immediate objective of both the saint and the boys was the annual celebration of our Lady's feast at Becchi. In 1848 Don Bosco obtained Archbishop Fransoni's permission to set up a chapel in Joseph's house. This chapel (which is still there) became the focus of a great festival for the whole town of Castelnuovo, prepared for by a novena and solemnized by the presence of the Oratory band and choir. Between the solemn religious services (which included two Masses, the rosary, litanies, and benediction), there were games; in the evening, there were festivities with skits, poetry, song, balloons, and fireworks.

In the next day or two, in the early years, the boys might do a little local, hiking, play games in the farmyard, or just relax. Joseph Bosco helped very effectively with general supervision, especially while his brother was working on sermons, hearing confessions, or conducting business.

Father Cinzano, pastor of Castelnuovo, always hosted Don Bosco and his young friends for a day. The boys would visit the little town where their dear father had once gone to school, the church where he had been baptized and made his first communion. The boys provided ample entertainment and enjoyed a huge polenta.

By the mid-1850s, the outing had been extended in time to about two weeks and in locale to sites other than Becchi. Each day the boys and Don Bosco would set out for some chosen destination, making a day trip of it or sometimes an overnight. At the village, the bass drum—or the racket of the band—announced that some tiling special was about to happen, and all the people and the pastor would assemble. Don Bosco would address a few words to them (the pastor knew in advance that he was coming, of course), gather them in church for a service, preach, and hear confessions. The Orator\ band and choir provided sacred music. If it were an overnight stop, the boys entertained everyone, as at Becchi; Charlie Gastini and Charles Tomatis soon became local legends with their antics. Naturally the hosts saw that their hungry guests were well fed. In the morning Don Bosco offered Mass, usually for the deceased of the village, and there was general communion (an unusual event in parish life).

On return to Valdocco, Don Bosco unfailingly thanked his young companions for their good behavior that had edified so people and rejoiced his own heart.

In 1861 Don Bosco announced that the outing would be especially memorable. After spending the feast at Becchi as usual, the troupe moved on to Pica, Alfiano, Casalc. Mirabello, and Villa-franca d'Asti in a continuous trek. At the last town they got on a train back to Turin, courtesy of a government pass. The entire outing lasted seventeen days, and sixty boys participated. In the next three years, the trips got even longer. The last one, that of 1864, involved some one hundred youngsters who spent twenty-three days on the road. This excursion took them as far as Genoa, and they used the trains quite a bit.

Don Bosco, always dressed in his cassock and dripping with sweat, walked along with a group of kids. Not even thirty of them could keep in a group. Especially in the early years, boys sometimes got so lost that some farm family would have to put them up for the night and send them on to Becchi on the morning of the great feast it sell¹. Don Bosco entertained his immediate companions with historical, religious, or autobiographical episodes connected with the various places through which they walked, with funny stories, and with catechism lessons.

We can imagine the difficulties of marching thirty to a hundred boys to Becchi (eighteen miles from Valdocco) and lodging them there for two weeks or taking them all over the countryside for three weeks. The boys got a little pocket money from

Father Alasonatti before setting out—money which they had deposited with him, according to the rules; presumably Don Bosco saw that the poorest lads had something too. At Chieri, friends of Don Bosco, especially Chevalier Mark Gonella, always met them and treated them to lunch. By the time they got to the Bosco farm around dusk, the kids were almost too tired to eat, but Joseph had a spread ready for them.

Don Bosco arranged for an extra floor to be added to Joseph's farmhouse; it became a dormitory for twenty or twenty-five of his sons when Joseph spread hay over it and gave each boy a sheet. In later years neighbors helped with the lodging, which usually consisted of their haylofts.

When the kids set out for a day's hike, someone provided them with a loaf, some cheese, and two or three apples. If they were to be away overnight, Don Bosco arranged in advance not only for lodging hut for a meal to be provided by the local pastor or some other benefactor. Writing ahead in mid-September, Don Bosco asked for bread, soup, and whatever might be convenient for his hungry troops—who, as John Baptist Francesia put it, might he only a hundred but bad appetites for three hundred. "Whatever might be Convenient" usually included cheese, fruit, salami, and lots of polenta. Sometimes a wealthier person, a noble or a bishop, would literally "kill the fatted calf" for Don Bosco and his gang- (Part of Don Bosco's advance work was known to include "buttering up" parish housekeepers; cf. BM VI, 27-20.)

Don Bosco was not the only one with preparations to make in advance: planning the route, lining up hosts, making historical and religious notes on the sites along the way. preparing sermons. The bandmaster and choirmaster also had to rehearse their charges with both sacred and secular pieces for the church services and public entertainments that repaid the villagers for their hospitality, and the young dramatists had to prepare their skits and plays.

. How did the Oratory's musical instruments and stage props make it from one village to another? By boy-power. One would think that Don Bosco would have arranged for some transport, but not so. Each band member had to carry his own instrument—even the bass drum—on each day's hike for the fifteen or twenty days; and several of the bigger fellows had to carry the stage props. Each boy also had his own little bundle of extra clothes (little enough, no doubt) and maybe a blanket (though the sources make no mention of any bed clothing except Joseph's sheets). While all the kids must have been glad to see the railroad station at Villafranca in 1861, none more so than the band and the actors!

That is an outline of *what* Don Bosco did. More important is *why* he did it. We can identify seven general purposes:

1. The simplest intention of the annual outing was recreational, It was a bit of vacation, a chance for the tired priest and his mother to spend a few days with their family. John and Joseph Bosco "were one in heart and soul" (BM IV, 335); and all Mama Margaret's sons and grandchildren adored her. It was a chance for fresh air, rural scenery, and lots of room for exercise for those boys who had no other family.

2. Don Bosco never took a vacation, pure and simple. In Becchi he remained the priest and apostle. He kept in close touch with Father Alasonatti and the rest of his children back in Turin. He edited the *Catholic Reading* at night. The outings themselves were pilgrimages, focused on the feast of the Holy Rosary. In his native place Don Bosco paid homage to the Madonna who meant so much to him and his sons. In the trips to neighboring towns, the hikers from Turin often celebrated other local patronal feasts as well. On Hie way through Chieri, the boys always visited Louis Comollo's grave. In 1857, the year of Dominic Savio's death, they the custom of visiting his grave at Mondonio too. Thus, they honored these model youths and drew inspiration from them. The boys' affection and admiration for their deceased schoolmate Savio was so genuine that in that first year they passed up Mr. Savio's proffered refreshments to charge straight to the cemetery; when they found the gates locked, some could not wait for the key and scaled the wall. At the grave they left a tributary plaque and many tears.

Some of the boys saw the excursion as a different kind of pilgrimage. They took home bits of brick and plaster from Don Bosco's boyhood home as relics.

3. The outings were an incentive to the students and artisans of the Oratory to work hard and behave well during the school year so that they might have the privilege of being in that select group. It was a reward eagerly hoped for! It was also an

inducement that Don Bosco used to encourage the boys to spend their four months' vacation with him, or at least to cut short their time at home.

4. These outings quickly became an integral part of a total educational plan and method. They capsulized that sense of God, of religion, of Study, work, and apostolic venture, and of joy that Don Bosco had learned from his mother and labored to instill in his sons. These sons later looked back at those golden days with nostalgia and awe.

Don Bosco frowned on the type of vacation in which a boy returned to his native town, mixed with his former, not-very-edifying pals, heard and saw bad example from relatives, lacked an opportunity for confession—especially if Don Bosco thought that the young man might have a priestly vocation. So the fall hikes kept him in touch with these boys. They said their daily prayers, attended Mass, had him on hand for their regular confessions; he spent time with each youngster, one-on-one, advising him about his future or touching on what was in his heart. These were choice educational moments.

Outside the urban and school setting, a different kind of education could go on. The piety of the villagers edified the youths, and vice versa. Their guide helped them to see God in the beautiful nature all around them, to make a link between the sacred and the profane. Don Bosco doubted that a boy's soul could refuse God's approach when it was so gentle and pleasant. The youths could see in Don Bosco himself a continuity between prayer and play, and their prayer lives deepened. It was not uncommon for a boy waking in the middle of the night to see one of his companions kneeling in the hay at prayer. The rapport between the themselves grew, as well as that between the boys and their benefactors. Don Bosco's apostolic work on the outings was not confined to the boys. He was zealous for the people wherever he went, preaching, hearing confessions, offering religious services (usually with the pastor's assistance and always with his prior approval). Wherever he went, besides, he tried to interest pastors and concerned laity in the *Catholic Readings* so that the good effects of his visit might continue.

By 1861 Don Bosco was ready to expand his work outside Turin, and some eager offers were coming from Mirabello. So the hike served this apostolic purpose too. He led his gang there and so began the negotiations that led to the opening of a new school two years later. Later expeditions served similar exploratory purposes. The 1864 journey took him to Mornese, where he encountered Mary Mazzarello and the group of young women around her, the future foundress of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Nor was Don Bosco the only apostle on these trips. The young men were apostles too through their singing, instrumental music, service at the altar, prayer, and public entertainments. Many boys were so attracted to the fun that Don Bosco's boys were having that they would "hook up" with the oratorians for a day of hiking, playing, and praying—and some of them hooked up permanently. The villagers who saw how Don Bosco treated these adolescents and how they responded to him grew in their esteem for priests and the Salesians.

6. Which brings us to another goal of the hikes: recruitment. What parent, seeing Don Bosco and his seminarians in action with these boys, would hesitate to send a son to the Oratory? So Don Bosco found new students; some, like twelve-year-old Dominic Savio came looking for him. In 1850 Don Bosco found another twelve-year-old, Johnny Cagliero, who was the "lord" of Father Cinzano's rectory at Castelnuovo. It was especially for potential priestly vocations that he was on the lookout. To this end he often used the feast of the Holy Rosary at the Becchi chapel as the occasion for solemnly vesting a new clerical candidate. Eleven days after moving into the Oratory as a resident student, fifteen-year-old Michael Rua was so vested in 1852; he was just one of many. Don Bosco planned these ceremonies to impress and attract the youths of Castelnuovo.

Nor was it only boys whom Don Bosco attracted; on the 1864 he met Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne near Genoa.

7. Finally, Don Bosco was attentive to his benefactors, many of whom had either summer homes or permanent ones in the country. Bringing his boys to them—for lunch, of course, if not for dinner, followed by some show of appreciation through music or drama—was a marvelous expression of gratitude, as well as a way of keeping the purse strings open. These well-to-do men and women could see their charity turned into flesh and blood, so to say.

If Don Bosco could not bring the boys, he often made a little side trip himself, e.g. to his old friends the Moglias or to the De Maistres. Of course, one of his biggest benefactors was his brother. Whenever Joseph came to Turin, he brought along some produce or livestock for the poor boys of Valdocco. The boys, in turn, felt a great deal of affection and respect for "Signer Giuseppe." Indeed, sometimes Don Bosco invited him to address a few words to the boys at the Oratory {in a "good night"?}, which he would do, offering some sound advice in Piedmontese dialect.

So there were many sound reasons for these trips, and they got bigger and more spectacular as the years went by. We are surprised, then, to learn that they stopped abruptly after 1864. The burden of Don Bosco's work had grown so heavy that he could no longer afford to be absent from the Oratory for so long in that fashion. We might also note that Father Alasonatti, his one truly experienced and mature helper, died in 1865. And Don Bosco himself turned fifty that year; both age and ill health were catching up with him. He continued to go to Becchi for our Lady's feast until 1870 and to take along the choir and the band, but the "golden era" had passed.

Besides BM III-VII, see Luigi Deambrogio, *Le possedute attunali di Don Bosco per i colli monferrini* (Castelnuovo Don Bosco: Istituto Salesiano, 1975); Giovanni Battista Francesia, *Don Bosco e le sue passeggiase autunnali nel Monferraio* (Turin: Libreria Salesiana, 1897); idem, *Don Bosco e le sue uliimt passeggiaic* (Turin: Libreria Salesiana, 1897); idem, *Short Popular Life of Don Bosco* (London: Salesian Press, 1905), pp. 185-189.

* On so December 1847, Charles Albert received a petition from 600 prominent Catholic citizens, a great number of whom were clergymen,¹ They laid out their reasons for requesting that emancipation, hut they attached little importance to heretical expressions concerning matters of religion which one finds in ihe petition. As a result, the king signed the famous decrees mentioned here.

From that time the Jews tame out of their ghettos and become leading property-owners. The Protestants then broke from any restraints on their boldness; though few in number amongst us, they were protected by civil authority and did great damage to religion and morality.⁴

✠ Hyacinth Arnaud,⁶ Sansoldi," both deceased; Joseph Buzzetli, Nicholas Galesio;^ John Costantino,⁸ deceased; James Cerutti, deceased; Charles Oasiini,^{1^1} John Gravano;¹ⁿ and Dominic Borgialli," deceased. Those were numbered amongst those who made the first retreat that year and who dways showed themselves good Christians.

Chapter 49

Religious Celebrations

*Progress in music • Procession to Our Lady of Consolation • Award from the city and from the Schools for the Poor • Holy Thursday * The footwashing rite*

The dangers to which youngsters were exposed in matters of religion and morality called for greater efforts to safeguard them. In the night school, as well as in the day program, we thought it would be good to add courses in piano, organ, and even instrumental music to those in vocal music. So I found myself as teacher of vocal and instrumental music, of piano and organ, though I had never truly been a student of them myself. Goodwill made up for everything.

Having prepared a group of the best soprano voices, we began to give recitals at the Oratory; afterwards we ventured into Turin, to Rivoli,¹ Moncalieri,² Chieri, and other centres. Canon Louis Nasi and Fr Michelangelo Chiatellino³ were willing helpers in training our musicians, accompanying them, and conducting them at their public performances in various towns. Since choirs of boy sopranos with orchestral accompaniment had not often been heard up till then, and our solos, duets, and full choral renderings were so novel,⁴ our music was spoken of everywhere and our singers were much sought after for various solemn occasions. Canon Louis Nasi and Fr Michelangelo Chiatellino were generally the two accompanists of our emerging philharmonic society.⁵

Every year we used to go to perform at a religious function at the Church of Our Lady of Consolation. This year we marched in procession from the Oratory.⁶ The singing along the way and the music in church drew a numberless crowd of people. Mass was celebrated, holy communion received, and then I gave a short sermon suited to the occasion in the underground chapel. Finally, the Oblates of Mary⁷ put a fine breakfast for us in the cloisters of the shrine.

In this way we began to overcome human respect,⁸ we gathered youngsters, and we had opportunities to inculcate with the greatest prudence a spirit of morality and respect for authority and to encourage frequent reception of the holy sacraments. But such novelty gave rise to rumours.

In this year, too, the city of Turin sent another deputation composed of Chev. Peter Ropolo, Capello called Moncalvo, and Comm. Dupre⁹ to assess the vague reports that were being put about. They were highly satisfied with us. When their report was sent in, an award of 1000 francs was decreed,¹⁰ and a very flattering letter. From that year the city assigned an annual subsidy that was paid until 1878, when the 300 francs, which the judicious rulers of Turin had budgeted to provide lighting for the night school for the benefit of the sons of the people, was withdrawn.¹¹

The Schools for the Poor also sent a deputation, headed by Chev. Gonella, to visit us. That work had also introduced night schools and music schools, using our method. As a mark of their approval, they gave us another award of a thousand francs.

Every year on Holy Thursday, we used to go together to visit the altars of repose.¹² But because of the ridicule — we would even say contempt — not a few of the boys no longer dared to join their companions. To encourage our young men ever more to disdain human respect, in that year for the first time we marched in procession to make those visits,¹³ singing the *Stabat Mater* and chanting the *Miserere*.¹⁴ Then youngsters of every age and condition were seen joining us along the route and racing to join our lines. Everything went off in a peaceful and orderly fashion.

That evening was the first time that we performed the ceremony of the washing of the feet. For this purpose twelve youngsters were chosen, who are usually called the twelve apostles. When the ritual washing was finished, a moral exhortation was preached to the public. Afterwards the twelve apostles were all invited for a frugal supper, and each one was given a small gift which he proudly carried home.¹⁵

Likewise in that year the stations of the cross were erected according to the prescriptions of the Church and solemnly blessed.¹⁶ At each station there was a brief little sermon, and an appropriate motet was sung.

In such ways our humble Oratory continued to consolidate at the same time that grave events were running their course, events which were destined to change the face of Italian politics, and perhaps the world's.

Notes

1. A town then about eight miles west of Turin, now part of the city.
2. A small city then about six miles south of Turin, now also part of the city.
3. Father Chiatellino (d. 1901), a doctor of theology, helped in the oratories, provided funds for needy boys, and bought various publications from Don Bosco (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 172, 9, 556, 568). See also MB XX.
4. "Gave such an impression of novelty" would probably be more accurate.
5. The second reference to the two priests is repetitious; Don Bosco added it to Father Berlin's copy.
6. The year was 1848. This annual procession was continued until 1854. The church is about six blocks from the Oratory.
7. The Oblates of the Virgin Mary were founded in 1815 by Father Luis Bruno Lanteri. They work "to form an educated, young, active clergy, devoted to the Church and the Holy See, resolved to struggle against the bad press and to propagate good reading matter," to conduct parish missions, and to aid the poor (Cristiani, *A Cross of Napoleon*, pp. 105, 103).

They are also foreign missionaries and teachers. The Oblates cared for the shrine for the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation until 1857. The government expelled them because of their loyalty to the Holy See.
8. In the preceding chapter, Don Bosco spoke of verbal and physical assaults on the clergy. We may presume that the boys of the Oratory were taunted too as they came and went on Sundays, and the schoolboys as they went to their daily classes in the city. Among the schoolboys of Turin Don Bosco's stood out in their hand-me-down or military surplus clothing, which made them the objects of juvenile humor at any time, and all the more at a time of increasing anti-clericalism. Obviously the presence of hundreds of boys in procession went far to overcome those kinds of problems.

When Don Bosco speaks of overcoming human respect, he also means that one does what is right, regardless of what others say or think. For those as subject to peer pressure as adolescents are, human respect is a formidable obstacle to spirituality and morality; e.g. it could keep a lad from making his Easter duty (chapter 40).
9. All three men were members of the city council and all three later served on Don Bosco's lottery committee when he was raising funds for the Church of Saint Francis de Sales. Ropolo was an ironmonger. Gabriel Capello, a master furniture maker, may have been from Moncalvo, a town about midway between Asti and Casale in east central Piedmont. (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 87, 625)
10. Teresio Bosco's already cited estimate of the value of the lira (chapter 1, comment) is actually placed here in his notes to the *Memoirs*. He cautions that the estimate fluctuates with the commodity being valued: the price of bread, a worker's daily wage, apartment rent, etc.

A skilled mason could make 500 lire a year; but his little apprentice mason would bring home only forty centesimi a day (about seventy lire during the whole April-October construction season). To feed his apprentices, on the other hand—and any other boarders—Don Bosco had to pay fourteen centesimi for a pound of bread, (T. Bosco, SP, pp. 76, 140). If he had ten

persons to feed and each consumed a pound of bread a day, he had to spend 511 lire in a year-just for bread.

In fact, during the months October-December 1853, when there were about forty boarders at the Valdocco hospice, Don Bosco spent 1600 lire for food. In 1854, with ninety boys, he was spending from thirty-one to seventy-eight centesimi per day per boy for all expenses (food, clothing, medicine, tuition, taxes). Rent for his three oratories in 1850 amounted to 2400 lire. (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 77-78, 201-211, 371-372)

11. In 1847 an award of three hundred lire had been made. In 1848, besides the thousand-lire award, an annual subsidy of three hundred lire was assigned. Don Bosco returns to the cancellation of this subsidy; evidently. It deeply hurt him, or more precisely, prevented him from taking in some boys that he could have fed and clothed with it.

12. After the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the Holy Eucharist is removed to a side altar as a symbol of the Lord's being seized and taken away for trial and execution. This side altar, where the Lord "reposed" until the Easter vigil Mass, was elaborately decorated with candles and flowers, and pious Christians spent much of the day in prayer, keeping vigil with Christ (cf. Matthew 26:36-41). If there were several churches nearby, they would make a little pilgrimage by visiting them in turn.

After the liturgical reforms, Mass is celebrated in the evening and the Eucharist is kept at the altar of repose only until midnight. There is much more emphasis on the Mass, the footwashing, and the Lord's new commandment of love; while there is less emphasis on keeping vigil with Christ and his being taken away, the faithful are still encouraged to spend some time with him on the night of his great gifts of the Eucharist and the priesthood and of his arrest.

13. Don Bosco maintained this practice until 1866, always accompanying the boys himself. Since many of the churches in Turin were close by, it was easily done.

14. The *Stabat Mater* is a medieval Latin hymn traditionally associated with Christ's passion. The Miserere is Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance; the Church has always given it a special place in her Friday liturgy because Christ died for our sins on a Friday.

Don Bosco seems to imply that the boys sang as they went along in procession. Ceria maintains that they sang in the various churches, with the permission of the pastors (MO, p. 210).

15. The rite of footwashing, in imitation of Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13: 1-11), is part of the liturgy of the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Since that Mass was celebrated in the morning in Don Bosco's time, evidently he made a separate ceremony out of it so that more boys would be able to attend. The chief celebrant, portraying Christ, was Don Bosco himself. He washed the feet of the twelve chosen "apostles." This sound liturgical practice became a tradition in Salesian houses, as did the practice of inviting the twelve to dine with the Salesians and giving each a little gift. e.g. a medal a prayer book.

16. The stations of the cross, or the way of the cross, is a proper Lenten devotion, though it may be prayed any time. Images representing fourteen phases of Christ's passion are set up on the church wall (or outdoors), and the faithful meditate before each one. This may be done publicly or privately.

A particular ritual is used in setting up and blessing the stations. The sc-t at the Oratory was erected on April 1, 1847, and the first devotions performed the next day. Beginning in 1848, Don Bosco and the boys prayed the stations on the Fridays of March. Later the pious practice was observed on all the Fridays of Lent, a custom still kept in Salesian communities and in Catholic parishes generally.

Chapter 50

Thirty-three Lire for Pius IX

1849 • The closing of the seminaries • The Pinardi house • Peter's Pence and

Pius IX's rosaries • The Guardian Angel Oratory • A visit from some deputies

This year was very memorable. The war between Piedmont and Austria, begun the previous year, had shaken all Italy.¹ Public schools were suspended. The seminaries, especially those in Turin and Chieri, were closed and occupied by the army.² As a consequence, the diocesan clerics had neither teachers nor a place to gather. It was then, to have at least the consolation of doing what we could to mitigate these public calamities, that we rented the whole of the Pinardi house.³ The tenants screamed; they threatened me, my mother, even the proprietor. Though great financial sacrifices had to be made, we still succeeded in getting possession of the whole building. Thus that den of iniquity, which for twenty years had been at the service of Satan, was at our disposal.⁴ It embraced the whole site which now forms the courtyard between the Church of Mary Help of Christians and the house behind it.⁵

In this way we were able to increase our classes, to extend the chapel, and double our playground space. The number of young men rose to thirty.⁶ But the main aim, as in fact happened, was to be able to gather together the diocesan seminarians. We can say that our Oratory house for almost 20 years became the diocesan seminary.⁷

Towards the end of 1848, political events forced the Holy Father Pius IX to flee Rome and seek refuge at Gaeta.⁸ This great Pontiff had already shown us many times his customary kindness.⁹

When the rumour got about that he was in financial straits, a collection was taken up in Turin. It was called *Peter's Pence*.¹⁰ A committee composed of Dr Canon Francis Valinotti¹¹ and Marquis Gustavo Cavour came to the Oratory. Our collection amounted to 35 francs.¹² It was a small sum,¹³ which we tried to make a bit more acceptable to the Holy Father with a message¹⁴ that pleased him very much.

The Pope expressed his pleasure in a letter to Card. Antonucci, at that time nuncio in Turin, and now archbishop of Ancona.¹⁵ He asked the nuncio to convey to us how much consolation he received from our offering, but even more from the sentiments accompanying it. Finally, with his apostolic blessing he sent us a parcel of 60 dozen rosaries, which were solemnly distributed on July 20 of that year [1850].¹⁶ See the booklet¹⁷ printed on that occasion, and various newspapers,¹⁸ Letter of Card. Antonucci, at that time nuncio to Turin.¹⁹

The growing number of youngsters attending the oratories made it necessary to consider opening another centre. This was the Holy Guardian Angel Oratory in Vanchiglia,²⁰ near the place where, especially through the work of Marchioness Barolo, the Church of St Julia was later built.

Fr John Cocchis²¹ had some years previously established that oratory with a scope somewhat like ours. But con-

sumed by love of his country, he judged it better to teach his pupils the use of rifle and sword, put himself at their head, and march against the Austrians, which he did in fact."

That particular oratory was closed for a full year.²³ When we rented it, Dr John Vola, of happy memory, was entrusted with its direction.²⁴ This oratory continued until 1871, when it moved alongside the parish church. Marchioness Barolo left a legacy for this need, on condition that the boys' centre and the chapel be attached to the parish, as has been done.²⁵

A solemn visit was paid to the Oratory at that time by a committee of deputies and others appointed by the ministry of the interior, who came to honour us with their presence.²⁶ They inspected the whole place, talking to everyone in a friendly way. They then made a full report to the Chamber of Deputies.²⁷ This report was the subject of long and lively debate, as may be seen in the *Gazzetta Piemontese*²⁸ of 29 March 1850. The Chamber of Deputies gave a grant of 300 francs to our boys.

Urbano Ratazzi, who was then minister of the interior,²⁹ designated a sum of 2000 francs for us. The documents may be consulted.³⁰

Amongst my pupils at last I had one who donned the clerical habit. Ascanio Savio,³¹ presently rector of the Refuge, was the first seminarian from the Oratory. His clothing ceremony took place at the end of October of that year.

Notes

1. See the introduction and the bibliography.

2. Archbishop Fransoni ordered the seminaries to be shut down and the seminarians sent home early in 1848 because, despite his explicit orders to remain aloof from politics, many of the students were ardently supporting the new Constitution and war with Austria, taking part in demonstrations, wearing the revolutionary tricolor, etc. (See chapter 51, note 4.) When war came, the army needed facilities, and the seminaries were empty.

3. The previous lease had been with Soave. The new lease, at 1150 lire per year from April 1, 1849, to March 31, 1852, was made directly with Pinardi. The contract, dated June 22, 1849, was signed by Father Borel as lessee. Don Bosco, for the first time, signed as witness.

4. Although Giraudi (p. 95) and Stella (*EcSo*, p. 176) state that Don Bosco subleased the whole house in 1847-1848, Lemoyne (BM III, 429) and Don Bosco himself (here and in chapter 54) say that some tenants still remained on the ground floor till 1849. The implication, even stronger in chapter 54, is that they were prostitutes.

5. The building behind the basilica includes the Church of Saint Francis de Sales, the structure built on the site of the Pinardi house, and the hospice annex. The church, the annex, and what remains of the courtyard were once Pinardi's yard. Much of the yard between the basilica and the church was built over when the basilica was enlarged in the 1930's.

6. The number of boarders living at the Oratory.

7. Like the young students boarding with Don Bosco, the seminarians lived at the Oratory and went to school in the city. (Sections of the seminary had been left unoccupied by the government.) Naturally Don Bosco admitted only those who had the archbishop's approval, whoever could, paid a modest fee; the rest were kept free of charge.

Don Bosco was undoubtedly providing an invaluable service for the Church of Turin. He considered the fostering of priestly and religious vocations to be of the highest importance and rated it as one of the purposes of the Salesian Society (BM V, 637, no. 5; cf. 1984 Constitutions, article 28). In the coming years, bishops of other dioceses also boarded some of their seminarians with him. This led, unintentionally, to long and bitter conflict with two archbishops of Turin who charged Don Bosco with stealing their seminarians for his own congregation.

It is estimated that in his lifetime 2500 diocesan priests came from the Oratory or other Salesian schools —not counting men who entered religious life.

8. A city about two-thirds of the way down the coast from Rome toward Naples, within the Kingdom of Naples. The Pope stayed there from November 24, 1848, to April 12, 1850.

9. We know of only two occasions. In 1846, at Don Bosco's request he had granted faculties for three years for the Oratory to celebrate solemn midnight Mass at Christmas, a privilege normally reserved for parish churches. In 1847 he allowed himself to be enrolled among the members of the Company of Saint Aloysius.

10. In the Middle Ages, this name was given to an offering sent by Christian nations to the Holy See. On the initiative of French Catholics, the practice was revived when Pius IX was driven into exile by the Roman revolution. The Peter's Pence collection is still taken up annually around the Catholic world for the administrative needs of the Holy See and for charities which it supports.

In promoting this collection for Pius IX, Don Bosco was motivated not by a personal relationship with this particular Pope (that would develop in the future) but by a deep reverence for the Vicar of Christ, whoever he might be. This devotion to the Holy Father he made a hallmark of the Salesian spirit. See indexes to BM, and particularly BM V, 383, 635; VH, 107-109; X, 353; XIV, 461; XV, 368-369. See also 1984 Constitutions, articles 13 and r25, and the commentary on both in [Francesco Maraccani] *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco: A guide to the Salesian Constitutions*, trans. George Williams (Rome, 1986), pp. 180-187, 899-901; Pietro Ricaldone, "Learn to Know, Love, and Defend the Pope" (*Acts of the Superior Chapter*, no. 164, May 1951); Egidio Vigano, "Our Fidelity to Peter's Successor" (*Acts of the General Council*, no. 315, October-December 1985).

11. Canon Valinotti (18137-1873) was from the diocese of Ivrea. When his bishop and Don Bosco cofounded the *Catholic Readings* (chapter 59), he became the business manager of the enterprise and, eventually, the center of a controversy over its direction. (BM IV-VIII)

12. The documents report the total as thirty-three lire, which was given to the collection committee on March 25, 1849.

13. From these words to "consolation he received," three sentences down, was added to the original manuscript by Don Bosco. When Father Berto copied this passage in his manuscript, he added "(and now deceased)" after "Ancona."

14. Don Bosco composed the message, which was read by one of the boys on the solemn occasion of handing over the funds collected. It was then sent along with the offering.

15. When Father Berto was copying the manuscript, he added "and now deceased" at this point. Cardinal Antonucci died on January 29, 1879 (Desramaut, *LesMem*, p. 117). The nuncio wrote to Don Bosco on May 2, 1849:

In presenting to His Holiness . . . another contribution to the Peter's Pence Fund, delivered to me . . . on behalf of the committee formed for this purpose in the city of Turin, I took it upon myself to single out for His Holiness' attention the donation of thirty-three lire from your boys. I also mentioned the sentiment they expressed in presenting their contribution to the committee. In a reply dated April 18, [Cardinal Antonelli] . . . informed me that the Holy Father was moved by the loving and sincere contribution of these young apprentices and by their words of filial devotion. Would you therefore kindly tell them that the Holy Father was pleased by their offering, and considered it singularly precious since it comes from the poor; he felt deeply consoled by seeing; that they were already imbued with genuine reverence for the! Vicar of Jesus Christ, a sign, no doubt, of the religious principles impressed upon their young minds. (BM III, 367-368)

16. The parcel of rosaries was sent on April 2, 1850, through the pontifical consulate in Genoa. The confusion prevailing in Turin at that time caused considerable delay in delivery, so that it reached the Oratory only in July. The Holy Father's gifts were handed out with great ceremony on Sunday, July 21 (not Saturday, the 20th).

17. It was a little monograph by Don Bosco with, according to the literary custom of the time, a long title: *Breve ragguaglio della festa fattasi nel distribuire il regalo di Pio IX ai giovani degli Oratori di Torino* [A short account of the feast celebrated when Pius IX's gift was distributed to the boys of Turin's oratories] (Turin: Rotta, 1850). The booklet speaks of "oratories" because the boys of the Saint Aloysius Oratory also contributed to the thirty-three lire. Even 720 rosaries were insufficient; Don Bosco had to buy more to ensure that each boy got one.

18. One article particularly worthy of note was written by Gustavo Cavour for his newspaper *L'Armonia* (no. 40, 1849). It is reproduced in BM III, 359-360.

The Italian edition of Rene Francois Rohrbacher's (1789-1856) *Universal Church History*, after recounting some touching stories of offerings which humble persons made to help the Pope, went on to tell about a certain group of very poor artisans who had saved a bit of money daily to put together the sum of thirty-three francs, which they forwarded with a covering letter (Turin: Marietti, 6th printing, XV, 558).

19. This phrase stood in the original prior to the addition noted above (note 13). Don Bosco may have meant to have Father Berto copy out the letter.

20. Vanchiglia was the easternmost of the northern industrial zones, located in the rough triangle formed by the Dora and Po Rivers and corso San Maurizio. It

was a cluster of hovels whose walls, blackened by time, threatened to come tumbling down at any moment; it looked like a fortress manned by men hostile to any form of order, greedy for the possessions of others, driven by some fierce instinct to evil, ever ready to shed blood. Crime, poverty, and vice rubbed shoulders. In this neighborhood was born the notorious, feared gang of Vanchiglia [cf. BM III, 231-232]. No one dared set foot there after dark, not even the police. (BM III, 394)

The Guardian Angel Oratory was on the property of a lawyer named Bronzino. The facilities were a shed in the vegetable garden and a rustic courtyard, which served as Playground, chapel, theater, and gymnasium. (Stella, *EcSo*, Pp. 71-72, n. i; cf. BM III, 319) It was at the corner of via Tarino and via Santa Giulia.

21. Father John Cocchi (Don Bosco added an *s* to his name) was a zealous and unselfish priest, compassionate, enterprising, and patient. The Murialdo cousins worked with him, and he enjoyed the support of Marchioness Barolo, Marquis Robert d'Azeglio, and others.

22. Without doubt Father Cocchi (and quite a few other priests) got caught up in the patriotic spirit of the hour. It was one of those epochs of history when only those who lived through it could imagine what it was like.

On the other hand, Father Cocchi was not exactly the leader of the expedition that Don Bosco makes of him. He went as chaplain because he did not want to let the boys go alone. Those would-be soldiers numbered about two hundred. When they arrived at the front lines at Vercelli, the divisional commander would not recognize them as soldiers. In the meantime, the Austrians had routed the Piedmontese at Novara (March 23, 1849), and the youthful brigade snuck home to Turin in small groups. (BM III, 392-393)

23. After the fiasco of the oratorians' march to the war zone, their oratory stayed closed. The archbishop, sternly opposed to liberalization and unification, was content to leave it so. In any case, Father Cocchi did not return to Turin until October, and then he got involved in a new project and lacked the time and the resources to reopen the oratory (BM III, 393; cf. Giraudo and Biancardi, p. 182). By the end of 1849, Father Cocchi was forming a society of priests and laymen to work for the education of orphaned and abandoned young men by teaching them trades. This developed into the Work for Artisans [*Opera degli Artigianelli*], which eventually founded a college on corso Valdocco (see chapter 42, note 19).

In 1851, after Archbishop Fransoni had been banished, Father Cocchi founded a new oratory in Borgo Dora —at the chapel of Saint Martin of the Mills! In later years he also turned his attention to other forms of youth ministry by opening a number of agricultural schools and schools for juvenile offenders.

It did not take Don Bosco and Father Borel long to realize how sorely an oratory was needed in Borgo Vanchiglia. They consulted with Father Cocchi, obtained the archbishop's written authorization and the help of Father Louis Fantini, pastor of the Church of the Annunciation, and reopened the Guardian Angel Oratory in October 1850. (BM III, 393)

24. Father John Baptist Vola (1805?-1872). Father Carpano preceded him as director, transferred from the Saint Aloysius Oratory, where Father Ponte took over. He did not stay long, nor did Father Vola. The Murialdo cousins then took charge and persevered through the problems that had discouraged their predecessors. (Giraudo and Biancardi, p. 182)

25. Marchioness Barolo provided for the building of the Church of Saint Julia (1866). Don Bosco gave title to the oratory to the pastor, and the oratory relocated and took a new name in 1871 (*ibid.*).

26. In 1849, a certain Volpato, a relative of the Gastaldis, forwarded a petition to the interior ministry, through the Senate, requesting a subsidy for the Oratory. Although he did so in Don Bosco's name, Don Bosco was not informed. Volpato worked in one of the government ministries and had advised Don Bosco to seek semiofficial government backing; Don Bosco had declined.

The Senate appointed a committee of three senators to study the request, and they came to Valdocco one January afternoon in 1850. The three were Count Frederick Sclopis, Marquis Ignatius Pallavicino, and Count Louis Provana of Collegno. (BM IV, 12-18).

Frederick Sclopis (1798-1878), count of Salerano, was president of the Senate, a royal counselor, a distinguished historian, and a devout Catholic. Renowned as a jurist, he served on the five-man international tribunal which arbitrated the *Alabama* case between the United States and Great Britain in 1872.

Marquis Pallavicino (1800-1871) must have been the chairman since he filed the report with the Senate.

Louis Provana of Collegno (1786-1861), another devout Catholic, was the younger brother of the Oratory's defender before the Turin city council (chapter 41). He served in the foreign affairs ministry between 1815 and 1825, and then moved to the education department; later he was appointed to the council of State, of which he became president in 1840 (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 56-60).

27. The lower house of the Sardinian parliament. As indicated in the preceding note, the delegates were in fact members of

the Senate.

28. The government newspaper.

29. Rattazzi (1808-1873), the anticlerical leader of the moderate left in parliament, was president of the Chamber of Deputies (1852-1853), minister of justice and cults (1853-1854), and interior minister (1854-1860). He supported Don Bosco's work, appreciating what this priest was doing for the poor.

When Don Bosco was forming the Salesian Society, the minister gave him some valuable hints on how to get around the law which suppressed religious orders (BM V. 459-562). He served two brief, unsuccessful periods as prime minister in 1862 and 1867. Don Bosco spelled his name with one *t*.

30. Especially the *Am Ufficiali* of March 1, 1850. Marquis Paliavicino described Don Bosco as "a distinguished and zealous priest" and his institute as "religious, moral, and useful." He held that "it would be a serious loss to the whole city" if such an institution had to "suspend its work or to close down for want of a helping hand to continue such work, however incomplete it might be." as Don Bosco had done up till then.

The marquis concluded the report thus: Our committee believes that, to be true to itself, to the Senate which honored it with this precious charge, and to society, it should most strongly recommend to the minister of the interior to take effective steps to help such a useful and valuable work.

31. Ascanio Savio (1831-1902) came from Castelnuovo. He was one of the group of youngsters whom Don Bosco had tutored through high school level, hoping that they would stay with him and help him in the oratory work (see chapter 53). Savio's clothing ceremony took place in 1848 at the Cottolengo, the archdiocesan seminary being closed. Later he got permission to stay at the Oratory and help Don Bosco instead of living at the seminary in Chieri. In his last years Don Bosco loved to recall how much precious help this seminarian had given him. (BM III. 307-309).

The first clothing ceremony for seminarians at the Oratory took place on February 2, 1851, involving Buzzetti, Gastaldi, Felix Reviglio, and James Bellia. (B.VI IV, 161)

Chapter 51

No Politics

National festivals

In those days a strange event took place which caused no little upset to our meetings. People wanted our humble Oratory to take part in public demonstrations which were being staged in cities and towns under the name of national festivals.' Those who took part in them and wished to make a public display of their patriotism parted their hair in the middle and let it fall in curls in the back; they wore tight-fitting jackets of various colours, and a national flag, a medal, and a blue cockade on the breast.² Thus attired, they went in procession singing anthems to national unity.

The chief promoter of these demonstrations was Marquis Robert d'Azeglio.³ He sent us a formal invitation. Despite my refusal, he sent us whatever we would need to make an honourable appearance with the rest. A spot was reserved for us in piazza Vittorio,⁴ amongst all the organizations of whatever name, purpose, and condition. What was I to do? To refuse was to declare myself an enemy of Italy. To acquiesce would mean accepting principles which I judged would have disastrous results.⁵

"My Lord Marquis," I answered the above-praised d'Azeglio, "this family of mine, these boys who come here from all over the city, are not a corporation. I would make a laughingstock of myself were I to pretend to make my own institution which depends entirely on civic charity. "

"Exactly. Let civic charity know that this newborn work isn't against modern institutions. That will work to your advantage. Support for your work will increase. The city and I myself will give you generous help."

"My Lord Marquis, it is my firm system to keep out of anything political. Never pro, never am."

"What do you want to do, then?"

"To do what little good I can for abandoned youngsters, using all my powers to make them good Christians in regard to religion, honest citizens in civil society."

"I understand all that," replied the marquis. "But you're making a mistake. If you persist in this principle, everybody will abandon you, and your work will become impossible. One must study the world, understand it, and shape both old and new institutions to the needs of the times."⁷

"Thank you for your goodwill and the advice you offer. Invite me anywhere that a priest can exercise charity, and you'll find me ready to sacrifice life and means. But I want now and always to remain outside politics. "⁸

That renowned nobleman went away satisfied. From that day on he had no further dealings with us. After him many other laymen and priests deserted me. More than that, I was left quite alone after the incident I am now about to relate.

Notes

Don Bosco has backtracked to February 8, 1848, when King Charles Albert announced his intention of granting a constitution. The demonstrations followed that announcement.

1. These were the insignia of revolution- The national flag is the tricolor (green, white, and red), reminiscent of the flag of republican France. A great deal of romanticism marked the beginnings of the Risorgimento. Lemoyne wrote of it: [The boys] were fascinated by the sight of young choirboys dressed in black velvet trousers and shawl, wearing felt hats adorned by tiny Italian flags. Their hair fell in curls to their shoulders, a dagger was slung at the belt, and a small shield representing Italy hung from a slender gold-plated chain on the chest. (BM III. 292-293)

On the general climate, see Desramaut, *SpLife*, pp. 22-23-3.

3. Azeaglio is a small town southeast of Ivrea. The d'Azeaglio brothers, whose family name was Taparelli, were great Italian patriots. The most famous, Massimo (1798-1866), was prime minister (1849-1852) until unseated by Cavour and Rattazzi. He was Manzoni's son-in-law and earned more renown as an author than as a statesman.

We have already referred to Robert (1790-1862) as the promoter of religious toleration and defender of the archbishop's palace (chapter 48, notes 3 and 5). Besides being a senator and politician, he was an art critic and director of the royal art gallery.

A third brother, Louis (1793-1862), was a Jesuit priest, and was an accomplished musician, but his main field was philosophy, which he taught for many years. He published several textbooks and treatises on political philosophy. He was an editor of the Jesuits' Roman periodical *La Civiltà cattolica*.

4. Piazza Vittorio Veneto is a great square, one end of which opens on the Po, over which the Vittorio Emanuele I Bridge leads to the Church of the Great Mother of God. In that church, modeled on the Pantheon of Rome, the city government organized a solemn ritual of thanksgiving, celebrated on February 27, 1848. The choice of that church is ironic, for King Victor Emmanuel I had erected it in thanksgiving for the defeat of revolutionary liberalism and the restoration of legitimate (absolute) government in 1815.

King Charles Albert and the royal family were there, as well as the members of the city government; deputations from the various towns of Piedmont and from Liguria, Savoy, Nice, and Sardinia; and representatives from all the workers' guilds. This was the meeting to which Don Bosco was invited. (Nice, like Savoy, was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia until ceded to France in 1860: it was Garibaldi's native city.)

In all, some fifty thousand people gathered in the huge square. But the archbishop refused to participate and would not allow the *Te Deum* to be sung. He did permit benediction of the Blessed Sacrament to be given. He forbade his seminarians to take part, and when they did, all decked out in the cockade of revolution, it was the last straw (after earlier clashes; cf. T. Bosco. HN, p. 173); the seminaries were closed.

5. These were the principles of political liberalism as it was then emerging. Ceria assessed Don Bosco's position thus:

Don Bosco sincerely loved his country. But because of his relationship and especially his frequent conversations with the archbishop, he saw what others missed: how armies, in the name of patriotism, were being aligned against the Church. So important reasons inspired his reserve. Besides, it seemed to him that he had enough on his hands to gather abandoned youths and make good citizens out of them. (*San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere* [Turin: SEI, 1938], p. 98)

During his life Don Bosco was deeply concerned with political matters, but not with party politics (chapter 37, note 7; chapter 45, comment). "I will never belong to a political party," he said. In his dealings with public officials (as well as with bishops and cardinals), he was a skillful politician. But when he had to deal with politicians, his interests were statesmanship, specifically the politics of Church and State, and social justice, specifically the care of abandoned youth. He entered the political arena of Church and State only when both sides pressed him and the good of souls required it. See Desramaut, *SpLife*, pp. 36-37.

Don Bosco revealed his patriotism not in flag-waving but in practice: in his willingness to mediate between the Vatican and the Italian government despite the difficulties involved and the misunderstandings risked; in his ability to distinguish the proper roles of the Church and the State and remain at the service of both; in his never-failing respect for the king (e.g. BM XV, 257-264) and government ministers; in his insistence that his work performed a public good as well as a religious one, that he was forming good citizens of Italy as well as good Christians; in the love for Italy's history, language, and culture that he showed through his study, textbooks, classroom practice, and educational outings. On his mediation, see BM VIII, 43-76, 237-242, 259-261; X, 183-245; XIII, 373-376; XIV, 72-74; and Francesco Motto, "Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli nel 1858," *Ricerche storiche salesiane* V (1986), 3-20.

6. A satiric note.
7. This, of course, is exactly what Don Bosco was doing. He had run afoul of the pastors of Turin because he was adapting the apostolate to new times. But he refused to concede that partisan political involvement was a necessary part of such adaptation.

This has remained a firm Salesian principle, though not in as absolute a sense as previously. See the 1984 Constitutions, article 33; cf. article 31, and the commentary on both in Maraccani, pp. 312-319, 327-335; contrast that with the 1966 Constitutions, article 14, and Regulations, articles 45, 378, 386; and the evolution of those articles into the 1972 Constitutions, articles 17 and 19 (cf. Joseph Aubry's commentary, *Una via che conduce all'amore* [Turin: LDC, 1974], pp. 112-116, 121-126).

8. Bishop Jeremiah Bonomelli of Cremona (1831-1914) was a respected observer of the social issues at the turn of the century, and a moderate in the thorny issues of Church and State. In *Questioni religiose, morali, sociali del giorno* (Milan: Cogliati, 1892), I, 310, he wrote:

One day, not many years back, I was chatting familiarly with that man of God, Father John Bosco, a true apostle of youth whose name is still held in benediction. With his characteristic simplicity and practical tact, he told me something I will never forget, in these exact words: "In 1848 I realized that if I wished to do a little good I had to stand aside from all politics. I've always kept to this policy, and so I've been able to achieve a little and avoid obstacles. Indeed, I've found help where I'd least have expected it." This rule is the fruit of experience and requires no comment.

Don Bosco saw clearly the dangers of party politics—the factionalism against which Madison warned Americans in *Federalist* no. 10. Taking one side or another would alienate some of his backers, could turn the government against him, and even risked disaster; he had just seen some of the king's favorite ministers completely disgraced.

But Don Bosco did take a stand when politics directly involved the Pope: "As a Catholic I stand by the Pope and support him unequivocally. ... If we Catholics say we are loyal to the Pontiff of Rome, then we have to be "loyal in all things" (Bonetti chronicle, July 7, 1862).

Don Bosco was well aware that the social world that encouraged political liberalism was not going to go away. Marx

and Engels published the *Communist Manifesto* in London in February 1848. Don Bosco, wrote Lemoyne,

was one of the few who 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.

Don Bosco [also] saw how wealth was becoming the monopoly of ruthless capitalists. Employers imposed unjust labor contracts 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. (BM IV, 55-56)

If responsible individuals and the Church did not rise to defend the dignity of the poor and the workers, others were ready to exploit them. Don Bosco was acting. Staying out of politics did not mean avoiding the real issues. (See T. Bosco BN, pp. 195-198)

See also Giuseppe Spalla, *Don Bosco e il suo ambiente socio-politico* (Turin: LDC, 1975); Stella, *ReCa*, chapter IV, "Storia e salvezza" [History and Salvation], pp. 59-100.

Chapter 52

Another Threat to the Oratories

A particular episode

On the Sunday following the festival just mentioned,¹ at two in the afternoon I was at recreation with the youngsters. One of them was reading *L'Armonia*² when the priests who usually came to give me a hand in the sacred ministry appeared in a body. They were decked out with medals and cockades and carried a tricolour flag. Worse, they had a copy of a truly immoral newspaper called *L'Opinione*.³

One of them, a man of respectable zeal and learning, came right up to me. Noticing the boy reading *L'Armonia* beside me, he sneered, "This is outrageous! It's time we finished with this rubbish." With that, he grabbed *L'Armonia* from the boy's hand, tore it into a thousand pieces, threw them on the ground, spat on them, and stomped all over them.

Having thus freely expressed his political fervour, he stood facing me. "Now this is a worthwhile paper," he said, thrusting *L'Opinione* in my face. "This paper and no other should be read by every true and honest citizen."

His manner of speaking and acting took my breath away. Not wishing to compound the scandal in a place where good example should be given, I limited myself to asking him and his colleagues to discuss such matters in private and amongst ourselves only.

"No, sir," he answered. "No longer should anything be either private or secret. Let everything be brought into the clear light of day."

At that moment the bell called us all to church. It summoned also one of those priests, who had been charged with preaching a short sermon on morality to the poor youngsters. But on this occasion it was really immoral.⁴ Liberty, emancipation, "and independence resounded through

the whole sermon.⁵

I was in the sacristy, impatient for a chance to speak and put an end to this disorder. But the preacher left the church immediately after finishing die sermon, and no sooner was benediction given than he invited priests and boys to join him. Heartily intoning national songs and passionately waving the flag, they marched straight to the Mount of the Capuchins. There a formal promise was pronounced not to go back to the Oratory again unless they were invited and received with all their national insignia.

While all this was going on, I had no way to express either my thoughts or my reasoning. But I was; not afraid of

anything that clashed with my duty. I let those priests know that they were strictly forbidden to come back to me. The boys then had to report to me one by one before they were readmitted to the Oratory. Everything ended well for me, None of the priests tried to come back.⁶ The boys apologised, pleading that they had been misled and promising obedience and discipline.⁷

Notes

1. That would have been March 5, 1848. Since *L'Armania* began to publish only in July 1848, evidently this event happened much later. According to Lemoyne (BM m, 291-294), a number of lesser incidents led up to the major one described here.-

2. The first Piedmontese reforms, promulgated in October 1847, included the relaxation of press censorship. A proliferation of political newspapers followed. Among the first was the reform-minded *Il Risorgimento*, published by Camillo Cavour. *L'Armonia* [Harmony] was a moderate Catholic paper founded by Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea (1800-1878), Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, Marquis Gustavo Cavour, and Father William Audisio. After Marquis Charles Emmanuel Birago of Bisce (1797-1862), Marquis Fabio Invrea, and Father James Margotti (1823-1887) joined them, the paper became more militant, even "intransigent" Father Margotti became its guiding spirit and a major force in Turinese journalism. It ceased publication in 1859, to be replaced by *Unita cattolica* [Catholic Unity], which Father Margotti directed until his death. (BMIII, 290; Stella, *EcSo*, p. 342)

3. *L'Opinione* (Opinion) was a lively and biting anticlerical paper founded in January 1848 by James Durando (1807-1894), brother of Father Mark Anthony Durando, C.M. After Durando, a veteran soldier, was given a command in the war against Austria, Massimo Cordero (1807-1879), marquis of Montezemolo, directed the paper. Durando was later a senator, government minister, and ambassador. A third Durando brother, John (1804-1869), was also a general and fought in the 1804-1869 and 1859 wars of independence and in Crimea. (Stella, *EcSo*, p. 342)

4. Don Bosco uses "immoral" in contrast to "moral" in the previous sentence. The sermon should have edified the boys; instead, it disturbed and confused them.

5. Ceria (San Giovanwi Basra, p. 96) writes-

There was a universal euphoria and a mania for things new. Not a few of the clergy, intolerant of discipline or inflamed by the writings of Gioberti, or naive and deluded, let themselves be carried away on the wave of the general enthusiasm.

But before judging these priests harshly, one should consider what they were trying to do: to show that the clergy understood and supported the people's aspirations for liberty; otherwise, the enemies of religion would take the lead —as, to a great extent, in fact happened. Stella presents the problem quite well in LW, pp. 84-87.

Father Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), an inactive priest, lived, taught, and published in exile from 1833 to 1848; eventually he died in exile. His *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1843), profoundly stirred Italian patriots by urging national unification under the presidency of the Pope. Gioberti recognized and upheld the importance of religion in private and public life. But the political impulse to make unification possible would have to come from Piedmont. The book's weakness was that it really ignored the problems of the Papal States and the Austrian occupation.

When he returned to Turin from exile in 1848, he immediately became involved in politics. He became president of the Chamber of Deputies and then prime minister-foreign minister for three months in 1848-1849; later he was ambassador to France (1849-1851). As a politician, he was egotistical, adventurous, and secretive at the same time —a formula for disaster.

See Harry Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento, 1790-1870* (New York: Longman, 1983), pp. 195-197; Arthur James White, *The Evolution of Modern Italy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), pp. 49, 71-76

6. Among the "liberal" priests who broke, at least temporarily, with Don Bosco at this time were Fathers Carpuno, Trivero, and Ponte. The fact that Father Ponte moved out of the Oratory on February 29 would indicate a break at that point, two days after the mass demonstration in *piazza Vittorio Veneto*. Fathers Carpano and Ponte were both working in Don Bosco's oratories later; so the temporary breach was healed in their cases, at least. But apparently it was not in some other cases. The ever-reliable Father Borel once again stood atone with Dun Bosco for a while. (Stella, LW, pp. 86, 109-110; *EfSo*, p. 176: BM111, 296-397, IV, 215-321, 254-266) In these circumstances, Don Bosco decided to organize another retreat for his best boys, like the one of 1847, "his heart set on gathering around him a nucleus of boys truly virtuous, fit to be 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' [cf. Matthew 5:13-16] among their companions-" With most of his older boys enticed away, he was able to assemble only thirteen retreatants, many of whom had also made the 1847 retreat. A new name in the list is Felix Reviglio. (BM III, 297-2(18; IV, 215-221. 254-266)

7. Almost every one of the older boys went with the "patriotic" priests, and so did most of the younger boys. The oratories had been drawing some five hundred youngsters every Sunday and feast day: fora few Sundays at the height of Turin's national ardor, only thirty or forty came. (BM ill, 296)

Chapter 53

Almost Alone Again

Fresh difficulties • A consolation • Father Rosmini and the Archpriest Peter De Gaudenzi

But I remained alone. On feast days I was obliged to begin hearing confessions early in the morning, to celebrate Mass at nine and preach afterwards; then (here were singing classes and literature lessons¹ until midday. At one in the afternoon there was recreation, and then catechism, vipers, an instruction, benediction, more recreation, singing, and school until night.

On weekdays,² I was obliged to work during the clay for my artisans," and to give *ginnasio* courses to a group of about ten youngsters. In the evening, lessons in French, arithmetic, plainchant, vocal music, piano, and organ all had to be attended to. I do not know how I was able to keep going. God helped me!

A great support and a great consolation to me in those days, however, was Doctor Borrelli. That marvelous priest, though burdened with his other important duties of the sacred ministry, tried to help me every moment he could. He frequently stole from his hours of sleep to come and hear the hoys' confessions. He denied rest to his weary body to come and preach to them. This critical situation lasted until I was able to get some relief from the seminarians Savio, Bellia, Vacchetta. But soon I was left without their help. For, following advice given them, they left without a word to me and entered the Oblates of Mary.⁴

On one of those feast days, I had a visit from two priests I think it appropriate to name.⁵ At the beginning of catechism period, I was totally occupied with arranging glasses when two clergymen arrived. They were coming with a humble, respectful bearing to commend me and seek information about the origin and system of the Oratory.

As my only answer, I said, "Would you be good enough to help me?" One I asked, "Would you come to the apse and take the big boys?" To the taller one I said, "I entrust to you this class, which is the wildest."

Convinced that they were excellent catechists, I asked one of them to give a short sermon to our boys, and the other to give benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Both accepted graciously.

The shorter priest was Father Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity.⁶ The other was Canon Archpriest De Gaudenzi, the present bishop of Vigevano. From that time, both of them were always kindly disposed towards our house; in fact they were benefactors.

Notes

1. I.e., lessons in reading, writing, and correctly speaking Italian (Desramaut, *SouAut*, p. 213, n. i).

2. Monday through Saturday.

3. In effect, Don Bosco was a one-man employment agency for his boys. He found work for them with reputable employers, worked out apprenticeship contracts (a typical example is found in BM IV, 205-206), accompanied them on their first day of work, and visited them every week at their jobs to make sure that they were being well treated and well trained and were fulfilling their responsibilities. If any were sick, he called on them at their lodgings and made sure that they had something to eat. In addition, he used those skills he had learned so long ago in Castelnuovo and Chieri: he made and mended their clothes and helped Mama Margaret prepare, cook, and serve meals for the boarders.

Teresio Bosco (SP, p. 201) writes of this era: Until 1844 specific regulations governed relations between apprentices, young shop clerks, and employers in Piedmont in order to protect the young men and women and to ensure that the employers taught them their trades responsibly and did not take advantage of them.

A royal edict of 1844, forced upon the king by the "liberals" in the name of progress, abolished these regulations. From then on, the young clerks and workers were on their own, helpless in their employers' hands (cf. Annando Castellani, *R beato Leonard/I Mtrialdo* (Rome, 1960), I, 468). At the age of eight or nine, they were thrown into jobs demanding twelve to fifteen hours a day, subject to abuse, scandal, and exploitation in the unhealthy environments of factories and shops.

Camillo Cavour, who favored unlicensed freedom for industry and commerce, declared in parliament in 1850, "Perhaps we are too little interested in knowing that in our mills the women and children are working almost one-third longer, if not twice as long, as they are in England" (*Discorsi Parlamentari* [Bologna, 1955], I, 342)

4. Around 1852 Ascanio Savio left Don Bosco to join the Oblates; Don Bosco predicted future problems, but he refused to listen. He became ill and had to leave the Oblates. He then became a prominent diocesan priest and was always a close friend of the Salesians. (BM IV, 342)

James Bellia (1834-1908), an outstanding singer, was one of the illustrious four first singled out by Don Bosco for special studies (1849). By the time he was sixteen, he was teaching less advanced students, as Don Bosco had hoped. He too left Don Bosco around 1852 and became a diocesan priest but remained friendly with Don Bosco. (BM III-IV; V, 382; VII, 405)

Stephen Vacchetta boarded at the Oratory at least in 1853-1854 (Stella, *EcSo*, p. 262). He joined the Oblates despite Don Bosco's prophecy that he would suffer a mental breakdown, which was fulfilled (BM IV, 342-343).

5. This was early in 1850.

6. Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855) was a priest from Trent, a patriot, philosopher, and theologian. Ordained in 1821, he sought to reconcile Catholicism with modern thought, both scientific and political. He was a pioneer in reviving the study of Saint Thomas Aquinas. His works and letters fill some seventy-three volumes.

A man of great learning, he was also a man of genuine piety and charity. In 1828 he founded the Institute of Charity (Rosminians), a religious congregation of men, to promote education and charitable works; at one point Don Bosco seriously considered linking his work with this society so as to assure the viability of the oratories. When he began to compose the

Salesian rule, he was much influenced by the Rosminians,

In his political writings Father Rosmini tried to counter the anticlericalism and anti-Catholicism that seemed to be taking over the Risorgimento. For a time he was quite close to Pope Pius IX, joining him in his exile at Gaeta. After two of his political books were condemned by the Congregation of the Index {1848}, he retired from public life; the specific condemnation was lifted in 1854, but some ideas ostensibly taken from various of his works were again censured in the 1880s.

See NCE, XII, 677-679; *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1981), VIII, 678-679; BM III-V.

Father Rosmini was still alive when Don Bosco wrote *La Storia d'Italia* (Turin: Paravia, 1855); so he is not mentioned in the first edition. But in the second and later editions, we can detect Don Bosco's affection for the great philosopher and man of charity:

Antonio Rosmini came from a rich and noble family of Rovereto, a small city near Trent. ... He was devout, and with the greatest diligence he pursued very difficult studies. . . , His great genius and his diligent study caused his teachers and his fellow students to marvel, and even then to forecast great things of him. When he was seventeen, he decided to become a priest. . . . Rosmini read and studied in Rovereto the major systems of philosophy then current in Italy and France. Sickened by all of them, he was inspired to try to unite reason and faith. So he studied theology. After he was ordained a priest, Pius VII urged him to devote himself to philosophy. He returned to his home town and studied with an energy and diligence that seemed prodigious. But the spirit of charity that he had shown from his youth remained with him in whatever he did. This was his intention in founding the Institute of Charity, popularly known as the Rosminians after their founder. ... At Milan he published various philosophical works. After reading one of them without knowing who had written it, Alessandro Manzoni confessed, "Heaven has given a great man to Italy and to the Church in the author of this book. . . ."

Among the many works of this outstanding philosopher and writer were some that were censured by the Church and put on the Index of Forbidden Books. For some authors this would have been cause for resentful indignation; but for Rosmini it was an opportunity to let the whole world know that his profound learning was coupled with the resolution and humility of a good Catholic. Without any hint of resentment, he answered, "With the sentiments of a son most devoted and obedient to the Holy See, I submit to the ban of the specified works purely and simply and completely, and I wish to assure the Holy Father and the Sacred Congregation of that." His diligent and profound study caused him to fall gravely ill in 1855.... Strengthened by the comforts of our Catholic religion, he died after a long illness on July 1, 1855, at the age of 58. (*La Storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù* (Turin, 1887), pp. 473-475)

Besides Don Bosco's respect for a benefactor and one whom he regarded as a saint, we may also observe something of his educational methods and aims: a simple style, specific details of time and place, little abstraction (e.g. concerning Father Rosmini's thought), the testimony of a great man (Manzoni), and the repetition of key ideas (study, piety, love for the Pope).

Don Bosco revered the man but kept a cool distance from his philosophy because it had been censured by Rome. This was one of the causes of his problems with Archbishop Gastaldi, who was a champion of Rosminianism (cf. BM XV). When speaking or writing to adults, even bishops, Don Bosco maintained the same ecclesial outlook that he promoted in his textbooks:

Father Rosmini proved himself to be a learned philosopher by the books he wrote, but he revealed himself to be a profoundly Catholic philosopher by his submission to the judgment of the Church. He showed his consistency by professing respect for the See of Peter in deeds as well as words. ... I do not recall ever seeing a priest say Mass as reverently and devoutly as Rosmini. He was visibly a man of deep faith, which was the source of his love, kindness, modesty and dignified demeanor (BM XIII, 8-9, quoting Don Bosco's letters).

Chapter 54

Buying the Pinardi House

Purchase of the Pinardi and Belleza houses • The year 1850

The year 1849 was painful and sterile, even though it had cost great fatigue and enormous sacrifice. But it was a preparation for 1850, which was less turbulent and much more fruitful.¹

Let us begin with the Pinardi house.² Those who had been dislodged from this house found it hard to take. "Isn't it disgusting," they went round saying, "that a house of entertainment and relaxation should fall into the hands of a priest, and an intolerant priest at that?"³

Pinardi, moreover, was [offered]⁴ a rent almost twice as great as ours. But he felt considerable remorse at getting more money by sinful means. So several times he had offered to sell [the house] if ever I wished to buy it. But his price was exorbitant. He was looking for eighty thousand francs for a building whose value must have been one-third that. God wished to show that he is the master of hearts, and he showed it here.

One feast day, while Doctor Borrelli was preaching, I was at the courtyard gate to prevent assemblies and disturbances⁵ when Mr Pinardi came along.

"Hello there," he said. "Don Bosco should buy my house."

"Hello there," I replied. "Mr. Pinardi should sell it to me for what it's worth, and I'll buy it at once."

"Of course I'll sell it for what it's worth."

"How much?"

"The price I've been asking."

"I couldn't think of it."

"Make me an offer."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because your price is excessive. I don't want to insult you."

"Offer what you wish."

"Will you sell it to me for what it's really worth?"

"On my word of honour, I will."

"Shake hands on it, and I'll make my offer."

"How much, then?"

I suggested to him, "I've had it valued by a friend of yours and mine.⁶ He assured me that in its present state we ought to be discussing [a price] between 26 and 28 thousand francs. And, to close the deal, I'll give you 30,000 francs."

"Will you throw in a brooch worth 500 francs as a gift for my wife?"

"I'll give her that," I said.

"Will you pay cash?"

"I'll pay cash."

"When can we sign the papers?"

"Whenever you please,"

"Two weeks from tomorrow. Payment in one installment,"

"Everything just as you wish."

"A fine of one hundred thousand francs on whoever backs out."

"Amen."

That transaction took only five minutes. But where was I to get that sum at such short notice? Then began a beautiful stretch of Divine Providence.⁷ That same evening, Fr. Caffasso did something unusual on a feast day; he came to visit me, and he told me that a devout lady, Countess Casazza-Riccardi,⁸ had entrusted him with ten thousand francs for me, to be spent on whatever I considered to be for God's greater glory. The next day a Rosminian who had come to Turin to invest 20,000 francs came to ask my advice in the matter. I proposed that they should lend it to us for the Pinardi contract.⁹ In that way the sum I was looking for was put together. The three thousand francs for related costs were donated by Chev. Cotta, in whose bank the much-desired deed was drawn up.¹⁰

Having thus secured ownership of that building, I turned my attention to the so-called Gardener's Inn. This was a tavern where pleasure-seekers used to gather on feast days. Music from accordions, fifes, clarinets, guitars, violins, basses and double-basses, and songs of every kind flowed therefrom all day long. Indeed it was not seldom that all those sounds issued at once in concert. As only a simple wall divided our courtyard from this building, the Bellezza house, it often happened that the hymns from our chapel were confused and drowned out by the din of the music and of the bottles of the Gardener's Inn. In addition there were the constant comings and goings between the Pinardi house and the Gardener's Inn,¹¹ One can easily imagine the disturbance this caused us, and the danger for our boys.

To free ourselves from this odious situation, I tried to buy the house, but I did not succeed. I tried to rent it, and the landlady was willing; but the tavernkeeper claimed exorbitant damages. Then I proposed to take over the whole tavern, pay the rent, and buy all the furnishings of the bedrooms, table service, cellar, kitchen, etc. By paying dearly for it all, I was able to become the manager of the premises. I changed their character immediately. In this way was destroyed the second seedbed of iniquity which up to then had existed in Valdocco alongside the Pinardi house."

Notes

1. For example, in September 1850 Don Bosco arranged a week's retreat for 109 men and boys at the diocesan minor summary at Giaveno, assisted by Father Robert Murialdo. Giaveno is a small town about seventeen miles west of Turin. The preachers were Canon Innocent Arduino (1806?-1880), the scholarly and zealous archpriest of the collegiate church in that town, Father Stephen Giorda, pastor in the village of Poirino (about thirteen miles southeast of Turin), and Don Bosco himself. The 109 participants numbered 52 boys aged sixteen or seventeen, 26 aged eighteen or nineteen, 18 young men between twenty and twenty-three years old, 6 men in their late twenties, 4 in their thirties, and 3 in their forties. The teenagers included James Bellia, Joseph Buzzetti, Caesar Chiala (who became a Salesian in 1873), Charles Gastini, Felix Reviglio. Michael Run, Angela Savio (one of the original eighteen Salesians and the first economist general), and seminarian Ascanio Savio. (BM IV, 78-82, 523-524).

2. As we have already seen, at first Don Bosco subrented the whole house from Pancrazio Soave. From April 1, 1849, he rented them directly from the owner. He had wanted to buy house for quite some time.

3. Don Bosco is too delicate say directly that these last tenants prostitutes.

4. Ceria's addition to the text.

5. From people in the street and at the Bellezza house. This was in January 1851.

6. A young engineer named Anthony Spezia (d. 1892), who lived nearby. He later designed the Church of Mary Help of Christians, donating his services.

7. Pinardi's price came down because he was fed up with the fights and other disturbances at the Gardener's Inn; the police often summoned him as a witness (BM IV, 170; cf. Stella, *EcSo*, p. 84). That did not solve Don Bosco's problem. His blind faith in God's Providence is remarkable. He hesitated not an instant in his bargaining with Pinardi. He would not spend Providence's funds blindly, but once he had done his part (getting a fair price here), he knew that God would do the rest.

8. According to the Oratory records, she was a regular benefactress of Don Bosco's work at least between 1854 and 1857 (Stella, *EcSo*, p. 379).

9. Don Bosco had not yet met Father Rosmini, but he had already written to him about possible cooperative use of the field that he had bought in June 1850 from the archdiocesan seminary (see chapter 47, note 10). When this opportunity offered itself, he hastened to suggest that they cooperate to purchase the Pinardi house, and Father Rosmini graciously agreed (letter of January 10, 1851, from Father Charles Gilardi, procurator general of the Institute of Charity, BM IV, 170-171). On January 15, 1851, Don Bosco wrote back (in part):

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. (BM IV, r72)

Don Bosco was to pay four percent interest on the 20,000 lire; Father Rosmini advised him that it need not be paid until he asked for it. Indeed, he never asked for either interest or capital. Nevertheless Don Bosco arranged his accounts every year with Father Gilardi and finally cleared the debt.

10. Chevalier Joseph Anthony Cotta (1785-1868) was a distinguished banker, a senator, a philanthropist involved in many of the same charities as Chevalier Mark Gonella, and a major benefactor of the Oratory until his death. The related costs amounted to 3500 lire. (Stella, *EcSo*, passim; BM IV, 172)

The deed, signed on February 19, 1851, shows that Don Bosco actually paid 28,500 lire for the house and property. The purchasers were listed as Fathers John Bosco, John Borel, Robert Murialdo, and Joseph Cafasso. (BM IV, 172). Fathers Borel and Murialdo withdrew from the arrangement on January 26, 1853; that left Don Bosco and Father Cafasso joint owners and jointly responsible for the Rosminian debt. Father Cafasso gave his share to Don Bosco on October 10, 1856. (BM IV, 409; Giraudi, p. 99)

11. The only way to get to the Bellezza house was by way of via della Giardiniera, which meant there was constant traffic of merry-makers past the Pinardi house to their place of enjoyment, and their tipsy return.

12. Both moral and physical dangers to the Oratory boys were involved in the tavern's proximity. On one occasion, for instance, a couple of military officers carried their drunken swordplay to the chapel door before Don Bosco was able to intervene. (BM II, 421-422)

When the widow Bellezza categorically refused to sell her house, Don Bosco bought up the innkeeper's lease at great expense in 1853 and then arranged with Mrs. Bellezza to rent the entire building at 950 lire per year in a three-year lease through September 30, 1856. The lease was then renewed for another three years at 800 lire per year. Don Bosco sublet the house to tenants of a better character for a time; eventually Mrs. Bellezza herself moved into the house. All told, Don Bosco spent some 20,000 lire to get rid of the Gardener's Inn and its evils. (BM IV, 423-428)

Mrs. Bellezza died in 1883, and Don Bosco was finally able to buy the house and land in February 1884. Her heirs wanted 180,000 lire, but Don Bosco beat them down to 100,000. His generous French benefactor Count Louis Anthony Colle of

Toulon (d. 1888) donated the money (Giraudi, p. 236; BM XV, 75-76).

The Salesians used the premises for various purposes until the house was demolished in 1922 to make room for the new workshops for the technical courses. Part of the land became a section of the playground for the festive oratory.

Chapter 55

A Chapel and a Lottery

*The Church of St. Francis de Sales*¹

Freed from the moral vexations of the Pinaridi house and the Gardener's Inn, we had to think about a more decorous church for our worship, better suited to our growing needs.² The old one, it is true, had been considerably enlarged; it was situated where the superiors' refectory is now (1875).³ But it was uncomfortable on account of its capacity and its lack of height. To enter one had to go down two steps; as a result in winter and when it rained we were flooded out. In summer the heat and the bad odors suffocated us. Few feast days passed without some pupil fainting and being carried out limp. So it was necessary to start a building more proportionate to the number of youngsters, better ventilated, and more healthy.

Chev. Blachier drew up plans for what we now know as the Church of St Francis and the building that stands round the courtyard beside the church.⁴ The contractor was Mr. Frederick Bocca.⁵

When the foundations had been dug, the cornerstone was blessed on 20 July 1851.⁶ Chev. Joseph Cotta placed the stone in position; Canon Moreno, royal almoner,⁷ blessed it. The renowned Father Barrera,⁸ moved by the sight of such a large crowd, stood upon a mound of dirt and improvised a marvelously opportune speech. He began with these exact words:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the cornerstone which has just been 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 will find refuge; it symbolises also that this work is founded on a cornerstone which is Jesus Christ, against which the enemies of the faith will hurl themselves in vain."⁹ Then he proved both points, to the great pleasure of his audience, who thought that the eloquent preacher was inspired.

Here is the record. The record of that solemn occasion was written down.¹⁰

Such well-publicised occasions attracted youngsters from all over. Many turned up at all hours of the day; others begged for shelter. That year their number passed fifty,¹¹ and we began some workshops in the house; for we were finding it ever more ruinous for the boys to go out to work in the city.¹²

The sacred building for which we longed was beginning to rise above ground, when I realised that my funds were completely exhausted. I had collected 35 thousand francs by selling some property,¹³ but these disappeared like ice in the sun. The treasury granted us nine thousand francs,¹⁴ but they were to be turned over only when the work was nearing completion.

Bishop Peter Losana of Biella¹⁵ realised that the new building and that whole institution especially benefited the bricklayer apprentices from Biella.¹⁶ He sent out a circular letter to his parish priests encouraging them to help

with contributions. The circular read thus:

Biella, 13 September 1851

Reverend and dear Father:

That devout and outstanding priest Don Bosco, inspired by a truly angelic charity, has undertaken to bring together on feast days as many boys as he meets, abandoned and scattered through the squares and streets of Turin, especially in the densely populated neighbourhoods between Borgo Dora and Martinetto.¹⁷ He has undertaken to provide accommodation for them in a suitable place, so that they might enjoy honest recreation as well as Christian instruction and upbringing. Such has been his holy zeal that the existing chapel has become too small for their needs; in fact, it does not accommodate more than a third of the six hundred and more boys who now flock there. Driven by love to accomplish so much good, he has set

Chapter 56

Woe to Turin!

The powder magazine blows up • Gabriel Fascia • The new church is blessed

While the items were on public show, the powder magazine near the Cemetery of St Peter in Chains blew up (26 April 1852).¹ The concussion that followed was horrible and violent. Many buildings near and far were shaken, and serious damage was reported from it.² Of the workmen, 28 were killed. That the disaster was not even worse was due to a certain sergeant named Sacco, who at great personal risk prevented the fire from reaching a bigger supply of powder.³ This could have destroyed the whole city of Turin. The Oratory house, which was badly constructed, suffered serious damage; the deputies sent us an offering of 300 francs to help repair it.

In connection with this incident, I would like to recall a fact which refers to one of our young artisans, Gabriel Fascia. The previous year he fell ill and was at death's door.⁴ At the height of his delirium he kept saying over and over, "Woe to Turin! Woe to Turin!"

His companions asked him, "Why?"

"Because it's threatened by a terrible disaster."

"What land of disaster?"

"A horrible earthquake," he answered.

"When's it coming?"

"Next year. Oh, woe to Turin on 26 April."

"What should we do?"

"Pray to St Aloysius to protect the Oratory and those who live in it."

It was then that, at the request of all the youngsters of our house, a *Pater, Ave, and Gloria*, addressed to this saint to our common morning and evening prayers.⁵ In fact, relative to the danger, our house suffered slight damage, and there were no injuries to our boarders.⁶

Meanwhile, the work on the Church of St Francis de Sales went on with incredible speed, and in the space of months it was completed. On 20 June 1852, it was cited for divine worship with a solemnity that was unique than rare amongst us.⁷

At entrance to the courtyard an arch of colossal - was erected. On it in outsize letters was written: *of gold — we shall write on every side—may this day*

From every side echoed these verses which had been put by Maestro Joseph Bianchi, of happy memory:

Sooner shall the setting sun

Return to its rising,

Sooner shall every river

Return to its source,

That shall the memory

Of this beautiful day

Be forgotten amongst us.⁸

The following words were recited and sung with ardent enthusiasm:

As a bird flits from branch to branch,

Goes searching for trusty shelter, etc,⁹

Many newspapers reported this celebration.¹⁰

On 1 June that same year a *Mutual Aid Society* was established¹¹ to stop our boys from enrolling in the so-called Workers Society, which right from its start showed that its principles were anything but religious.¹² One may refer the booklet we published; it served its purpose.¹³ Our aid society later converted into an affiliated conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society,¹⁴ which is still functioning.¹⁵

The church was built but needed all kinds of furnishings. Civic charity did not let us down. Comm. Joseph Dupre undertook to decorate a chapel dedicated to St. Aloysius and buy a marble altar which still adorns the church. Another benefactor undertook to fit out the choir loft, where a small organ was set up for the day boys. Mr. Michael Scannagatti¹⁶ bought a complete set of candlesticks; Marquis Fassati¹⁷ undertook to supply our Lady's altar and provided a set of bronze candlesticks, and later the statue of our Lady.¹⁸ Fr Caffasso paid all the expenses incurred for the pulpit. The high altar was provided by Doctor Francis Vallauri¹⁹ and completed by his son Fr Peter, a priest.

Thus in a short time the new church was fitted with everything needed for both private and solemn ceremonies.

Notes

1. The magazine consisted of a powder factory and three warehouses. It was located just east of Saint Peter's, not far north of the Cottolengo, and a quarter of a mile northeast of the Oratory.

2. The explosion was heard fifteen miles away (BM IV, 267).

3. The brave soldier was Paul Sacchi (d. 1884), sergeant of artillery. Though injured in the first two blasts, he risked his life to keep the flames from reaching the third warehouse, which contained eight hundred barrels of powder. The grateful city of Turin named a street in his honor along the west side of the Porta Nuova railroad station.

4. Fassio, thirteen years old, boarded with Don Bosco. He was an apprentice blacksmith. Don Bosco had predicted his death. (BM IV, 276) In some of the Oratory registers he is called Fazio (Stella. *KcSo*, pp. 177, 561). Don Bosco, still spelling his name Fascio, called him a "model of virtue" in the preface to the life of Dominic Savio (Aronica ed., p. 24; O'Brien ed., p. vii).

5. A prayer to Saint Aloysius followed by an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be remained part of morning prayers in Salesian communities until Saint Dominic Savio was canonized in 1954. At that time the prayers were simplified and a prayer to Saint Dominic replaced the one to Saint Aloysius.

6. To commemorate the grace of the Oratory's safety. Don Bosco printed five thousand copies of a most unusual picture of Our Lady of Consolation, the city, the Oratory boys, and the exploding magazine (see Ceria MO, opposite p. 236).

7. The church was completed and consecrated before the lottery was finished!

8. Lemoyne called it a "delightful motet" (BM IV, 306). Ceria had another opinion: "I hope the music was better than the verse" (MO, p. 233) —even though the verse was Don Bosco's! (BM IV, 305, 533)

9. The opening lines of an ode which Don Bosco composed to relate the adventures of the wandering Oratory before it found its permanent home at Pinardi's house, It was set to music and taught to the boys so that they could sing it in honor of their benefactors, the honored guests at the dedication of the church. (BM IV, 303) The sixteen stanzas are reproduced in BM IV, 530-532 — 111 Italian.

10. BM IV, 307-309, reproduces the entire report from a journal called *La Patria* [Fatherland], June zi, 1852. *L'Armonia* cov-

ered the story in its June 23 issue.

11. Don Bosco had already organized it on July 1, 1850. It was probably the first union established to look after the interests of Catholic workers. Its regulations are printed in BM IV, 518-520. To join, one first had to belong to the Company of Saint Aloysius; union dues were a soldo a week, collected on Sunday. Members who fell ill received fifty centesimi a day in assistance "until their complete recovery" (regulation no. 4).

12. Piedmontese workers organized a number of mutual aid societies, starting with one among carpenters in 1822. Their purposes were to help one another in times of illness or financial difficulty and to stand together when dealing with employers. Many priests and some bishops (including Bishop Losana of Biella and the bishops of Savona and Asti) grasped the urgency of such workers' associations and supported them. (T. Bosco, *Mem*, p. 200, n. 2)

Nevertheless, not many years later Saint Leonard Murialdo lamented, "The mutual aid societies say that they will keep young workers out of politics and are not opposed to the Catholic faith; but they propagate disrespect for priests, religious indifference, and communism" (Armando Castellani, *il beato Leonardo Murialdo*, I, 566-567).

13. The booklet was titled *Societa di Mutuo Succorsodli alcuni individui della Compagnia di S. Luigi errata nell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* [Mutual Aid Society of various individuals of the Company of Saint Aloysius, set up at the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales] (Turin: Speirani, 1850). Behind its title page one reads the motto, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). It contains the regulations and membership form and served as the membership card. The society flourished until 1857, when it changed its form, as Don Bosco will describe next.

14. Founded by Frederick Ozanam (1813-1853) at Paris in 1833, this association of laymen and women has as its aim to serve the poor through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It has become a worldwide organization, with 4700 chapters in the United States as of 1988.

The first chapter of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Turin was established on May 13, 1850. Don Bosco had a big hand in founding it. Some of the most prominent citizens of Turin were members, e.g. the counts of Collegno, Count Cays, and patriot-author Silvio Pellico. In 1854 there were 220 members. (BM IV, 48-51; Stella, *EcSo*, p. 477). Don Bosco frequently gave conferences to the members. These were published in book form: *The Christian Trained in Conduct and Courtesy*, trans. Silvester Adriano, ed. Margaret L. MacPherson (Paterson: Salesiana Publishers, 1956).

In 1854 Don Bosco established a junior chapter of the society for the older Oratory boys; two years later the society's supreme council recognized the junior chapter as an affiliated unit. This was an exception to the society's bylaws, for membership was normally restricted to adults. The rules of the Oratory chapter are found in BM V, 310-311.

15. When Don Bosco wrote this last part of his *Memoirs* in 1875, the Oratory conference was still in operation, though no longer with official recognition (BM V, 311). It died out some time later at an unknown date.

16. Scanagatti was one of Father Cafasso's regular penitents; he donated 314 lire toward the church —for the candlesticks, presumably — and served on the executive committee for Don Bosco's lottery. He helped Don Bosco as either a catechist or an assistant at the boys' recreation. (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 87, 162, 417)

17. Marquis Dominic Fassati Roero San Severino (1804-1878), his wife Mary (1824-1905), and their family were devout Catholics, very involved in public charity. They ardently supported Don Bosco, and their privileged positions at court were often useful to him. (See MB XX.)

18. This statue, which is still in its niche in the Church of Saint Francis de Sales, has a story behind it. On April 18, 1853, the solid silver, three-hundred-pound statue of the Madonna was stolen from the Church of Our Lady of Consolation. A wooden

statue was put in as a temporary replacement. Later, when a silver-plated statue was provided for the shrine, Marquis Fassati acquired the wooden one and gave it to the Church of Saint Francis de Sales.

19. One of the Oratory's medical doctors. When he died in 1856, Don Bosco, grateful for all the favors the good doctor had provided for the boys, gave him "a solemn and most devout funeral" in the Church of Saint Francis de Sales (*L'Armonia*, September 12). His son Peter (1829-1900), a good and pious priest, always remained a cordial friend of Don Bosco.

Chapter 57

The New Building Collapses

The year 1852

The new church, complete with sacristy and bell tower,¹ enabled us to provide for those youngsters who wished to attend sacred services on feast days, the night school, and day classes too. But how were we to provide for the multitude of poor children who were appealing for shelter all the time? This was the more acute because the explosion of the powder magazine the year before² had almost ruined our ancient building. In that moment of supreme need, we decided to build a new wing on the house.³ In order to continue using the old building, we began the new one on a site a bit apart. It stretched from the end of the present refectory to the print foundry.⁴

The builders made rapid progress.⁵ Although autumn was already well along, they reached roof level. In fact, all the trusses had been put in place, all the crosspieces nailed in, and the tiles were stacked up on the beams ready to be laid down neatly. Then a torrential rain interrupted all work. Water poured down for days and nights, flowing from the beams and the crosspieces; it wore and washed away the fresh mortar, leaving the walls only of soaked bricks and stones.

Around midnight, when we were all in bed, we heard a loud rumble which became louder and more frightening by the moment. Everyone woke up⁶ and, completely ignorant of what was happening, utterly terrified, wrapped in blankets and sheets, ran from the dormitory and fled in confusion with no idea where to go, with only the idea of putting distance between himself and the danger, as one imagine. The noise and the chaos got worse. The roof framework and the tiles mixed with the wall materials as everything collapsed into ruins with a mighty roar.

Since that construction had stood against the wall of the lower, older building, we feared that everything lay flattened under the pile of rubble. But, as it proved, the only harm was the horrendous noise, which caused no personal injury.

City engineers came to inspect things in the morning. When Chev. Gabbetti⁷ saw another pillar cracked at the base and leaning over a dormitory, he exclaimed: "You should go and give thanks to Our Lady of Consolation. Only a miracle is keeping that pillar up. If it had fallen, it would have buried in rubble Don Bosco and the thirty boys sleeping in the dormitory below."⁸

As the building was still unfinished, most of the loss was the builder's.⁹ Our damage was estimated at 10,000 francs. The accident took place at midnight on 2 December 1852.¹⁰

Amid the continual sad afflictions which befall the poor human race, there is always the loving hand of the Lord to lighten our misfortunes. If the disaster had happened a couple of hours earlier, it would have buried our night school pupils. They finished their lessons at ten, and when they came out of their classrooms, about 300 of them, they used to run round the empty building under construction for half an hour or so. A little later the collapse occurred.

Not only did the advanced season no longer allow work on our ruined house to be completed; we could not even begin to rebuild part of it. In the meantime, who would provide for us in such straits? What could we do for so many boys with such limited facilities, and these half-ruined? We made a virtue of necessity. After the walls of the old church had been reinforced, it became a dormitory. We then transferred classes to the new church, which was therefore a church on feast days, a school during the week.

The bell tower beside the Church of St Francis de Sales was also built in this year. Our benefactor Mr Michael Scannagatti presented us with an elegant set of candlesticks for the high altar, which are still one of the most beautiful furnishings of this church."

Notes

1. The Church of Saint Francis de Sales, the first building put up in Valdocco by Don Bosco, was the heart of Oratory life for sixteen years (June 1852 to June 1868). The reason is obvious: there boys and Salesians celebrated the Holy Eucharist every morning, gathered before It for prayer at regular times during the day, and came individually for frequent, private moments of meditation or intercession.

Part of the old chapel served as a sacristy from 1852 to 1856, when a room in the new building that replaced the Pinardi house was turned to that purpose. A small door in our Lady's chapel gave passage from church to sacristy. In 1860 Charles Buzzetti built a sacristy on the gospel side of the church.

The modest bell tower was built on the left side of the church between December 1852 and February 1853. Count Charles Cays bought another, louder bell to add to the small one that had been used with the Pinardi chapel. In 1929 both bells were recast into the present bell.

Count Cays of Gillette and Caselette (1813-1882) was a leader in many of Turin's charitable associations, a close friend of Don Bosco for many years, and a member of parliament (1857-1860). His wife died in 1845; he became a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained in 1878. (*Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, p. 78; Stella, *EcSo*, passim; MB XX)

2. The explosion was in April 1852.

3. As was mentioned in chapter 55, note 4, this new building project was part of Chevalier Blachier's original design when he planned the new church.

The new building was to have three floors, an attic, a basement, and porticos. Its west end was at the east end of the Pinardi house; it began where the central stairway is today. It was to run to the wall on the east, marking the property line between Don Bosco's land and the Filippi brothers'. At that end, each story would have an additional room jutting out to the south, more or less in symmetry with the church at the opposite end of the Pinardi house. Each floor of the east-west section was to be divided lengthwise by a corridor, with rows of rooms on each side of it.

The complete plan (including replacement of the Pinardi house) called for a main (east-west) section measuring 13¹ feet by 37; the north-south wall was to be 41 feet by 29; and the whole structure was to be 52.5 feet high.

When several of the boys, including John Cagliero (1838-1926), the future cardinal, objected to the narrow dimensions of the

classrooms, the low ceiling in the attic (which was to be a dormitory), and other inconveniences, Don Bosco pointed to his limited means and then added that these drawbacks made it unlikely that the government would ever want to confiscate it, as it had other church property. (BM IV, 327-328)

4. What Don Bosco refers to as the refectory is now the Chapel of the Resurrection, site of the Pinardi chapel (see chapter 55, note 3). Don Bosco intended to preserve the Pinardi house, but by 1856 he changed his mind.

In the 1870's the typesetting section of the printery was in a large ground-floor room under Don Bosco's quarters. Today the room is a gift shop.

5. The contractor was Frederick Bocca, who had done the church. Work began sometime in mid-summer and was well advanced by the time Don Bosco took fifty boys with him for a retreat at Giaveno in September (BM IV, 329).

6. As it turned out, this was not true. On the second floor of the Pinardi house, three of the seminarians (Louis Viale, Felix Reviglio, and Stephen Vacchetta) slept through the entire disaster. All together there were thirty-eight residents: boys, seminarians, Mama Margaret, and Don Bosco. One of the seminarians was Michael Rua, who had come to live at the Oratory in September 1852 and had taken the cassock at Becchi on October 3, together with Joseph Rocchietti. Among the boys were John Cagliero and John Baptist Francesia. (BM IV, 337-338, 356-357)

7. Chevalier Charles Gabetti, municipal building inspector.

8. Don Bosco's bedroom was at the east end of the Pinardi house, closest to the ruins. In one way the collapse of the building was providential. During some reconstruction work in 1928, the main walls of this first house were found to be almost entirely of stone and mortar with very little lime. As Giraudi put it, "The building which collapsed must have been built of even worse material. Divine Providence saw to the disaster so that the Valdocco Oratory might be founded not on sand, but on solid foundations" (p. 124, n. i).

9. In more ways than one: the city's investigation found Bocca at fault and fined him. One may notice Don Bosco's sensitivity in not mentioning his name —a courtesy hardly earned by the man's incompetence and/or fraudulent behavior. In March 1853, when it was time to resume work, Don Bosco was ordered to hire a licensed building contractor to undertake the project. (BM IV, 416; Giraudi, p. 124)

10. i.e., between December 1 and 2.

11. Don Bosco mentioned the bell tower in the first line of the chapter and Scanagatti's gift in the previous chapter.

Chapter 58

Continued Growth

As soon as the weather permitted, we began promptly to rebuild the ruined house. Work went ahead rapidly, and by October the building was finished.² Because we so badly needed room, we rushed at once to move in. The room which I first took is the one which, by God's grace, I still occupy.³ The classrooms, refectory, and dormitory were permanently established, and the number of our pupils went up to sixty-five.⁴

Various benefactors continued to look after us. Chev. Joseph Dupre at his own expense presented a marble altar rail for the St Aloysius chapel; he adorned the altar and had the whole chapel stuccoed. Marquis Dominic Fassati gave us the small altar rail for the altar of our Lady and a set of bronze gilt candlesticks for that altar. Count Charles Cays, our outstanding benefactor, prior of the Company of St Aloysius for the second time,⁵ paid a long-standing debt for us, twelve hundred francs owed the baker, who was beginning to give us problems with our bread deliveries.⁶ He bought a bell, which was the object of a charming ceremony, Dr. Gattino, our parish priest of happy memory, came to bless it; then he took the opportunity to give a little sermon to the many people gathered from the city.⁷ After the religious services, a comedy was presented which everyone enjoyed. The count also gave us a handsomely decorated baklachino,⁸ which we still use, and other furnishings for the church.

With the new church thus furnished with what was essential for worship, we were finally able for the first time to fulfill the shared desire to celebrate the forty hours devotion.⁹ Though the church was poorly enough appointed, there was an extraordinary assembly of the faithful. To comply with their religious fervor and to provide all of them with an opportunity to satisfy their devotion, when the forty hours finished we followed with an octave of preaching, which was literally spent hearing the confessions of the crowds.

That unexpected attendance was our reason in the years that followed for continuing to organise the forty hours devotion with regular preaching; many people came to receive the holy sacraments and attend the other practices of piety.¹⁰

Notes

1. At this point Don Bosco stops numbering his chapters.

2. This is the building which extends from the central stairway up to and including the wing parallel to the Church of Saint Francis de Sales. Of the wing the only part built at this time was the part that directly faces the church, i.e. as far as the projecting pilaster before the last pair of windows on each floor. The ell was doubled in width in 1861 after the purchase of the Filippi property on the east side, and the front was extended in 1876.

3. Don Bosco took a small room on the top floor, which until 1861 served as both bedroom and office. When the ell was widened, it became his reception room—for by then he had visitors constantly—and he moved into a new room behind (to

the east of) it. He moved still again in 1876 when the building was extended, so that he had a reception room, an office, and a bedroom. All of these rooms, as well as what was the boys' dormitory, are now a museum.

4. For the school year 1853-1854. By summer's end in 1854, they were up to seventy-six (Giraud and Biancardi, p. 215). Dominic Savio entered the Oratory at the end of October 1854.

5. The Regulations for the Company of Saint Aloysius provided for its guidance "by a spiritual director, who must be a priest, and by a prior, who must be a layman." The prior was elected by the members of the company for a one-year term and could be re-elected. (BM III, 459) Lemoine writes, "The prior was often a young man of a distinguished family. He was treated with great deference when he arrived, seated at a place of honor during the religious services, and given an ovation on leaving." (BM V, 26) He had not only oversight responsibilities but —especially later —the honor of presiding at feasts and providing some of the treats connected with them.

6. One could write a book with nothing but stories of how Divine Providence rescued Don Bosco from such situations. Many of these episodes are far more dramatic than anything he has narrated in his memoirs. For examples see BM XV, 400-401, 443. The most dramatic episode, of course, was the multiplication of breakfast rolls one morning in November 1860, right outside the Church of Saint Francis de Sales as the boys filed out after Mass (BM VI, 453-455); a plaque on the outside wall of the church marks the place today.

7. Valdocco, though just a few blocks from the center of Turin, was beyond the old city wall and was therefore "out in the country."

8. A portable canopy carried over the Blessed Sacrament in processions.

9. The solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for forty consecutive hours, with appropriate scripture readings, sermons, hymns, and silent prayer. Under current Church law, exposition is not permitted during the celebration of Mass, at least in the same church or chapel.

10. One may still witness this extraordinary piety during the festivities of the solemnity of Mary Help of Christians in her basilica on May 23-24. These celebrations draw thousands of men and women, young and old, from all over Italy.

Chapter 59

The Catholic Readings

That year [1853], in March, periodic publication of the *Catholic Readings* began. In 1847, when the emancipation of the Protestants and the Jews took place,² it became necessary to put some antidote into the hands of the Christian faithful in general, and of the young³ in particular. From that act it appeared that the government meant only to grant freedom to those beliefs and not to harm Catholicism. But the Protestants did not understand it in this light. They produced propaganda with all the means available to them. They distributed three newspapers (*La buona Novella, La luce Evangelica, Il rogantino piemontese*)⁴ and many books both biblical and nonbiblical. They gave assistance freely, found employment, supplied work, offered money, clothing, and food to those who came to their classes or attended their lectures or simply joined them at church. They used all these means to make proselytes.⁵

The government was aware of all this and allowed it to go on; with its silence it gave them effective protection. The Protestants, moreover, were organized and furnished with every means both moral and material. Catholics, on the other hand, had relied on the civil law for protection and defense up till then; they possessed a few newspapers, a few classic or learned works, but no newspapers or books to put into the hands of the working classes.

At that time, advised by necessity, I began to draw up some summaries about the Catholic Church, and then some posters entitled "Reminders for Catholics." I handed them out to both children and adults, especially at missions and retreats. These handouts and pamphlets were eagerly welcomed, and I had soon given away thousands and thousands of them. This convinced me of the need for some popular means of spreading knowledge of the fundamental Catholic doctrines. So a pamphlet entitled "Advice to Catholics" was printed.⁶ Its aim was to put Catholics on the alert lest they let themselves be caught in the nets of the heretics. Its distribution was extraordinary; in two years it sold more than two hundred thousand copies. This pleased the good, but it enraged the Protestants, who had begun to think that they had the field of evangelization all to themselves.⁷

It was then that I began to see that the matter of preparing and printing books for the people was urgent, and I laid out plans for the so-called *Catholic Readings*? When a few issues were prepared for publication, I wanted to get them printed at once. But an obstacle loomed up, as unexpected as it was unforeseen. No bishop wanted to take the lead. Those from Vercelli, Biella, and Casale refused, saying that it was dangerous to tangle with the Protestants.⁹

Archbishop Fransoni was then in exile at Lyons. He approved and recommended [the project], yet no one was willing even to undertake the ecclesiastical review.¹⁰ Canon Joseph Zappata,¹¹ the vicar general, was the only one who acceded to the archbishop's request and reviewed half of one issue. Then he sent the manuscript back to me with this comment: "Take your work. I can't see my way to signing it. The cases of Ximenes and Palma* are far too recent. You challenge and take the enemy head on, but I prefer to sound the retreat before it's too late."

With the vicar general's consent, I explained everything to the archbishop. His reply was accompanied by a letter to Bishop Moreno of Ivrea,¹³ asking that prelate to take under his patronage the publication I was planning and to assist it through his censor and with his authority. Bishop Moreno readily agreed. He delegated his own vicar general, the canon lawyer Pinoli,¹⁴ to act as censor, stipulating that the censor's name was not to be published.

A programme was quickly put together,¹⁵ and the first issue of *The Catholic Instructed, etc.*¹⁶ came out on March 1,

Notes

1. In Italian the title was *Letture Cattoliche*

2. Emancipation was granted in 1848. See chapter 48.

3. *Gioventu*, i.e. the young of both sexes.

4. These names mean *The Good News*, *The Light of the Gospel*, and *The Cheeky Piedmontese*.

5. Don Bosco had to contend with all these activities in Porta Nuova, where the Waldensians made their headquarters.

6. *Avvisi ai Cattolici* [Advice to Catholics] was printed in Turin by Speirani in 1850. The thirty-two-page pamphlet dealt with six topics: 1. Religion in general. 2. There is only one true religion. 3. Heretical churches lack the divine character. 4. The heretical churches are not the Church of Jesus Christ. 5. A reply to the Protestant argument: "We believe in Christ and in the Gospel, and therefore we are in the true Church." 6. Protestants agree that Catholics are in the true Church.

He later added three other topics: 1. The head of the Catholic Church. 2. Papal infallibility. 3. The advantages of defining papal infallibility. (The First Vatican Council defined this teaching as a doctrine of Catholic faith in 1870.)

The pamphlets were printed with one of two covers: either a picture of Christ giving the keys to Saint Peter (cf. Matthew 16:13-19), or one of the papal coat of arms; below the picture was the motto, "Where the successor of Saint Peter is, there is the Church of Jesus Christ —Saint Ambrose." On the inside was written, "Our pastors unite us with the Pope, and the Pope unites us with God."

In 1851, Don Bosco inserted "Advice to Catholics" in his new edition of *The Companion of Youth*, entitling the section "Fundamentals of the Catholic Religion."

The third printing of "Advice to Catholics" announced the launching of the *Catholic Readings*.

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7. Don Bosco sent a hundred copies of "Advice" to his former seminary professor Father John Baptist Appendini (1807-1892), who had become pastor in Villastellone and requested them. Don Bosco warned him:

If you get involved in these booklets you're sacrificing any support you might have from *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, and maybe from others. This booklet, tiny as it is, is a nuisance to them, and they would just love to burn any copies they can get hold of. (cf. BM IV, 159)

La Gazzetta del Popolo [The People's Gazette] was one of the more virulent anticlerical papers that sprang up in 1848 with the lifting of censorship.

8. He first conceived the idea in 1850 (BM III, 380). It took him several years to develop concrete plans for financing the project, finding authors and translators, and attracting subscribers and other supporters.

9. The archbishop of Vercelli was Alexander d'Angennes (1781-1869); John Peter Losana was bishop of Biella (see chapter 55); the bishop of Casale Monferrato from 1848 to 1867 was Louis Nazari di Calabiana (1808-1893), the future archbishop of Milan. Events, without much delay, were to prove that their fear was well founded (see chapters 60-63).

10. Until Vatican II, books on any religious or moral topic had to be submitted to the local bishop for certification that they did not contain any opinion or teaching contrary to the Catholic faith. This was indicated on the reverse of the title page as the *nihil obstat* from the reviewer (the ecclesiastical censor) and the *imprimatur* from the bishop. Catechetical books still require such review.

11. Canon Zappata (1796-1883) had many dealings with Don Bosco, especially between 1850 and 1867, when the see of Turin was effectively vacant.

12. Both these clerics were assassinated in 1848. Father Ximenes published *Il Labaro* [The Standard], not *U Contemporaneo* [Current Events]. Bishop Palma, one of the Pope's secretaries and the editor of *Il Labaro*, was standing near Pius IX in the Quirinal Palace during the rioting that followed the assassination of Count Pellegrino Rossi, the papal prime minister, in November 1848; when the mob began to fire on the palace, the bishop was fatally wounded. A few days later the Pope fled to Gaeta. The Quirinal Palace was the seat of papal government. (E.E.Y. Hales, *Pio Nono*, p. 98; BM III, 324)

13. Bishop Louis Moreno (1800-1878) was one of the founders of *L' Armenia*. His long relationship with Don Bosco was based on the *Catholic Readings*; unfortunately, it ended in a bitter fight over ownership. See BM IV-VIII; Stella, *EcSo*, PP-347-368.

14. Canon Angelo Pinoli became a friend of Don Bosco and was later caught in the middle when the bishop and the saint argued over the *Readings* (BM VII, 96-97, 380; MB VIII, 375-3931)

15. Don Bosco sent the prospectus to thousands of potential subscribers and other supporters, especially the bishops of Piedmont (cf. BM IV, 371, 541):

1. These booklets will be written in a simple, popular style and their contents will deal exclusively with the Catholic faith.
2. Each month an issue of 100 to 108 pages, or *more* if the topic requires it, will be published. The format, paper stock, and type font will be as in this prospectus.
3. The subscription rate, payable in advance, is 90 centesimi per semester or 1,80 lire per year. Rates including postal delivery are 1.40 lire for six months or 2.80 lire for a year.
4. To make it as easy as possible for any distinguished person, clerical or lay, who wishes to assist in this charitable work, the issues will be sent to them without postage charge anywhere within the Kingdom . . . provided that at least 50 copies are addressed to a single center.
5. In *towns* and rural centers subscriptions may be paid to agents appointed by the respective bishops, to whom we particularly recommend

this work. We enclose their names and addresses.

For a list of subscription agents in 1855, see Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 543-544- They included priests, a few bishops, and some laymen, among them Don Bosco's old friend Evasio Savio at Castelnuovo. Four of the agents were in Sardinia, which was part of the realm, and there was one each in Milan and Rome, which were not.

To oblige Bishop Moreno. item 2 was modified to provide for two shorter issues a month, leaving the total pages at 100-108.

Printing was done by the De Agostini Printers in Turin. The enterprise was so successful that it continued for over a hundred years, eventually changing the name *Letture Cattoliche* to *Meridiano 12* (Twelfth Meridian, i.e. the longitude of Rome); the format had changed by then too, so that it resembled the American *Catholic Digest*.

16. The full title was *Il Cattolico Istruito nella sua Religione: Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo* [The Catholic Instructed in His Religion: Discussions between a Father and His Sons according to the Needs of Our Times]. Its author was none other than Father John Bosco.

This work required six issues (March to August) for complete publication. Immediately after the August issue, Don Bosco had them bound into one volume of 452 pages. It was a popular treatise explaining why Catholicism was the true religion, According to the temper of the times, it refuted the errors and theological inconsistencies of the Protestant ministers, revealed their bad faith and the various ways in which they altered or misinterpreted the text of the Bible, faulted their manner of worship, and recounted the lives of the principal Reformers.

When Don Bosco revised the book, considerably modifying it. in 1883, he changed the title to *Il Cattolico nlt secolo* [The Catholic in the World], *La Civiltà cattolica* (1883, III, 81) called it a book "of small size but rich in sound Catholic teaching." Three years later a French edition came out, *Le catholique dans le monde* (Nice: Patronage St. Pierre, 1886).

Needless to say, this and Don Bosco's other polemical writings were tracts for his time and place, when Christians of most denominations viciously fought with one another, and Catholics and Protestants in particular gave no quarter to each other. Even in the relatively tolerant United States, there were serious anti-Catholic riots in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s; anti-Catholicism played a decisive role in the 1884 presidential election and was a major issue in those of 1928 and 1960.

* Father Ximenes, the publisher of a Catholic paper, *tt Contemporaneo* of Rome, was assassinated. Bp Palma, papal secy, and a writer for that paper, was done in by a harquebus shot right in the halls of the Quirinal Palace.¹²

Chapter 60

Disputations with the Waldensians

1854

The *Catholic Readings* were warmly received, and the number of readers was extraordinary.¹ But they also aroused the anger of the Protestants. They fought back in their own newspapers and their *Letture Evangeliche*;¹ but they lacked readers. So they launched attacks of every kind against poor Don Bosco. Now one, now another would come to dispute, convinced, they said, that no one could withstand their arguments, that Catholic priests were just so many simpletons and therefore could be easily confounded.

At first they came to assault me one at a time. Later they came in pairs and finally in groups. I always listened to them, and I always recommended that they should refer back to their own minister* those problems which they did not know how to answer, and then kindly relay the answers to me. Those who came were Amadeus fort, then Meille, the evangelist Pugno,³ then others and still others. But they could make no headway towards getting me to cease speaking or publishing our discussions.⁴ This aroused them to absolute fury. I think it good to relate some episodes on this subject.

One Sunday evening in January⁵ I was informed that two gentlemen had come to speak with me. They came in and, after a long series of compliments and flattery, one of them began to say, "Good Doctor,⁶ nature has favoured you with the great gift of being able to make yourself read and understood by the common person.⁷ So we'd like to ask you to use this precious gift in the service of humanity and for the benefit of science, commerce, and the arts."

"At the moment," I said, "I am taken up with the *Catholic Readings*, and I intend to devote myself wholeheartedly to that project."

"It would be much better if you were to write a good book for young people on, say, ancient history, geography, physics, or geometry, but not the *Catholic Readings*."

"Why not the *Catholic Readings*?"

"Because its topics have already been dealt with over and over again by many authors."

"These topics have already been dealt with by many authors, but in learned volumes and not for ordinary people. That is precisely my aim with the *Catholic Readings*."

"But this project is of no advantage to you," they argued. "On the other hand, if you were to take on the projects

which we are recommending to you, you'd gain a nice sum for the wonderful institute that Providence has entrusted to you. Here, take this advance (they were four thousand-franc notes). And it won't be the last donation you'll get. You'll get even more."

"What's all this money for?"

"To encourage you to undertake the works we've been suggesting, and to help you with your most praiseworthy institute."

"You'll pardon me, gentlemen," I said, "if I return your money. At present I can't take on any scholarly project other than the *Catholic Readings*."

"But if a project is useless ..." they started to say.

"If it's a useless project, why are you worrying about it? Why are you offering me this money to get me to stop?"

"You don't realise what you're doing," they persisted. "Your refusal endangers your work, exposes you to certain consequences, certain dangers. ..."

"Gentlemen, I understand what you're trying to tell me; but I tell you clearly that when I stand up for the truth I'm not afraid of anyone. When I became a priest, I was consecrated to the good of the Church and the good of poor humanity. And I intend to continue with my weak efforts to promote the *Catholic Readings*."

"You're making a mistake." Their tone and attitude changed as they got to their feet. "You're making a mistake. You've insulted us, and who knows what might happen to you, here, and," they added menacingly, "if you leave the house, will you be sure of coming back?"

"Gentlemen, you don't know Catholic priests. While they have life they try to do their duty. If they must die because of their labour, that they would consider their good fortune and their greatest glory."

By then they both seemed so annoyed that I was afraid they were about to attack me. I got to my feet and put a chair between them and me. Then I said, "If you wish to use force, I'm not cowed by your threats. But a priest's strength rests on patience and forgiveness. Now please go." I walked round the chair and opened the door of my room. "Buzzetti,"⁸ I said, "take these gentlemen to the front gate; they're not accustomed to the stairs."

That command confused them. "We'll meet again under more favourable circumstances," they said as they left, their faces and eyes afire with indignation.

Several newspapers, especially *L'Armonia*, carried reports of this encounter.

Notes

1. In 1861 the average print run was ten thousand; in 1870, fifteen thousand (T. Bosco, SP, p. 198).
2. *Gospel Readings* was a Waldensian periodical.
3. Amadeus Bert (1809-1883) and John Peter Meille (1817-1884) were prominent Waldensian ministers, Pugno a controversialist. In 1849 Bert published *I Vadlesi, ossia i cristiani-cattolici secondo la Chiesa primitiva* [The Waldensians, or Catholic Christians as They Were in the Early Church]. Meille published the Waldensian newspaper *La buona Novella*, mentioned in the preceding chapter.
4. The *Catholic Readings*; specifically, Don Bosco is alluding to *The Catholic Instructed*, which included "discussions" in its subtitle (see chapter 59, note 16).
5. Lemoyne (BM IV, 435) and Bonetti (p. 249) maintain that it was a Sunday morning in August 1853.
6. The title "doctor," i.e. of theology, was normally reserved for those who had earned such a degree or been appointed to a prominent diocesan position. Here, the two Waldensians are either continuing their flattery or using irony because they underestimate him.
7. The reader will remember Don Bosco's youthful struggles to achieve just this ability (chapter 20).
8. Made suspicious by the attitude of the two strangers, Joseph Buzzetti and several other boarders had mounted guard in the ball way.

Chapter 61

An Attempt on My Life

It looked as if some group of either Protestants or Freemasons had organised a conspiracy against me.¹ I shall

narrate a few short examples.

One evening, I was amidst the boys teaching school when two men called me to hurry to a man who was dying at the *Golden Heart*.² I went immediately, but I wanted to take some of the bigger boy's with me.

"There's no need," they explained, "to bother your pupils. We'll take you to the sick man and bring you back home. Their presence might upset the patient."

"Don't worry." I replied, "my pupils will take a little stroll and then wait downstairs while I attend to the sick man."

When we arrived at the house where the *Golden Heart* was, they told me, "•Wait here & minute; relax a bit while we go to let the patient know you're here,"

They showed me into a ground-floor room where some good-time Charlies were eating chestnuts after their supper. They welcomed me profusely with praise and applause, and they wanted me to help myself and eat some of their chestnuts. I would not taste them, alleging that I had just finished my supper.

"Then at least drink a glass of our wine," they answered. "It won't hurt you. It comes from around Asti."³

"I don't feel like it. I'm not accustomed to drinking outside of meals. It doesn't agree with me."⁴

"A small glass certainly won't upset you."

With that they poured wine for everyone. But when they came to mine, they took a bottle and glass that had been put to the side. Then I understood their wicked ruse; never the less I accepted the glass and joined in their toast, but instead of drinking, I tried to put the wine back down on the table.

"You can't do that," one said. "It's offensive."

"It's an insult," another chimed in. "You can't put us off like that."

"I don't feel like, I cannot, and I will not drink." "You'll drink it for sure!" one exclaimed as he grabbed my left shoulder. An accomplice grabbed my right shoulder and added, "We can't let this insult pass. Drink it by choice or by force."

"If you really insist that I drink, I'll oblige you. But let me go. And since I can't drink it myself, I'll get one of my sons to drink it in my place."

With this misleading remark, I moved towards the door, opened it, and invited my young men to come in.

"There's no need for anybody else to drink it, none at all!" they cried. "Never mind, then. Let's go right away to see the sick man. These boys can stay downstairs."

I certainly would never have given that glass to anybody else, but I acted as I did the better to expose their treachery in trying to get me to drink the poisoned wine.

I was then taken to a room on the second floor,⁵ where instead of a sick man I discovered lying there the very fellow who had come to the Oratory to fetch me. He put up with some of my questions but then burst out laughing. "I'll go to confession tomorrow morning," he said.

I left promptly to get back to my own business.

A friend of mine made some enquiries about the people who had summoned me and about their intention. I was assured that a certain individual had treated them to a big meal on the understanding that they should try to get me link a little wine that he had prepared.

Notes

1. The Freemasons (or Masons) are a fraternal order whose "principles and basic rituals embody a naturalistic religion, active participation in which is incompatible with Christian faith and practice." Some of its branches, especially in Latin countries like Italy, are "atheistic, irreligious and anticlerical." Freemasonry has been condemned by eight different Popes seventeen separate times, a condemnation which still stands. (*1989 Catholic Almanac*, ed. Felician A. Foy [Huntington, Indiana, 1989], p. 311)

Don Bosco's aim was always the good of souls. His motto, and the Salesian Society's, taken from Genesis 14:21 by way of Saint Francis de Sales, is *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* ["Give me souls; take away the rest"]. Even his polemical writings, like the bishop of Geneva's, were inspired by moderation and charity. At the end of *The Catholic Instructed* he appealed to Waldensian ministers who might read it: "These are the words of a brother who loves you more than you think. They are spoken by one who offers himself and all he has in this world for your good."

His writings, however, enraged his opponents. In the April 1854 issue of the *Catholic Readings*, entitled *Some Interesting Current Events*, Don Bosco wrote of his Protestant adversaries:

In publishing *Some Interesting Current Events* we must warn our readers that the Protestants have shown themselves to be outraged by my publications about them. They have shown it by their words, private letters, and even their journalism. We expected them to challenge us by pointing out various errors in what we published. But they have not done so. All their words, writings, and publications seem to consist only of insults and abuse against the *Catholic Readings* and their author. When it comes to insults and abuse, we are quite willing to grant them the victory without bothering to reply. Our greatest concern has always been never to publish anything offensive to that charity which is due to every living person. So we willingly forgive all who abuse us, and we shall avoid resorting to personalities while uncovering error wherever it may be hidden.

Don Bosco was by no means the only writer for the *Catholic Readings*; but for their first nine years (1853-1861) he averaged four titles a year, some of them (like *The Catholic Instructed*) running over two or more issues. The titles averaged 109 pages each. Over the next twenty-three years (1862-1884), however, his contributions numbered just thirty-five. At the same time (1865-1888) he was authoring or revising fifty-four other works great and small, many of them concerned with the Salesian Society. (*Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, pp. 53-55; Stella, *Gli scritti a stampa di S. Giovanni Bosco* [Rome: LAS, 1977])

2. This was an inn reached through a small courtyard at 34 via Cottolengo, very close to the Oratory. Near the end of his life, Don Bosco used to point it out when he passed by and remark to the Salesians with him, "There's the chestnuts room!" Neither Lemoyne (BM IV, 486-488) nor Bonetti (pp. 253-256) indicates just when this episode occurred.

3. Asti, Don Bosco's native province, is famous for its wines.

4. Don Bosco was ordinarily so abstemious that we cannot conclude from his refusal of the chestnuts and wine that he suspected them at this point. But bringing some young men with him evidences an awareness of the need for caution. Since he does not tell us when this happened, we cannot be sure that it was the first of the several assassination attempts on him at this time.

5. Americans would call it the third floor.

Chapter 62

Further Assaults

Attacks • A hail of blows

These attacks that I am recounting may seem like fables, but sadly, they are all too true. Many people witnessed them. Here is an even stranger attempt on my life.

One August evening¹ around six o'clock, I was standing at the fence that we had put in the Oratory courtyard, surrounded by my young men. Suddenly a cry went up: "An assassin! An assassin!" And there was a certain man whom I knew quite well and had even given assistance to.² He was in his shirt sleeves and was brandishing a big knife. Rushing wildly at me, he was shouting, "I want Don Bosco! I want Don Bosco!"

All of us scattered in every direction, and the intruder chased one of the seminarians, mistaking him for me.³ When he realised his mistake, he turned and came running furiously in my direction. I just had time to beat a retreat to the stairs of the old house, and the lock to the gate was barely secured when the madman reached it.⁴ He hammered, shouted, and bit at the iron bars to open them, to no avail. I was safe inside.

My young men wanted to overpower the unfortunate man and break him apart, but I repeatedly forbade them and they obeyed me. We sent word to the police, to police headquarters, to the carabinieri. It was not till 9:30 that evening, however, that two carabinieri arrested the rogue and took him to the barracks.

Next day, the chief of police sent an officer to ask whether I would drop the charges against my attacker. I answered that I forgave that assault and all other injuries. But in the name of the law, I demanded of the authorities greater protection for the persons and property of citizens. But would you believe it? At the very same time when I had been attacked,⁵ as I was leaving the house, there was my attacker waiting for me a short distance off.

A friend of mine, seeing that I could not expect police protection, decided to speak to the wretched man.⁶ "I've been paid," he was told. "If you give me as much as the others do, I'll go away peacefully." He was paid 80 francs for back rent, another 80 to book him into new lodgings well away from Valdocco, and so ended that first comedy.⁷

The second which I am going to relate was not like that. About a month after the episode just narrated, one Sunday evening, I was asked to hurry to the Sardi house near the Refuge to hear the confession of a sick woman who was said to be dying.

Because of my previous experiences, I asked several of the bigger boys to come along with me. "There's no need," I was told. "We'll accompany you. Leave these lads at their games."

This was enough for me not to go alone.⁸ I left some of them in the street at the foot of the stairs. Joseph Buzzetti and Hyacinth Arnaud were on the first-floor landing⁹ not far from the door of the sick woman.

I went inside and saw a woman gasping as if she were about to breathe her last. I asked the men in attendance, four of them, to move off a little so that we might speak of her soul.

"Before I make my confession," she said in a strong voice, "I want that blackguard there in front of me to take back the calumnies he has been spreading about me."

"No," one of them answered.

"Shut up!" added another, rising to his feet.

Then they all stood up from their chairs. "Yes!" "No!" "Watch it!" "I'll strangle you!" "I'll cut your throat!" These shouts, mixed with horrible curses, echoed diabolically all over the room. In the midst of that melee, the light was put out. As the din increased, a hail of blows began to be aimed over where I was sitting. I had figured out their game right away, namely to jump me. In a moment, with time neither to ponder nor to reflect, necessity became the mother of invention. I grabbed a chair, put it over my head, and as I edged towards the door under that helmet, a shower of blows from sticks fell with a tremendous racket upon the chair.

Exiting that hotbed of Satan, I flew into the arms of my young men,¹⁰ when they heard that noise and those yells, they were determined to break in, come what may.

I had suffered no serious wound. One blow struck my left thumb, which was exposed against the back of the chair. The nail and half the tip were ripped away, so that I carry the scar to this day. The worst harm was the fright.

I never could discover the real reason for this persecution, but it seems that all these attempts on my life were intended to make me stop, they would say, calumniating the Protestants.¹¹

Notes

1. Lemoyne places this episode in the section of BM IV concerned mostly with 1853; he continues the story of the deranged man with events from the spring of 1854 (IV, 488-491).

2. The man's name was Andreis. and he had once been a tenant in the Pinardi house. At this time he lived in the Bellezza house. (BM IV, 488)

3. The seminarian was Felix Reviglio (BM IV. 489; Bonetti, p. 256).

4. There was a little iron gate at the foot of the staircase of the Pinardi house.

5. About six o'clock on the evening after the assault.

6. Don Bosco's longtime benefactor, Commendatore Joseph Dupre. He did not act, however, until after still another attempted knifing, witnessed In John Cagliero (Bonetti, P-257: BM IV, 490)

7. T. Bosco values these 160 lire at about 650.000 lire (1986), equivalent to about \$450 (SP, p. 200).

8. He had meant to bring two young men; at this point he decided that four would be better. They were Joseph Buzzetti, Ribaudi, Hyacinth Arnaud, and James Cerruti. The last two "were so muscular and strong that they could have felled an ox." (BM IV, 491) Buzzetti, Arnaud, and Cerruti were among the boys who in 1847 made the first Oratorv retreat.

9. The landing of the second floor (U.S.).

10. Lemoyne tells us that lion Bosco found the door locked, and "using his extraordinary strength he twisted and tore the lock away with one hand," the other still holding the chair over his head, just as Arnaud and Buzzetti crashed their shoulders into the door from the other side (IV, 492).

11. Sixteen-year-old John Cagliero witnessed a more explicit connection. Two men called on Don Bosco one Sunday afternoon in January 1854 while the boys were in church. They noticed the two and was suspicious; so he eavesdropped. After failing to dissuade Don Bosco from publishing the *Catholic Readings*, the visitors pulled pistols on him. When the conversation in Don Bosco's room grew heated, Cagliero pounded on the door, ran for Buzzetti, and came back as . Dori Bosco was escorting the two men out, who were flustered at being caught in the act, as it were. (BM IV, 493).

Other assassination attempt, besides those involving Grigio (next chapter), are recounted in BM IV, 494-405; XIV. 405-407. Father Margotti, editor of *L'Armonia*, suffered a violent beating in January 1856 (BM IV, 571).

Chapter 63

Grigio

The grey dog was the topic of many conversations and various conjectures.¹ Many of you have seen him and even petted him. Now, laying aside the fantastic stories which are told of this dog, I will tell you plainly only what is pure truth.²

The frequent attacks which had been made against me made it inadvisable for me to walk to or from the city of Turin alone. In those days, the asylum was the last building on the way to the Oratory. The rest of the way was land covered with hawthorn and acacia trees.³

One dark evening, rather late, I was making my way home with some trepidation when a huge dog appeared beside me, which at first sight gave me a start. But he seemed friendly and even nuzzled me as if I were his master. We quickly became friends, and he accompanied me as far as the Oratory. Many other times that evening's experience was repeated. Indeed, I may say that Grigio⁴ did me valuable service. Here are a few examples.

On a wet, foggy night at the end of November 1854, I was coming from the city. So as not to have a long way to go alone, I took the street connecting Our Lady of Consolation and the Cottolengo.⁵ At one point along the street I noticed two men walking a little in front of me. They matched their pace to mine, quickening or slowing down as I did. When I crossed the road to dodge them, they crossed right over in front of me. I attempted to turn back but was not in time. For they suddenly jumped me from behind, keeping an ominous silence, and threw a cloak over my head. I fought to keep from getting tangled up but it was no use. Then one also tried to stuff a rag into my mouth. I was trying to shout but could no longer do so. At that moment Grigio appeared, and growling like a bear he leapt into the face of one man while snapping viciously at the other. They plainly would have to tangle with the dog before finishing with me.

"Call off your dog," they began to cry, trembling with fear.

"I'll call him off," I said, "when you agree to leave passers-by alone."

"Call him off quick," they exclaimed.

Grigio continued growling like an enraged wolf or bear. The two men took to their heels, and Grigio stayed by my side, accompanying me until I went into the Cottolengo Institute. After recovering from my scare, and refreshed by a drink which that charitable institute always seems to come up with at the right moment, I went on home with a good escort.⁶

Every evening when I had no other company, as I passed the [last] buildings I would see Grigio bound out of nowhere along the way. Many times the Oratory boys saw him. Once he was the centre of an amusing incident. The boys saw him coming into the courtyard. Some wanted to strike him, and others wanted to throw stones at

him.

"Don't tease him," Joseph Buzzetti ordered. "That's Don Bosco's dog." They turned to patting and stroking him then as they brought him along to me. I was in the refectory having supper with some seminarians and priests and with my mother. They were alarmed at the unexpected sight of the dog.

"There's no need to be afraid," I said. "It's my Grigio. Let him come in."

In fact he made a wide tour round the table and came joyfully up to me. I patted him too and offered him soup, tread, and meat, but he refused all of it. He would not even sniff at what I offered.

"Well, what do you want?" I asked. He only cocked his ears and wagged his tail.

"Either eat or drink or otherwise entertain me," I concluded. He continued to evidence contentment, resting his head on my napkin as if he wanted to speak to me and tell me "Good night." Then the boys, wondering a great deal and quite happy, led him outside. I remember that I had come home late, and a friend had brought me in his carriage/

The last time that I saw Grigio was in 1866⁸ while I was going from Murialdo to Moticcucco to see my friend Louis Muglia/ The parish priest of Buttigliera wanted to accompany me part of the way. and as a consequence I was surprised by night all only halfway on my journey.

"Oh, if only I had my Grigio," I thought to myself, "how fortunate I would be!" Having said that, I started across a field to take advantage of the last rays of light. Just then Grigio came hounding *up* to me, full of affection. He accompanied me for the stretch of road that I still had to travel, which was two miles.

When I got to my friend's house, where I was expected, they asked me to go round another way, fearing there would be a fight between my Grigio and the family's two mastiffs. "If they got into a Tight," said Moglia, "they would tear each other to pieces."

I talked a lot with the whole family before we sat down to supper. My companion was left to rest in a corner of the room. When we had finished our meal, my friend said, "We must also give Grigio his supper."

He took a little food to bring to the dog; he looked in every corner of the room and of the house, but Grigio was not to be found. We all wondered, since neither door nor window was open, nor had the family dogs given any sign of his departure. We renewed our search upstairs, but no one could find him.

That is the last news I had of the grey dog that was the subject of so much enquiry and discussion. I never was able to find out who was his owner, I only know that the animal was truly providential for me on many occasions when I found myself in danger.¹⁰

Notes

1. Because of the dog's gray fur Don Bosco named him "Grigio." Art teacher Charles Tomatis, who was a student at the Oratory and saw Grigio, described the mysterious animal to Lemoyne:

It had a truly frightening appearance. Every time she saw it, Mama 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. (BM IV, 497)

2. The story of Grigio does, indeed, sound fantastic. We should note two things right away:

1. Don Bosco has just said that there are some "fantastic stories" being told about the dog, but he will tell only what actually happened.

2. He was not writing for publication but for the private readership of the Salesians; he had no need to impress anyone. Several Salesians had been eyewitnesses to these events; among those who saw and petted Grigio were Joseph Buzzetti, Michael Rua, John Cagliero, and John Baptist Francesia (BM IV, 496-502; Francesia, *Vita breve e popolare*, p. 179).

3. The distance is about a quarter mile. Don Bosco uses the Italian word *bossoli* [boxwood], which is almost identical to the Piedmontese *bóssol* (hawthorn), and that is what he meant.

4. Don Bosco, aside from the first words of the chapter, calls the dog simply *il grigio*, without either the noun *cane* or capitalization of the name which he bestowed on the beast.

5. One block along via della Consolata, across corso San Massimo, and one block along via Ariosto.

6. From the front door of the Cottolengo to the Oratory was a block and a half along via Cottolengo and another block along via della Giardiniera.

7. Buzzetti recalled "that Marquis Dominic Fassati had taken Don Bosco home late that night in his coach. Having missed him. Grigio seemed to have come to assure Don Bosco that he had waited for him with his customary fidelity" (BM IV, 500).

In 1920 an old Turinese priest, Father Philip Durando, recounted to a Salesian missionary, Father John Aliberti, how the dog appeared another time in the Salesian dining room while Father Durando was having supper with Don Bosco. (MB XVIII, 869-870)

8. Bonetti (pp. 263-264) and Lemoyne (BM IV, 496-502; VIII, 222) tell of several other incidents in which Grigio saved Don Bosco from assailants in the early 1850s or kept him company on lonely walks in the dark.

This 1866 appearance was the last as of the time when Don Bosco was writing his memoirs (but cf. BM X, 177). In 1883, however, he saw the mysterious dog again while returning to Vallecrosia from Ventimiglia (in western Liguria!) late one evening (MB XVIII, 8). He spoke of this appearance several times in different places. One of those who heard him tell the story was his French biographer Doctor Charles D'Espiney (MB XVI, 36; XVIII, 10); another was Father Secondo Gay, pastor of Saint Silvester's Church in Asti, who testified to it on October 17, 1908, during the gathering of evidence for Don Bosco's beatification.

9. As seminarian and as priest Don Bosco cherished the Moglias and visited them frequently; he is being quite reserved here when he speaks of them.

10. Don Bosco often thought about trying to learn where the dog came from. In the end he just said, "Well, let him belong to whomever he likes, as long as he's my good friend." Henri Gheon wrote:

Providence can use a dog. An angel could quite well take the form of a dog. At the very least we can assert that the animal — if animal it was — had a nose for sanctity, and would fight for it. If it was a miracle, God worked so many other miracles for Don Bosco that this one need not surprise us. (*Secrets of the Saints* [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1951], p. 358)

It is not inappropriate that the Lord should provide a special guardian for the priest who was the special guardian of so many poor and abandoned youngsters.

If Don Bosco has not told us all that he knew or suspected about Grigio (besides keeping silent about the other divine interventions to be mentioned in a moment), it is at least partly because he never proposed to write a complete autobiography or a complete history of the Oratory. There are, moreover, things that modesty does not permit one to write, regardless of commands.

But Grigio appeals to our curiosity in a unique way and makes us ask about his origins. In answer to a query in 1870, Don Bosco remarked, "It sounds ridiculous to call him an angel, yet he is no ordinary dog ..." (BM X, 177)-Another time, in 1883, Don Bosco was visiting the Olive family, generous benefactors from Marseilles. He told them how he had recently met his old and faithful gray friend on the road from Ventimiglia. The astonished lady of the house observed that Grigio would have to be two or three times older than dogs normally live. Don Bosco smiled mischievously. "Then it must have been Grigio's son or grandson," he suggested, evading the issue she was driving at. (MB XVI, 36)

The Salesian Sisters also claim to have experienced Grigio's protection on three occasions between 1893 and 1930 (MB XVI, 36-37)!

The Salesians feel safe in believing that Grigio sired no pups.

This seems to be an opportune place to raise a larger question, at least for those who know something more of Don Bosco than he tells us in these pages. How believable are the supernatural events connected with him? How reliable are the various sources for his biographies?

Pietro Stella has investigated some of the extraordinary charisms attributed to Don Bosco (*ReCa*, pp. 475-500). We referred at some length to Don Bosco's dreams in a comment at the end of chapter 2; he relates or mentions several of them in his memoirs, and others have turned up in the commentary.

Perhaps the most challenged instance of the supernatural in Don Bosco's life, if it actually occurred, is the reported raising to life, or resuscitation, of a deceased boy called "Charles." Stella made a forty-seven-page study of the case as a way of illustrating his historical method: *Don Bosco and the Death of Charles*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1985).

One may be skeptical about "Charles" or not, as one judges the skimpy evidence. Some have tried to discount all or most of the extraordinary events, as well as others (such as Don Bosco's dealings with certain great men and an occasion when he took some three hundred inmates of the Generala Prison on a day's outing without a single guard, and returned all of them in the evening). Some have discounted most of the *Biographical Memoirs* because they are barely documented and for other reasons. Ceria responded to such critics in a long letter addressed to the director of the Salesian theological school at Bollengo, outside Turin, on March 9, 1953. A translation of this letter is available in photocopy from Don Bosco Publications.

Others have said that in Don Bosco the extraordinary became ordinary. On at least one occasion each he multiplied chestnuts

(BM III, 404-406) and breakfast rolls (BM VI, 453-455); he multiplied the Holy Eucharist several times (BM III, 311-312; VI, 580-581; VII, 388-389; MB XVII, 520-521). There are well-documented instances of bilocation (BM VII, 290-291; XIV, 552-555; MB XVIII, 34-39). The examples of his predictions of deaths and other future events, his healings of the sick (at least sixty cases have been counted), his knowledge of consciences and of events happening miles away are countless and are abundantly witnessed (see MB XX under the headings *Predizioni*, *Gnarigione*, *Scrutazione dei cuori*, *Coscienze*, *Cuari*, *Leggere in frontc*, and *Loniana*).

POSTSCRIPT

Unfortunately the *Memoirs of the Oratory* stops with these murderous attempts and the story of the mysterious gray dog. A new phase of Saint John Bosco's life was about begin, that of the founder. As his dreams about the future of the Oratory had foretold, his first clerical helpers, and his earliest recruits (Ascanio Savio, Reviglio, Bellia, astini, Rocchietti) did not stay with him. But some of the ambs did grow up and turn into shepherds: Buzzetti, Rua, Cagliero, Francesia, Angelo Savio, Bonetti, and others. The Salesians are probably unique in that the founder shaped his "cofounders" right from their boyhood and did not form an association of some kind with grown men.¹

The decade 1854-1864 were the years of founding the Salesian Society. After night prayers on January 26, 1854, Don Bosco called the young seminarians Rua, Cagliero, Rocchietti, and Artiglia to his room. It was three days before the feast of Saint Francis de Sales, and the priest I proposed to the youths that they make promises to work together to perform deeds of charity toward their neighbors, that they might eventually bind themselves by vows, and that they take the name Salesians. They agreed.² Their practice of charity, of course, was focused on the work of the oratories (Valdocco, Porta Nuova, and Vanchiglia). Don Bosco guided them through conferences, spiritual direction, confession. They continued their philosophical and theological studies. In the next few years their group increased, and some began to make private vows under Don Bosco's guidance.

After almost six years, Don Bosco had with him one mature and experienced priest, Father Alasonatti, and eighteen youths whom he had trained himself. In December 1859 he invited them to form a new religious congregation with him to aim "at the sanctification of each member by mutual assistance" and "to promote God's glory and the salvation of souls, especially of those in greater need of instruction and formation." For some it was really a moment of decision: "Don Bosco wants to make monks of us all!" (Besides the vocational implications, there were the political ones. The government had already expelled all the monastic orders and confiscated their property.) Impetuous Cagliero paced up and down the portico for a long time before finally deciding: "I am determined never to leave Don Bosco. Monk or not, it's all the same to me!"

When the group met on December 18, only two had decided not to come. Don Bosco, Father Alasonatti, sixteen seminarians, and one layman bound themselves by vow and formally founded the Society of Saint Francis de Sales.⁵ Don Bosco had already drafted a Rule and presented it to Pius IX.

During the next ten years (1865-1875) the Salesians grew and spread. They won temporary papal approval in 1864 and final approval in 1864. After much tribulation, the Vatican approved the Rule in 1874. By then bishops and municipalities from all over northern Italy were asking Don Bosco to establish schools or oratories for them; Don Bosco and Mary Domenica Mazzarello had founded the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; and Don Bosco was beginning to plan the Society's expansion into France and the foreign missions (which became realities in 1875),

Don Bosco the builder was at work too. By 1863 the size and scope of the Oratory had outgrown the Church of Saint Francis de Sales and he began to think of a monumental church in honor of our Lady under the relatively unknown title of Help of Christians. With his customary trust in Divine Providence, he began the work in 1864 and handed the contractor, Charles Buzzetti, the first payment: eight centesimi. But with abundant miraculous help from heaven ("Every brick represents a grace from our Blessed Mother"⁴), the church was completed and consecrated in 1868.

With similar trust, energy, and heavenly help Don Bosco proceeded to put up two more great churches in the 1870s and 1880s, one in honor of Saint John the Evangelist in Porta Nuova, the other — by papal request — in honor of the Sacred Heart in Rome (opposite the main train station).

As a young man Don Bosco had thought about going to the foreign missions. Father Cafasso, happily, discouraged him. But the dream remained. It was more than a dream, really; for the missions were the subject of many of his prophetic visions. For instance, when Cagliari was dying of typhoid in 1854 and Don Bosco was called to anoint him, he suddenly saw around the boy a crowd of dark-skinned savages from who-knows-where, and a dove fluttering over the sick boy's head. He understood that Cagliari would recover and would eventually become a missionary.⁵ Other dreams seemed to show him the future fields where his sons and daughters would labor to make good Christians and good citizens.

Various requests for Salesians came from foreign lands. Don Bosco finally recognized one that answered to a dream and sent Father Cagliari and nine other priests and brothers to Buenos Aires in November 1875, with an eye to opening up missions in the vast wilderness of Patagonia. And so it happened. By 1884 Cagliari was ordained a bishop and dozens of Salesians and sisters were in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil.

From 1876 to 1887 Don Bosco expanded and consolidated the works which Divine Providence had entrusted to him. Realizing that lay people were critical to the apostolate in the modern world, the saint conceived another bold idea — one so bold that, when he incorporated it into his original Salesian Rule it became a major sticking point as far as the Roman Curia was concerned. That was to include laymen as full members of the Salesian Society, without vows and living at home. Anyone who wished to cooperate in working for the salvation of the young and in spreading good Christian literature was welcome! To secure the approval of the Rule, Don Bosco finally had to yield the point. But not the concept. In 1876 he brought it to reality in a different form, the Association of Salesian Cooperators. (It also included secular clergy, and indeed Pius IX asked to be enrolled as the first member.) By the end of the following year they had their own monthly magazine, the *Salesian Bulletin* (now published in a dozen languages in thirty-nine different editions). Although the Cooperators make no vows, in some sense they were the forerunners of secular institutes of consecrated lay people.

The apostle of youth's dreams continued to guide him in prophetic ways, and miraculous events became commonplace in his life. His contemporaries coveted his written and spoken word, even snips of his hair and bits of his clothing. Don Bosco exclaimed to Father Cagliari, "How wonderful is the Lord, and how immense his mercy! He chose a peasant boy of Becchi to be his instrument in performing his wonders before such a host of people."⁶ In the early 1860s the Salesians at the Oratory began to document virtually everything he said and did, entrusting the results to Father Lemoyne, who himself made a habit of "pumping" the saint almost every night for stories about his youth and the early days of the Oratory. Lemoyne assembled all this, plus the testimony he gathered from alumni, benefactors, friends from Don Bosco's youth, and others, into forty-five huge volumes of raw material.

After the saint's death (January 31, 1888), Lemoyne began to edit his documents into a biography; publication began in 1898 with the first volume of the *Biographical Memoirs*. When he died in 1916, he had completed nine volumes. Fathers Amadei and Ceria finished the work in 1939 except for the index (volume XX). As was mentioned in the introduction, only the first four of these deal with the years 1815-1854, the period covered by Don Bosco's autobiography. The remaining thirty-three years of his life fill volumes V-XVIII (7980 pages) — ample evidence to how thoroughly the first generation collected anecdotes and letters and recorded events and conferences. (The nineteenth volume of the *Biographical Memoirs* covers the process of canonization, 1888-1934.)

Pope Pius XI canonized Saint John Bosco on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1934. It has been said that it was a great April Fool's joke: how Don Bosco fooled all those who thought he was crazy! Today the visitor to Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome may see his statue in the row of the saintly founders a hundred feet above the floor; it is directly above the bronze statue of Saint Peter and the medallion commemorating the pontificate of Pius IX, a fitting place

for the defender of Peter's successors and friend of Pius. That, too, Don Bosco once dreamed, though without at all understanding what it meant; whoever recorded it thought it so insignificant that there are few details and no date.⁷

But the greatest monument to Don Bosco is not marble. It is his huge family. As of March 1989, there are over 34,000 Salesian sisters, brothers, priests, and novices in thirty-three nations of Africa, twenty-five countries in the Americas, Australia, nineteen nations and colonies of Asia and the Pacific islands, and twenty-one nations of Europe. In 1989 eighty-four confreres were serving the Church as "bishops, mostly in the Third World, including five as cardinals (Silva Henriquez of Chile, Castillo Lara of Venezuela, Obando Bravo of Nicaragua, Stickler of Austria, and Javierre Ortas of Spain). Tens of thousands of Cooperators and lay volunteers work alongside the Salesian religious. New branches of the family have sprung up: the Don Bosco Volunteers, a secular institute for women founded by Father Philip Rinaldi in 1917; and eight congregations of sisters founded by Salesians to carry out particular apostolic works according to the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint John Bosco. And there are, of course, the hundreds of thousands of past and present pupils— the heart of Don Bosco's family: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much."³⁸

Notes

1. See Francis Desrainaut, "The Founding of the Salesian Family (1841-1876)," trans. Paul Aronica (New Rochelle, 1985); and Joseph Aubry, "The Role of the Salesians Within the Salesian Family," trans. Paul Aronica [New Rochelle, 1987], pp. 4-11.
2. BM V, 7-8.
3. BM VI, 180-183,
4. See BM VIII, 402-403.
5. KM V, 67-68.
6. 3M XIV, 332; cf. X, 141. 7 MB XVII, 11-13,
8. *Il Giovane provveduto* (Turin, 1847), p. 7; quoted in Constitutions, article 14.