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ST. JOHN BOSCO'S
EARLY APOSTOLATE

The Story
of Don Bosco with his boys



SAINT JOHN BOSCO.

1815—1888.

ST. JOHN BOSCO'S
EARLY APOSTOLATE

A TRANSLATION FROM THE WORK OF

G. BONETTI, S.C.

WITH A PREFACE BY

HIS EMINENCE

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PREFACE.

It is a life-long memory to have known personally one in whom the Church has already discerned tokens of heroic sanctity. It was my privilege to see Don Bosco when he visited Paris in 1883, and to be a witness of the extraordinary impression which the fame of his holiness at once produced upon that city, regarded, not without reason, as heedless and unthinking.

Two years later, after my ordination to the priesthood, it was given me to visit Turin and to see the Saintly Founder of the Salesian Congregation in the midst of his religious family at the Mother House of the Institute.

In the autumn of 1887, I was able, at his direct request, to render some slight personal service to his sons on their arrival among us to found the first Salesian house in an English-speaking country.

These personal memories are no doubt the reason why I have been asked to write a few words of Preface to this volume dealing with the work of one of the most wonderful of the Servants of God, and to set forth briefly some of the main lessons which can be drawn from the recital of this history of an existence, that was devoted entirely to God's glory and the salvation of souls.

The first lesson which Don Bosco teaches us is that God's power has not grown less in these modern times, that He still raises up the weak things to confound the strong, and that He gives to those who listen to His voice a capacity for doing good far surpassing their own natural strength. Don Bosco began his work in

poverty and obscurity in the midst of ever recurring difficulties and contradictions. He left well-established Houses in many countries; his name is known the world over; the early difficulties are now merely a part of his history, and those who created them are scarcely remembered. The Providence of God has rarely been manifested more plainly or more decisively than in the origin and growth of the Salesian Congregation.

A second lesson which he has taught us is the necessity of concentrating our efforts on the education of the young, if we are to hope that the coming generation will rise above and overcome all the depressing influences, destructive alike of faith and virtue, which are to be found, nowadays, in every direction. This education must include a solid grounding in the fundamental virtues of the Christian life; a formation of character such that, when the boy has become a man, he shall have learnt to stand alone, and be no longer dependent on the external guidance which was needed in his boyhood and was gradually and wisely withdrawn as the years of adolescence were coming to an end; the most perfect industrial and professional training which each individual may be capable of receiving, so that all may hold in their grasp sufficient means of livelihood as long as health and strength are maintained, with due opportunity of making provision for the hour when they shall fail.

Most important of all is the lesson incessantly recalled by Don Bosco, and now solemnly ratified, and proclaimed to the Universal Church, by the voice of the Sovereign Pontiff, that the frequent reception of Holy Communion is the great source of the Christian life, and the remedy for all the ailments to which that life is subject. It was his doctrine that, while no one is to be compelled to receive the Blessed Sacrament more frequently than the Church prescribes, the greatest

encouragement and the easiest facilities should be given so that those who are free from mortal sin, and have the right intention, be not hindered from approaching this Sacrament of Life even every day, if they desire to do so. He knew from a long and varied experience that it was idle to hope, in most cases, for the preservation of purity and innocence in the troubled days of youth without constant reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and he set aside the rules of ordinary schools and was prepared to sacrifice the external semblance of discipline, often so highly prized, in order that all might have facility of receiving Holy Communion whenever they desired, and be neither impelled thereto, nor kept back therefrom, by any idea of human respect. His lesson is for us all. For Pastors of Souls, urging them to hear Confessions in season and out of season, lest any be kept from Holy Communion through difficulties in obtaining their restoration to a state of grace. For parents and masters, warning them not to discourage, but to counsel and facilitate frequent Communion on the part of those over whom they have control. For the faithful of every class, age, and occupation, reminding them that our Lord gives Himself to them to be their life and strength, and that nowhere else can they find Christian vitality and vigour in the same degree.

May this account of Don Bosco's early labours inculcate continually all these most precious lessons, and the many others with which it is filled, and propagate that firm and courageous Christian character, of which he gave so great an example, and which he ever taught with unswerving fidelity.

✠ FRANCIS, *Archbishop of Westminster,*

Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, 1908.

FOREWORD.

' Don Bosco among his Boys ' would be the proper title for this book, as giving a clearer indication of its scope. It aims at giving the story of the first twenty-five years of the Priesthood of St. John Bosco. This great Apostle of Youth lived with his boys and for his boys. During a quarter of a century he founded and developed that portion of his mission, but after 1866 he had perforce to hand over the actual work of the Oratory to others in order that he might devote himself to those three great religious organisations which he had founded with the approval of Rome, namely: the Society of St. Francis of Sales for priests and laymen, the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and the Association of Salesian Co-operators. By means of these devoted bodies he was enabled to ensure solidarity and permanence to the efforts which he had made on behalf of the young.

These pages give us the history of the ' Oratory.' Here we can examine at leisure our Saint's methods in dealing with boys and the people connected with them — how he saw the necessity of reason and religion in the cause of education — how he succeeded in his struggles to prepare his boys for any and every sphere in life.

The original of this book is the work of Don Giovanni Bonetti, a Salesian Priest, who spent thirty years of his life in close and intimate contact with the saintly Founder. Don Bonetti was also the companion and chosen friend of that young servant of God, Dominic Savio, whose virtues are claiming the seal of beatification: Hence we have a story which is narrated by an eye-witness, and can readily understand the spirit and

influence of Don Bosco when working for God and Religion among his boys. The style is easy, simple, idiomatic and natural. It is indeed in a way a reproduction of the style of 'The Little Flowers of St. Francis,' with its setting amid the poor quarters of the Valdocco in Turin.

His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster has given his gracious consent for us to reproduce the Introduction which he so kindly and sympathetically wrote for the first translation of this work in 1908.

The present translation has been carefully prepared and revised, but it is still a translation with all the imperfections implied in that word. The translator has tried to preserve the originality and spirit of the author's treatment, and for that reason has adhered to the dialogue form wherever it has occurred, and has tried also to reproduce the peculiar background of country, district and people, for the better understanding of the whole history.

This is a special edition prepared for circulation at a popular price. That has been rendered possible by the co-operation of printers and publishers. Thus it is hoped the book will come within easy reach of all who are directly interested in the work of the education of the young — priests, teachers, parents, social workers. It should also carry an appeal to boys and girls also — for its scenes are laid among the young who are anxious to do the best for themselves where all they need is help, guidance, and encouragement. Both the hero of this book and its saintly author gave up their lives to the education and training of the young, and every page of this book is full of descriptions at once edifying, instructive and encouraging.

Lastly, special thanks are due to all those who so painstakingly and patiently undertook the work of translation and revision for the press.

THE EDITOR.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

• The early days. — The first dream. — Oppositions at home. — A successful vocation.

THE story told in the following pages is not intended to be a Life of Saint John Bosco. It tells of the first twenty-five years of his work, and therefore necessarily treats largely of the Saint, and, incidentally, of the formation of the Salesian Congregation. However, before entering directly on the work of the Oratory, the reader may conveniently make the acquaintance of its principal figure, while the history itself will enable him to gain a more complete knowledge of his life and character.

In a poor cottage of a hill-side hamlet near the village of Murialdo, within the parish of Castelnuovo d'Asti, in the Archdiocese of Turin, John Bosco was born in the evening of August 16th, 1815. At the baptismal font he received the names of John and Melchior, but it was only by the former that he was afterwards known. His father, who kept a small farm, died when little John was but two years old, and his widowed mother, Margaret, who had now to bear the heavy burden of providing for the family, was an excellent, self-sacrificing woman, as rich in Christian piety as she was destitute of the goods of this world. The boy was at all times singularly docile to the loving solicitude of his mother, so that, although the youngest, he was an example of piety and obedience to his two brothers.

Coming as a second Joseph with a special mission from Heaven, while yet a lad hardly ten years old he had a singular dream, which was apparently meant to foreshadow his vocation. He afterwards gave the

following account of it to the family circle and to a few intimate neighbours: "I thought I was out in the meadow near our farm, and was somehow surrounded by a crowd of children at play. As I stood looking on, I noticed that many were doing mischief and even blaspheming. This made me angry, and in my desire to put a stop to such conduct I was about to strike one of the children, when a person all in white and with a shining face suddenly appeared, and, turning to me, said: 'Not with blows, but with charity and gentleness must you draw these friends of yours to a good life'; and he commanded me to teach them the hatefulness of sin and the beauty of virtue. I answered that I did not know how to teach them, and commenced to cry; but the person comforted me, and said that I should make a commencement and he would help me.

"As I was about to obey there appeared a lady of noble bearing, and at the same time the crowd of children changed into a multitude of wild beasts of every kind. I could do nothing but stand amazed at such a change, when the lady said to me: 'Behold the field of your labour, here is where your work lies. Be humble, but brave and persevering, and what you will now see happen to these beasts, you must do for my children.' Then another change took place before my eyes. In place of wild animals, I saw young lambs which bleated and skipped around the two persons and chased one another about. Musing on these wonders and admiring the change, I could not contain my joy, and I awoke quite comforted and happy."

About that time he frequently had such dreams, in one of which he saw that some of the lambs became in their turn shepherds, and assisted him in guarding and directing the flock.

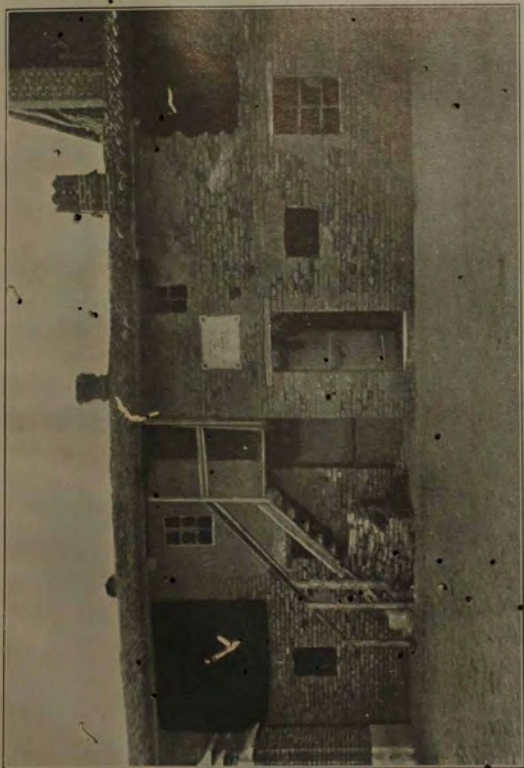
It is not for us to decide whether this was a simple dream or a wonderful vision; but from that day the boy had an ardent desire to become a priest for the instruction and salvation of children, and his mother encouraged this desire. But the opposition of his step-brother, Anthony (John Bosco's father was a widower),

and the poverty of his family, were obstacles to any regular study; and although for some time he went to distant village schools, walking many miles a day, his brother's arguments at last put an end to his lessons for the time. "I should like to know," Anthony used to say, "why John should be allowed to lie in the cool shade, or be at school, while I must dig away under the burning rays of the sun?" For the sake of peace, the poor child was obliged to give up going to school, and take a part in the labours of the field. But nothing could make him abandon the idea of a call from God; moreover, his continual struggle taught him many hard lessons, which, later on, were of great avail in dealing with others whose difficulties were of a similar nature.

Behold then our future Don* Bosco as a lad of twelve or thirteen, taking his share in the work of the farm. He had to give help in all departments, but as the minding of the cows and other live stock generally fell to his lot, he made good use of what leisure this occupation afforded. Hence wherever he went, or whatever he did, he took with him an inseparable companion, a book, on whose pages his eyes were eagerly bent whenever an opportunity offered itself. For some time also he had a few lessons in the early morning from the priest at Murialdo, and did his writing work at night; but this struggle could not last long. When his stepbrother came of age, a settlement of the family property was made, and the mother with her two sons, Joseph and John, separated from him. This gave the younger boy his freedom, and he soon resumed regular studies. Having finished his elementary schooling, he went, in 1831, to Chieri to take a course of Latin, and when this was terminated, in 1835, he received the clerical habit and entered the seminary. The early pages of his life contain many incidents which give a special charm and meaning to this part of his career, and bring to light his singular abilities as well as the wonderful ways in which his vocation was being gradually developed and

* *Don* is an Italian title prefixed to the name or surname of priests. It is an abbreviation of the Latin *Dominus*.

fulfilled; but for them the reader is referred to other sources of information. The cleric John Bosco passed through his studies at the seminary with characteristic thoroughness and success, and as about Midsummer, 1841, his ordination drew near, so did he insensibly approach the opening stages of what proved to be the providential working out of his youthful dreams.



THE HOUSE WHERE ST. JOHN BOSCO WAS BORN
AT CASTELNUOVO D'ASTI — NOW RENAMED CASTELNUOVO DON BOSCO.

CHAPTER I.

Don Bosco as a priest.—Monks and soldiers.—The prisons.—The idea of a remedy.

IN the seminary at Chieri, on the Eve of Trinity Sunday, 1841, John Bosco was ordained priest by the Archbishop of Turin, His Grace Aloysius Fransoni. He was then twenty-six years of age.

Three livings were almost simultaneously offered to him: a chaplaincy to a Genoese nobleman; a parish at Muialdo, and a curacy in his native place; but before coming to any decision he went to Turin to consult Don Cafasso, a priest from his own part of the country, to whom he had for some years had recourse for guidance in all matters of importance or difficulty. This saintly man was, at the time, Rector of the Ecclesiastical College annexed to the Church of St. Francis of Assisi; he listened to all that Don Bosco had to say concerning the stipend offered and the proposals made to him, then he answered: "You should first of all complete your course of moral theology and your preparation for the pulpit; give up all thought of benefices for the time being, and come here for a while." Don Bosco readily consented, and on November 3rd, 1841, he took up his abode with the other priests under Don Cafasso's direction.

A visitor to Turin will probably remember the grey, monastic building which flanks the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. This ancient pile, which has withstood the vicissitudes of centuries, formerly belonged to the Franciscans; but when Napoleon added Piedmont to his dominions, the monks were obliged to yield up their peaceful retreat to the soldiers and horses of the invading army.

At that time a certain Don Louis Guala was in charge of the Franciscan church. He had a high reputation for sanctity and prudence, for learning and disinterested zeal. Keenly alive to the unsettled state of affairs in Italy, and the difficulties which beset the clergy in those times, he saw the vital importance of a regular course of practical training for young priests fresh from the seminary, before they entered on their arduous labours. Accordingly, in 1808, Don Louis Guala arranged for meetings in his own house, and commenced lectures on moral theology.

Later on, the old Franciscan monastery became vacant in consequence of the withdrawal of the French troops at the fall of Napoleon. Don Guala applied for it immediately, and secured it with the authorization of King Carlo Felice. A simple code of rules was drawn up, the ecclesiastical college was firmly established, and meditation, spiritual reading, two daily conferences, lessons on preaching, every facility for study, reading and consultation, completed the course under Don Guala's regime.

In his praiseworthy undertaking, the labours of Don Guala were lightened by the able assistance of other priests, and their influence soon made itself felt in Turin and throughout the whole of Piedmont. Foremost among these assistants was Don Bosco's friend and fellow-countryman, Don Cafasso, who succeeded Don Guala as Rector of the College. It was in his company and under his guidance that Don Bosco began to visit the prisons of the city. Coming into contact with young prisoners between the ages of twelve and eighteen, who were undergoing various terms of imprisonment for petty crimes, in all the sickening detail of gaol life in those times, and with the immorality and evil habits it engendered, the young priest was moved by strange feelings of horror and pity. There, they were before his eyes the disgrace of their country, the dishonour of their parents; but he saw deeper: he thought of their immortal souls in evident peril of eternal perdition. Many of them had no home but the

prison. They left it only to return after a few days; released again, fresh convictions followed, till a life of misdeeds brought a worse ending.

This terrible experience haunted Don Bosco continually. Something should be done, some remedy must be found, it was cruel to let young lives perish in that way. He felt that he must do something for them. "Who knows?" he used to say, "if these unfortunate boys had had a friend to counsel them, if they had been instructed in our holy religion, they would have probably grown up in ignorance of evil ways. Is it not of vital importance to religion and to society, to take some means to prevent the same misfortune happening to hundreds of other boys in a like helpless condition?"

He put these thoughts before his adviser, Don Cafasso, and in concert with him, he began to think out a plan to remedy this sad state of affairs, placing his trust in Divine Providence, without whose aid human efforts are vain.

CHAPTER II.

*The Feast of the Immaculate Conception. —
The Sacristan. — The first lesson. — The name
"Oratory."*

THE Oratory of St. Francis of Sales and the other Houses that have sprung from it, are like so many large families of boys. Now, in order to be well regulated, properly brought up, and shielded from harm, a family needs the care of a mother. And here many eloquent facts might be added to show that the Blessed Virgin herself has ever been the Mother and powerful protectress of Don Bosco's works; but in order to follow events in their chronological order, suffice it to remark here, that it was precisely on a day consecrated to one of the brightest glories of our Heavenly Queen, that the Oratory had its providential beginning.

The heart-rending sight of the youthful prisoners—as has been related above—and of many others walking in the ways of sin, seemed continually to urge Don Bosco to devote himself entirely to the care of these unfortunate members of society. Nevertheless, he was not a little perplexed as to the particular shape wherein to embody this charitable design, when an incident put an end to uncertainty by opening the way to action. On the morning of December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Don Bosco was vesting for Mass in the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi.

The sacristan, a rustic, good-hearted sort of man, seeing a boy approaching, called to him to come and serve the Mass.

"I cannot; I do not know how," replied the boy.

"Come along, you must serve," said the sacristan.

"But I tell you I cannot; I have never served Mass in my life."

"Then what are you doing here in the sacristy?" rejoined the sacristan, somewhat ruffled, and applying the handle of his duster, he dismissed him rather summarily.

Awakening to a sense of what was going on at the door, Don Bosco turned round and said:

"What are you about? Why do you ill-treat the boy?"

"Why should he come in here, then, if he cannot serve Mass?"

"That is no reason why you should ill-treat him. Call him back immediately, I want to speak to him."

The sacristan could only obey, though he did so reluctantly. When the boy appeared he was still in dread, and it took a good deal of reassurance on Don Bosco's part to make him feel at ease.

"Have you been to Mass already this morning?" Don Bosco asked.

"No," was the brief reply.

"Stay then, and hear this one; afterwards I wish to speak to you about something."

Don Bosco wished at first only to make up for the sacristan's rough treatment, but God had another design, choosing that day for the lowly commencement of a vast work on behalf of the young.

Having said Mass and finished his thanksgiving, Don Bosco took the boy aside, and sitting down, began to interrogate him.

"What is your name, my young friend?"

"Bartholomew Garelli."

"What part of the country do you come from?"

"From Asti."

"Are your parents living?"

"My mother and father are both dead."

"How old are you?"

"I am sixteen."

"Can you read and write?"

"I have never been to school, and know hardly anything."

"Have you made your first communion?"

"No, not yet."

"Have you been to confession?"

"About six years ago."

"Do you go to catechism?"

"No; I am too big for that. The little boys know more than I do, and I am only laughed at among them."

"Supposing I were to teach you your catechism by yourself, would you come to learn it?"

"Yes, willingly."

"Shall we arrange to come here for the instruction?"

"Yes, if the sacristan will allow me to come in."

"Don't think of him any more. You shall have no ill-treatment, we shall be friends henceforth, and here you need have nothing to do with anyone else but me. Well, when shall we begin?"

"Whenever you like."

"Let us fix our first lesson for this evening."

"Very well."

"Or would you like to commence now?"

"I am quite ready."

Don Bosco commenced by making the sign of the Cross, but the boy only stared, not knowing even that much about his religion. The first lesson, therefore, consisted in teaching the way to make the sign of the Cross, and giving an idea of God, and creation, and why He created us. After about half an hour Don Bosco sent the boy away, making an agreement to continue their lesson on the following Sunday. By attention and perseverance the boy was soon able to make a good confession, and shortly afterwards made his first communion.

Acting on Don Bosco's instructions, young Garelli brought other boys to the catechism class in the sacristy of St. Francis of Assisi. They were mostly young lads who had come in from the country places to find work in Turin, and there, left to themselves amid the turmoil of a large city, they were liable to fall into reckless and evil ways.

As the number increased, Don Bosco varied his

programme, and instead of the half hour of Christian doctrine, he soon found the means of passing Sundays and holidays in their company. Part of the day was arranged for religious instruction and church services, the rest was passed in a variety of amusements, and such refining influences as singing, instrumental music, and simple lessons in the ordinary subjects. Such was the origin of the Oratory, which, by the favour of God and the protection of our Blessed Lady, was to have a development of unforeseen importance, according to the secret designs of Providence.

Though these Sunday meetings consisted of two parts, it was to emphasize their religious character and real aim that Don Bosco gave them the title of Oratory. Religion and its practice, moral instruction, and the salvation of souls, these form the end; recreation, music, and lessons were but some of the means to attain it.

CHAPTER III.

*The work of the Oratory.—Increase in numbers.—
An incident.—Removal.*

IT is characteristic of the works of God that their beginnings are lowly, and that, contrary almost to expectation, they afterwards display a wonderful growth, so that it may be quite clear that they are inspired and sustained by Divine Providence. The Oratory, as we shall see, bears this characteristic.

Although the object Don Bosco had in view was the care and instruction of the most needy and friendless, nevertheless, as an aid to discipline and for good example, he also invited and succeeded in drawing to the Oratory boys of better education and behaviour. Following their master's example, these boys were soon able to maintain good order among their less tractable companions, gave simple lessons, and took the lead in the vocal music, all of which served to give more variety to the meetings and increase their utility and attractiveness. In less than two months from the date of Garelli's first lesson in Christian doctrine, the vestibule of St. Francis' Church resounded with the music of the boys' first hymn to Our Lady, on the Feast of the Purification, 1842.

In those very early days the procedure at the Oratory was as follows: On all Sunday mornings and holydays of obligation, every opportunity was given to the boys to approach the Sacraments; but every month one Sunday was chosen for a general communion day. In the afternoon they met again in one of the chapels of the church (since the vestibule soon proved too small), where, after a hymn, there was a short spiritual reading, followed by another hymn. Then Don Bosco or another

priest gave a brief instruction in Christian doctrine, illustrating by examples or anecdotes, so that there was no formal preaching. After the service, little presents of some sort were generally distributed among the boys, sometimes indiscriminately, at other times as a reward for special effort.

Don Guala and Don Cafasso were delighted with these reunions, which steadily grew in numbers on every successive festival; and it was chiefly they who provided the little rewards which were given to the boys. Very often they purchased clothes for the poorest, and sometimes found themselves called upon to support for weeks together little wanderers whom Don Bosco had met in the streets.

Though many handicrafts were represented by the lads who frequented Don Bosco's Oratory, the larger number were engaged in bricklayer's work; and as St. Ann is regarded as the Patroness of that trade, Don Guala arranged for a special treat on her feast day. Accordingly, when morning Mass and communion were over, the good priest led all the boys, to the number of a hundred, into the Conference Hall of the Ecclesiastical College. But it was not for the purpose of the usual conference. One of the boys, recalling the feast in later years, remarked: "There was little difficulty in solving the cases put before us that morning; in fact most of them vanished almost as soon as they appeared."

Don Bosco's solicitude, however, was not confined to the Sunday, for a great part of the week was given up to the boys' interests. If any of them lost their post, or happened to be in an undesirable situation, Don Bosco would not rest till suitable employment and a good Christian master were found. Almost every day he visited some of the boys in their workshops, and on these occasions a word of encouragement, an inquiry or a little present, went a long way to lighten their heavy and sometimes unpleasant work. Employers themselves soon came to welcome these visits, for they saw that the influence on the boys and their work was

as much to their own advantage as to the welfare of the lads. An amusing incident illustrates the friendly relations which sprang up through these visits.

One of Don Bosco's *protégés* was an office boy in a merchant's shop in Turin. The priest was one day passing by the glass door of the shop, when the boy caught sight of him, and acting on the spur of the moment, rushed out into the street, not noticing, in his impetuosity, that the glass door was shut. At the sound of shattered glass Don Bosco turned round, a crowd of curious onlookers immediately gathered, and the merchant came out excitedly, giving free vent to his feelings. The boy stood near Don Bosco, ashamed and mortified. "What has happened?" asked the latter. "I saw you passing by," stammered the lad, "and in my eagerness to greet you I forgot all about the glass-door."

"Oh, if that is all, never mind, I'll pay for it."

"No, no," then put in the merchant, when he had learnt the cause of the mishap, "it shall never be said that I made the boy suffer for his good-heartedness, nor Don Bosco for his charity. But let us hope that another time the boy will remember that he cannot pass through a closed door like a fairy."

Don Bosco thanked the merchant for his generosity, and dismissed his young friend with a few appropriate words. Thus the incident terminated.

In the meantime Don Bosco completed the course of lectures at the college, and became the spiritual guide as well as the protector of his young friends. Thus almost three years passed, at the end of which time Don Bosco received his first appointment, and with his departure from the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, the Oratory was transplanted to new surroundings.

CHAPTER IV.

Don Bosco's appointment. — His new duties. — Removal of the Oratory. — Interview with the Archbishop. — The first chapel and its dedication.

AT the close of the scholastic year 1843-44, Don Cafasso, who was then the President of the Ecclesiastical College, made known to Don Bosco the decision of his superiors, that he should prepare to leave the institute; many applications had in fact been made for him from various quarters.

"Do you feel called especially to any particular work?" asked Don Cafasso.

"I am ready to follow out whatever you decide," was the reply.

"There are three appointments proposed: a curacy at Asti, a professorship of moral theology in the college here, and the chaplaincy of the Hospital near the Refuge; which would you prefer to take?"

"Whichever you think best."

"But have you no preference for any one of the three?"

"I have only one preference: to dedicate myself to the welfare of youth; you can dispose of me, however, just as you wish; your decision will be to me the Will of God."

"What thoughts are uppermost in your heart now?"

"Just at the present moment I seem to see a crowd of children calling to me for assistance."

"Very well," said Don Cafasso, concluding the interview, "you must now take a few weeks' holiday. When you return I shall tell you your appointment."

The vacation over, Don Bosco returned to the college, but for a fortnight he heard no more about his new

duties. At last Don Cafasso called him and said, "I expected you to come and ask about your appointment."

"But I wanted to have no part in the decision," replied Don Bosco; "I wish to take it as the expression of God's Will."

"Well then, get together your things and go to the Refuge, where you will be chaplain to the Hospital of St. Philomena, and at the same time you will assist Don Borel in the work of the girls' institute. Almighty God will find the means of carrying out your ideas on behalf of poor boys."

It may seem at first that this decision was altogether contrary to Don Bosco's inclinations, and more or less prejudicial to the work of the Oratory; the spiritual direction of a hospital and of an institute of upwards of four hundred girls, such as the Refuge was, might well be considered enough occupation to absorb all his attention and leave little for the boys. The sequel, however, proved otherwise.

Don Borel, mentioned above, was then the chaplain to the Refuge. He was a saintly man deserving of the highest admiration for his many good qualities and wide attainments. Don Bosco often said, in after years, that he regarded as a signal favour from God to have known and worked with such a man. He entered heartily into Don Bosco's plans on behalf of the boys, and the two soon became intimate friends.

Having now fixed his residence at the Refuge, Don Bosco began to be anxious about a site where he could continue the Oratory. It was Don Borel who temporarily settled his difficulties. "The rooms that are prepared for you," he said, "will do for the boys as well; I hope we shall soon find a more suitable place for them."

Accordingly, on the second Sunday of October, 1844, he announced to those assembled for the last time in St. Francis of Assisi, that the Oratory would henceforth be held in the Refuge at Valdocco, but it could be done only in the evening, as he had other duties in the morning.

On the following Sunday the inhabitants of the Valdocco quarter had a new experience, for they beheld, to their amazement, a crowd of boys of all ages and conditions running along the streets in search of Don Bosco and the new Oratory.

Don Bosco's name was heard on every side as the inquirers asked for their new meeting-place. As the people of Valdocco had not yet heard of Don Bosco nor his Oratory, it is easy to understand how, at the first appearance of the noisy throng, they were almost panic-stricken. Their second impulse, however, was to resist this juvenile invasion, and issuing from their houses, they began to threaten violence. Arguments soon changed to blows, and the affray had assumed a rather serious aspect, when Don Bosco hastened to the scene.

In a moment peace was restored, and Don Bosco's name again resounded in the boys' hearty shouts. At this turn of events the anger of the people changed to surprise, and they questioned one another about the new priest who seemed to be the friend and protector of every boy in Turin. "We are coming to the Oratory," shouted the boys as they gathered round their chief. In reply to their eager questions as to its whereabouts, Don Bosco evasively answered that the new Oratory was not yet ready, but for the time they were going to his rooms, which were large enough for their needs. The boys soon discovered that they had expected rather too much, but Don Bosco's presence was sufficient to counteract a good many drawbacks, and they declared themselves well satisfied with the new arrangements. The Oratory lessons and devotions were then begun as usual.

If the disturbance created in the streets was at first a drawback, it served as a wide advertisement for Don Bosco's undertaking. During the following week the Valdocco people freely discussed the matter, and they arranged that on the following Sunday, the boys of their own neighbourhood should join the regular attenders and ask to be admitted. Don Bosco extended

his welcome to all, till the rooms, corridors, and even the stairs were crowded with children. The articles of furniture served for playthings and the house was soon turned upside down. Don Bosco was not in the least disconcerted; he looked on with a smile, satisfied with giving out a few injunctions for the safety of some of his goods.

But though this might serve for the recreation part of the Oratory, the religious functions were not so easily arranged. There was no room in the house large enough to hold a third of the juvenile audience; if the others heard the word of God at all, it was under very adverse circumstances. Notwithstanding these difficulties, more than two hundred boys presented themselves for confession on All Saints' Day. There were only two confessors, but the boys waited patiently for their turn at the Sacred Tribunal; Don Borèl was delighted and edified, and he became one of Don Bosco's most enthusiastic supporters. He was convinced that such a work could not be carried on without a site more adapted to the requirements of the boys, especially for the religious functions.

It was then that Don Bosco resolved to visit the Archbishop of Turin, His Grace Aloysius Fransoni, and lay before him the needs of his humble institution and the fruits it had already produced. In describing its commencement, Don Bosco said, "Most of these boys are from other parts of the country, and spend only a few months in Turin. They are, generally speaking, poorly clad, and do not even know to what parish they belong. Many of them speak strange dialects and are in consequence easily perplexed, not being always able to make their position clear. There are others, too, more advanced in years, who would be ashamed to associate with boys for the early lessons in Christian doctrine which they still require. And those who are natives of Turin have either been neglected by their parents, or led away by bad companions, so that they seldom or never go to church."

The Archbishop was not slow to grasp the social and moral importance of such an institution. He commended Don Bosco for his zeal on behalf of the most needy, he blessed him and his work, gave him the most ample faculties, and promised all the assistance that lay in his power. "From what you have said," His Grace concluded, "I plainly see the need of more suitable premises; go to the Marchioness Barolo; she may be able to provide something in the Refuge itself."

Acting on this advice, Don Bosco waited on the Marchioness, who, it must be explained, was the foundress of the Refuge. He made his needs known, and as the Hospital was not to be opened for some months, she agreed that two of its wards should be converted into a chapel for his boys. These two rooms, therefore, formed the first chapel of the Oratory. The inauguration took place on the 8th of December, 1844, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady, to whose special patronage Don Bosco commended himself and his work. The boys who assisted at the opening service, later on in life clearly remembered every circumstance connected with that 8th of December. The streets of the city were covered with a thick layer of snow, which continued to fall during the morning, and many of the boys coming from considerable distances arrived half frozen. But that only increased the pleasure with which they entered the new chapel and saw the large fire that Don Bosco had taken care to have lit. At the hour fixed upon, Don Bosco proceeded to bless the chapel, dedicating it, with permission of the Archbishop, to St. Francis of Sales. The Holy Sacrifice was then offered and a general communion was made. Great was the joy of the children at finding themselves established in their own chapel, and it was difficult for them to understand why tears should appear on Don Bosco's face during the sacred functions. They were tears of consolation and joy, for he saw how the Oratory was by degrees assuming more of a permanent state, and that he had now much better

opportunities for carrying on his work on behalf of the young.

It may be interesting to know why the first Oratory was dedicated in honour of St. Francis of Sales. There were more reasons than one for it. In order to carry on the new undertaking, several priests were already partly co-operating with Don Bosco, and the above-mentioned Marchioness wished him to give the title of St. Francis to this company of priests. Another reason was that the position of spiritual director and guide to hundreds of youths which Don Bosco filled, called especially for the exercise of meekness and forbearance — qualities in which St. Francis of Sales was a model. Another consideration was, that just at that time the ideas of various sects were rapidly spreading throughout the north of Italy and especially in Turin; Don Bosco, therefore, desired to obtain the assistance of that great champion of the Faith who had, in his own time, converted so many heretics and accomplished great things for the good of the Church.

CHAPTER V.

Progress.—New quarters.—The benefits of transplantation.—Further difficulties.—The hand of God.

IN this chapel at the hospital, the Oratory flourished exceedingly. On Sundays, and other days when invited, boys came in large numbers to Mass and the Sacraments, which Don Bosco recommended as the great remedy against sin and evil habits. In the evening, Benediction was added to the religious functions, and during the morning and afternoon recreations, some of the elder boys helped Don Bosco and Don Borel with the general management.

About this time too, in 1845, Don Bosco went a step further in his work by organising evening classes. Their utility was so evident, that his example was soon followed in neighbouring towns and elsewhere. The workshops being closed and the day's toil over, many of the boys would come round to the priest's house in Valdocco, and Don Bosco and Don Borel, using their private rooms as class-rooms, set to work with great assiduity to instruct their young visitors in the simple subjects of general knowledge.

Seven months passed by in a fairly even course. The number of boys in attendance had grown considerably, they had become attached to their surroundings and hoped to enjoy them without disturbance. They were, however, to be disappointed. The date fixed for the opening of the hospital was drawing near, and the Marchioness Barolo, though in sympathy with, and even admiring Don Bosco's work, saw at once that it would be a disturbance to her own institute, and accordingly reminded Don Bosco of the expiration of the term agreed upon. The removal was to be on or

before August 10th, 1845. Don Bosco pointed out several ways which could suit them both, but they were not acceptable to the Marchioness, and she was inflexible. Don Bosco was perplexed but not dismayed. Confident that Divine Providence had blessed his work, he applied to the Municipal Council of Turin, and being supported in his petition by Archbishop Fransoni, he obtained, with certain restrictions, the use of St. Martin's Church. Without knowing that it was for the last time, the boys met as usual in the chapel of St. Francis of Sales for their Mass and instruction one Sunday in July. As he had arranged all the preliminaries, Don Bosco then announced the forthcoming change, and said it was necessary to strike their tents and find other quarters. The news was at first received with no slight disapproval, but the priest's words soon produced calm, and he finished by inviting the boys to return after mid-day to help him with the removal. This part of the change appealed to them readily enough, and they all came in good time to await Don Bosco's orders. On the word of command, an indescribable scene took place. Benches, stools, chairs, pictures, were carried off by the boys; here and there were boys carrying off the candlesticks, while another boy bore away the cross in triumph; in this way all the chapel furniture and altar requisites were speedily moved to the new meeting place, St. Martin's Church. Such a scene naturally brought a crowd of highly amused onlookers, and many questions were asked concerning the boys and their doings; so that this movement was another advertisement for the Oratory and made it known in different quarters of the town. When they had all arrived at the church, and order was again established, Don Bosco gave his first discourse in the new surroundings:

"My dear children," he said, "you know that cabbages, unless transplanted, do not become stout and hearty, and the same applies to our Oratory. It has already had two transplantings, and in its different sites it has always flourished with increasing vigour. The

time you spent at the Refuge was not without its good results, and, just as at the previous place, you had your own church services, your catechism, your recreation and games. At the Hospital we had commenced a real Oratory, having a chapel for ourselves and a more convenient locality, and it seemed that we had found a lasting abode; but Divine Providence has ordained that we should abandon that place and be transplanted here. Shall we be here long? We do not know. Whatever happens, we must hope that through transplanting, our Oratory will increase in the number of boys, and that in time we shall have, not only Sunday schools and night schools, but day schools as well. There must be no regretting the past; let us put all our troubles in God's hands, and He will take care of us. Even now He assists and maintains us; He will find us also a place to promote His honour and glory and the good of souls. In the meantime, let us remember also that divine favours are connected like the links of a chain. Be careful not to break any one of these links; let us avail ourselves of the first graces bestowed upon us and we shall receive more and more. Try to keep in view the end for which the Oratory was founded; frequent it and profit by the instruction; and thus, with the help of God, you will make progress in a good Catholic life, become upright, worthy citizens, and one day gain the Kingdom of Heaven where Our Blessed Lord will give to each the reward he has merited."

Although Don Bosco and Don Borel did all in their power to keep up the courage and spirits of the boys, and make them feel at home in their new surroundings, it must be confessed that they were not always successful, and the Oratory at St. Martin's never became a favourite resort. For reasons depending on the parish clergy, they were not allowed to have Mass or the Sacraments in the Church of St. Martin, but were obliged to go to one or other of the churches of the town, thereby causing great inconvenience to themselves and to the congregation. The playground, too, was quite inadequate, consisting of a small square in front

of the church, so that the games were carried on partly in the street, more or less to the annoyance of everyone. But even such a place was better than nothing, and they tried to make the most of it for the time being, awaiting the further dispensations of Providence.

In the meantime a new danger was approaching, which threatened the existence of the Oratory. Indeed from this point may be dated the annoyances and petty persecutions against Don Bosco's work, which only proved, however, that the designs of God were not to be thwarted. It must be mentioned that St. Martin's Church was near the city flour mills; the kind of people inhabiting the place may therefore be surmised. Yet even these thought they had a right to do away with what they considered a nuisance — the noise of some hundreds of boys at play. Accordingly they drew up a petition to be presented to the Municipal authorities, representing the Oratory in the worst colours they could. Therein was pointed out that the boys obeyed the least sign from Don Bosco, and might therefore be dangerous instruments in the hands of a priest, by whom disturbances or even a revolution might be organised at a brief notice. It was further alleged that the boys were ruining the walls of the church, and that if they were allowed to continue their afternoon meetings there, the neighbourhood would be no longer safe. It was therefore urged that the only remedy was to withdraw the order of the Mayor for the use of the church, and to forbid any further gatherings of the boys, under whatever name they might be held.

The Mayor, after consideration, sent an officer to examine and report on the damage done by the boys; but contrary to the words of the complaint, the church, both interior and exterior, and all its belongings, were found to be in precisely the same condition as they were before Don Bosco and his boys took possession. A single scratch on one of the walls was all that the severest scrutiny of the law could detect. Yet this one scratch afforded pretext enough to Don Bosco's detractors for invoking the interference of the Municipal authorities,

and they seemed to be as much concerned as though the city was about to be destroyed by an earthquake.

As the petition did not immediately produce the desired effect, a clerk at the mills, on his own initiative, addressed a letter to the Mayor, repeating the former complaints, and enlarging upon them, declaring that the families at the mills were disturbed both in their duties and in their domestic tranquillity. He even went so far as to suggest that the Oratory meetings were a cover for immorality. This letter seemed to have the desired effect. Although aware of the false nature of the charges, the Mayor sent an order forbidding the use of St. Martin's Church, and obliging Don Bosco to sever all connection with the neighbourhood. It may be noted in passing, that this letter was the last ever written by the unfortunate clerk. No sooner had he sent the document containing the false accusation, than his right hand was seized with such violent tremors that he was obliged to give up his position, and died about three years afterwards. His little boy, left quite destitute, was taken by Don Bosco and placed in one of the Houses that he had then opened.

About that time many occurrences served to prove that Don Bosco's work was not only acceptable to Almighty God, but blessed by Him in a remarkable manner. Numerous indeed were the families of Turin and elsewhere, that, on their own testimony, dated their prosperity from some act of charity towards Don Bosco's work. While, on the other hand, events which will be mentioned later on show that severe chastisement often followed those who maliciously strove to destroy it.

CHAPTER VI.

The Oratory at St. Peter's. — A letter and its consequences. — The Oratory unsettled. — A new lease.

IN the early part of its formation, the Oratory may be compared to the nomadic existence of the ancient Patriarchs; like them, it moved its tents from time to time to seek a new abode. In alluding to this fact, Don Bosco always encouraged the boys to look forward to a Promised Land which God would sooner or later point out to them, and where they could settle permanently.

Being obliged to leave St. Martin's, as has been explained above, Don Bosco petitioned the Municipality for permission to use the old courtyard and church, commonly known as St. Peter's churchyard. His Grace, Archbishop Fransoni, supported his request, and as the Mayor and most of the Councillors were persuaded that the complaints from the mills were slanders, his reasons were favourably received and the petition granted. The Oratory was therefore transferred, after only two months at St. Martin's. The next locality had several advantages; wide porticoes, a large courtyard, and a suitable church for the children's service, all these met with the immediate approval of the boys, and the disturbances at the former place were soon forgotten.

But rejoicings were premature. The first outbursts of glee had not subsided when a formidable adversary appeared in the ancient burial ground of St. Peter's. It was no ghostly vision of the long past dead awakened from slumber: it was living, and very energetic despite its years, for it was none other than the chaplain's old housekeeper. No sooner did she hear the boys' glad voices, their songs and perhaps rather noisy games, than she rushed upon the scene, her bonnet awry, and

began to vociferate with characteristic eloquence. Whenever she paused for breath, a servant girl took up the note, her dog kept up a continual bark, being as excited as his mistress, the disturbed hens and geese began to cackle; it was evident that war was in the air. Don Bosco approached, and explaining that his boys had no evil intentions and bore her no ill-will, strove to pacify her; he tried to show her that they were simply enjoying themselves without the slightest harm to anything or anybody. It was all in vain. Far from succeeding in his effort, Don Bosco himself became the object of no light invectives and reproaches, and convinced that no good could be done by arguing the point, he gave a sign to stop the recreation and to assemble for the afternoon service in the church. After a little catechism and the Rosary the boys went home, assured that by next Sunday all would have been satisfactorily arranged. They were mistaken, however, for they had seen the first and last of St. Peter's.

On that fateful Sunday the chaplain of the place was absent. When he returned, the old servant accosted him, and declaring that Don Bosco and his boys were nothing short of profaners of holy places, and the lowest of the rabble, she induced him to write to the Municipality. At the dictation of the enraged female, he wrote his charges with such acrimony that a warrant was issued for Don Bosco's arrest, should he again attempt to meet with his boys at St. Peter's.

It is sad to record the fact that this, too, was the last literary effort of the unfortunate chaplain of St. Peter's. On Monday morning he sent the letter to the Municipal authorities; after a few hours he fell ill of an apoplectic stroke and died almost immediately. And that was not all. His grave was hardly closed in, when a fresh one was dug. The old housekeeper, struck down in the same manner, survived her master only two days. Thus, before half the week had passed, these two who had given a check to Don Bosco's work, had disappeared from the scene.

It is easier to imagine than describe the terror produced by these two sudden deaths; it was impossible not to see the hand of God in the matter, and the boys were so convinced of it, that instead of giving up the Oratory, they became more and more attached to it, and determined never to abandon it, no matter what schemes might be laid for its destruction.

It must not be forgotten, however, that Don Bosco was now turned out of doors for the third time. He expected to find some meeting place before Sunday came, but notwithstanding all his efforts he did not succeed. Many of the boys had not heard of the closing of the Oratory at St. Peter's, and Don Bosco, even had it been possible to do so, had not the heart to inform them. Crowds of them accordingly repaired to the church on the Sunday, but finding it barred and bolted, they made their way to Don Bosco's house at the hospital to learn the meaning of it. His apartments, of course, could not offer even standing room for all their number, but he managed to spend the day among them in the neighbourhood, and, hiding his intense grief, he awakened their expectations by glowing descriptions of a future Oratory, which then, of course, only existed in his own imagination and in the hidden designs of Divine Providence.

As there was no available room at the Refuge to lodge the homeless Oratory, and the Hospital was forbidden them, for two months it had to lead a nomadic existence, a circumstance which, no doubt, went a long way to show that Don Bosco and his troop of boys partly deserved the name bestowed on them by evil wishers, namely, "an assembly of vagabonds." At an early hour on Sunday mornings the boys came to Don Bosco's house, bringing with them some provisions for the day. At the hour fixed, their leader placed himself at their head and conducted them to some village church or sanctuary in the vicinity of Turin, and there they had their religious functions. At the end of each meeting Don Bosco told the boys what excursion he had arranged for the following Sunday, explained the route and other circumstances, and exhorted them to bring companions

with them. Next Sunday's walk became one of the chief topics at home and in the workshops, and was eagerly looked forward to. The walks varied with the circumstances; the weather, especially, had to be taken into account. On arriving at the village in question, one or other of the neighbouring churches was fixed upon for Mass, and at Don Bosco's word, order was established with a readiness and unanimity that quite amazed the bystanders. Mass was followed by a brief explanation of the Gospel; then breakfast in the open air. Those who had plenty shared with the less fortunate boys, and Don Bosco provided for those who had none. Now and then the bread would fail, but good humour and good appetites were never wanting. After a time passed in games or rest, the walk was continued, vespers being sung at another church in the afternoon. A catechism lesson was then given and the rosary recited, and when the sun began to disappear behind the Alps in a rosy sunset, the boys turned their steps homewards, and though somewhat fatigued in body, they re-entered Turin with light consciences and contented hearts.

The months passed rapidly on, and the November weather proved anything but suitable for long country walks. Some place within the city became indispensable, and Don Bosco and Don Borel, after much searching, succeeded in renting three rooms at Moretta House, in Via Cottolengo, where the Convent Chapel of the Nuns of Mary, Help of Christians now stands. Here four months were passed, and though the accommodation was very limited, the boys were content with it, as it afforded room for a night school and for religious instruction, and they had Don Bosco's company all to themselves. For the Sunday Mass they went to one or other of the public churches.

In that winter of 1845 disquieting rumours began to be propagated, which, though they could have little effect on Don Bosco, were not at all to the liking of the boys. Evil tongues began to spread the rumour that Don Bosco was a revolutionary, a lunatic, or even a heretic. These detractors were of course bent upon

stopping the Oratory, by bringing discredit on its author, and destroying, if possible, the wonderful influence he exercised over his young disciples. The result, as on former occasions, was quite the contrary; these calumnies seemed only to increase the affection of his young friends and to add to their numbers and devotion.

The clergy of Turin next complained that the young priest's imprudent zeal drew the children away from attendance at their parish churches. They feared, they said, that the children would never get accustomed to going to church, the priests would not be able to make the acquaintance of the younger members of their flocks, and would gradually lose sight of them.

"The children whom I gather together," replied Don Bosco, to the deputation that waited on him, "do not in any way affect the attendance at the parish churches."

"And how do you explain that?" asked one of the priests.

"Because they are almost all strangers; in fact, the greater part of the boys who attend the Oratory are Savoyards, Swiss, Lombards or natives of other States."

"But can they not attend the church of the parish in which they are at present residing?"

"They do not know their parish churches."

"And why not inform them of it?"

"Because it is morally impossible. The distance from their relations, the diversity of their dialects, the uncertainty of their abode, their frequent changing of employments, the example of their companions already estranged from the Church, all these circumstances have combined to make it impossible for the boys to know and attend any particular parish church. Again, many of them are fifteen, eighteen or even twenty years of age, and yet almost entirely ignorant of their religion. Who will induce them to go to church and sit with boys of eight or nine years for instruction in catechism?"

The meeting concluded with the conviction that if

the Oratory were abandoned, the class of boys frequenting it, instead of attending the churches in the city, would probably soon fall back into the evil ways from which Don Bosco was endeavouring to rescue them. The parish priests therefore held a conference to examine the matter in all its bearings, and after much discussion, a favourable resolution was passed and communicated to Don Bosco. This document was as follows :

"The clergy of the city of Turin, assembled in Conference, have discussed the question of the continuance of the Festive Oratory. After considering the advantages and drawbacks, they have passed a resolution, that, as each parish priest cannot provide an Oratory for his respective boys, Don Bosco be encouraged to continue his work until other arrangements are agreed upon."

It may be remarked here that the Turin clergy never afterwards regretted their resolution, but all of them became supporters of Don Bosco's work, and sent him many boys whom they could not deal with themselves. Their goodwill was probably stimulated by the fact that their Archbishop, Aloysius Fransoni, was constant in his support of the Oratory, and gave no countenance whatever to those who chose to regard the zealous priest as an innovator.

One would think that Don Bosco's troubles were now subsiding; such, however, was not the case. While his ecclesiastical brethren were now favourable, and he had nothing to fear from that quarter, another difficulty arose. The other tenants of the house in which the Oratory had rooms complained to the landlord that the disturbance was unbearable, and although the landlord himself was well disposed towards the Oratory, he explained his awkward position to Don Bosco, and advised him to find another meeting place. It was to his interest to do nothing harsh or spiteful, for the examples of the clerk or secretary, and of the chaplain and his housekeeper were still fresh in people's memory, and taught them to be more careful of their behaviour.

CHAPTER VII.

*The Oratory in the open air. — A homeless boy. —
A walk to Soperga. — An interview with the
Marquis of Cavour.*

DON BOSCO was not disconcerted by the necessity of a fifth move, but set about at once in search of another house. It is easy to understand that not many places were suited to his requirements, and as he could not settle on any particular house, he rented a field belonging to two brothers. This field was in the Valdocco neighbourhood, since occupied by an iron foundry and workshops, and there accordingly, in March, 1846, the Oratory took up its quarters. A broken hedge scarcely served to separate the boys from the public road, and their happy voices, games and singing, drew the attention of others, and the number soon increased to four hundred. While the malice of man kept moving Don Bosco from place to place, Almighty God took advantage of it to multiply his disciples, thus increasing his opportunities of doing good.

The thought, however, will suggest itself to the reader: "A field is all very well for recreation, but it could hardly serve for the practices of religion." It must be said in reply that religion was practised, and in quite an Apostolic and early Christian fashion. On Sundays, soon after daybreak, Don Bosco might be seen sitting on a hillock, on some improvised seat, hearing the confessions of the boys who came early for that purpose. Those preparing themselves knelt at a little distance, while those who were not going to the Sacraments played further off in the field. At a certain hour Don Bosco arose from his primitive confessional, and a boy, who always performed that office, then beat

on an old drum. This called the boys together, and when all were listening, Don Bosco told them the church where they would attend Mass and go to Holy Communion. They all got into line and walked to the church with a recollection that was quite edifying.

After Mass the boys looked after their own breakfast; and as soon as they chose they went to the Valdocco field to continue their games and listen to the instructions from Don Bosco and Don Borel. Their movements and various exercises were regulated by the sound of the drum. A hymn to our Blessed Lady usually concluded the afternoon's or evening's instruction, after which recreation went on till nightfall. When all had left the field Don Bosco returned to his rooms, and so exhausted was he on some occasions, that he would sink on the way and have to be carried home. Do not these scenes, however, remind one of the crowds that followed our Divine Master in the fields, on the hills and by the lake-side?

A little incident occurred at this time when the Oratory was held in the open-air. While all were at recreation one Sunday evening, a strange boy looked in at one of the openings of the hedge. It seemed as though he wanted to push aside a little branch and join the others, but dared not. Don Bosco soon saw him and drew near, but although he put more than one kindly inquiry, he received no answer. The priest began to think that the boy might be dumb, so going closer and putting his hand on the boy's head, he said again, "Come, tell me what is the matter; perhaps you are ill?"

Thus encouraged, the new-comer opened his lips, and in a hollow, startling voice, gave the brief answer: "I am starving." The reply moved all to pity, and food was immediately brought. When the boy had somewhat recovered, Don Bosco began to talk to him, and asked:

"Have you no relatives?"

"Yes, but they are far away."

"What work do you do?"

"I have been working as a saddler, but I lost my job through not knowing my trade sufficiently."

"But why did you not seek another place?"

"I have been and was doing so all day yesterday; but I am a stranger and could get no work."

"Then where did you sleep last night?"

"On the steps of St. John's Church."

"Did you go to Mass this morning?"

"Yes, but I was too indisposed to hear it well."

"Where were you going when you passed this way?"

"For some hours past I had been tempted to steal some food."

"Have you not asked anybody for help?"

"Yes, I have; but I do not look enough like a beggar, and could get nothing."

"If you had stolen, you would have been arrested."

"It was the fear of that which prevented me; but God must have saved me from it by leading me to you."

"Would you like to join us on Sunday in future?"

"If you will allow me I should be very glad to do so."

"Well, come whenever you can. Do not worry any more to-night about food and lodgings, they will be provided. To-morrow I shall see what can be done to get you some employment."

It is almost needless to say that the boy was ever afterwards grateful to Don Bosco, and remained attached to the Oratory till he entered on his military service in 1852.

A good deal has been said about the walks which Don Bosco arranged for Sundays during fine weather. It may be interesting to have a description of the walk to the famous Basilica of Superga, as narrated by one of the party. In the early morning, after the usual meeting in the field, and hearing Holy Mass, the whole company of some hundred boys formed into a double line and took the road to Superga, which lies some distance outside the city. Their band consisted of the traditional drum and a trumpet, both of which were

fairly audible, while some parts of the company enjoyed the music of a violin and a guitar. Distributed among the boys were baskets of bread and other light provisions which were to serve for refreshment. Passing through the city, order and comparative silence were preserved, but as soon as the river was passed, more freedom was allowed, and the noise gave some the impression that Soperga was to be taken by storm. Don Borel had already preceded the boys to arrange for the reception of the squadron, for he knew that after such a walk appetites would be unusually keen. Just at the foot of the long ascent they saw a horse ready saddled. It had been sent by the parish priest of the place for the captain of the band, and the messenger also handed a note to Don Bosco from Don Borel, in which he said: "You may come as soon as you like; the soup, meat, and wine are ready." Mounting in the saddle, Don Bosco read the note to the boys; it was received with loud applause which even caused the horse to start.

There was no need now for any pretence at order; the boys made the ascent in small groups just as they pleased, the greater number keeping company with the horse and its rider. It may be safely stated that the steed had never had so much pulling and urging on in its life; but it bore it all with great patience.

In the meantime the ascent was being gradually accomplished, and the Sanctuary was at last reached. Most of the boys were hot and perspiring, and as the weather was inclined to be chilly, Don Bosco gathered them together in a sheltered spot, and as soon as the tables were ready, they sat down for their refreshments. The Rector of the Ecclesiastical College, which has already been described, provided the soup and meat, while the parish priest of Soperga made himself responsible for the wine and fruit. There is no need to say that both these priests were loudly applauded, although they regarded the pleasure they had given the boys as sufficient recompense. After the meal, at a fixed time, all gathered together while Don Bosco explained the origin and historical connections of the Sanctuary;

he had a good opportunity here to dwell on many interesting and instructive points bearing on the history of their country, and after his explanations they visited the church, the tombs of the princes, the hall of the portraits of the Popes, and even mounted up to the cupola, whence they could view the beauties of Piedmont, backed by the majestic crescent of the snow-clad Alps. About three in the afternoon the bells were rung and the people from the neighbourhood came to the Sanctuary, where the boys sang vespers. Don Bosco preached a short sermon, and Benediction was then given. It was quite unusual, in those days, for boys to sing in church, and the people were so surprised and affected by it, that they remembered the occasion for years afterwards.

The spirit of loyalty among the boys enabled Don Bosco to claim order and silence at a moment's notice, and on one occasion, when he wanted their games to stop while he made a few arrangements, he merely made a sign with his hand, and there followed a lull and then complete silence. This immediate compliance drew from a soldier, who had been looking on, the remark: "If this priest were a general in command of an army, he could lead it anywhere and always to victory."

Just about that time there were rumours of revolutionary movements and of civil strife in different parts of Italy, and the remarkable influence of Don Bosco over his hundreds of youths led some of the Turin citizens to express their fears that this priest was a danger to the city, as he had so many willing instruments at his command. These idle rumours found credence with many influential people, and especially with the Marquis of Cavour, Mayor of the city and father of the famous statesman. Some time previously he had seen Don Bosco among his boys, engaged in one of his customary instructions, and he enquired:

"Who can that priest be, surrounded by all those boys?"

"It is Don Bosco," answered his companion.

"Don Bosco! Either he is mad," said the Marquis, "or else he ought to be put to prison."

Being acquainted with these prejudices of the Marquis, it is not difficult to understand his subsequent conduct. He sent to Don Bosco, asking him to call at the Town Hall, and when the two were seated, he began a cross-examination about the rumours then being spread concerning Don Bosco and his Oratory. After a lengthy interview he finished by saying:

"I am convinced that the meetings of your boys are dangerous, and accordingly, I cannot permit them. Take my advice, leave these boys alone, for they will only be a cause of anxiety to yourself and of trouble to the public authorities."

To this, Don Bosco replied: "I have no other aim, my lord Marquis, than to improve the condition of these poor boys. I do not ask for money; I only want to gather them together in some definite place, where they may pass the time in various amusements, instead of wandering about the town; and at the same time I can give them some instruction in their religion and advise them as to their behaviour."

"You deceive yourself," answered the Marquis, "and all your labour and sacrifices are being thrown away. Where could you find the means to provide such a number with food and lodging? No! I cannot allow these meetings any longer."

"The results of my first experiments are a proof that my labour has not been in vain. Many boys, who had been entirely neglected, have now been placed out of all danger of leading an idle or vagabond life, and are in fact learning good trades, so that they will be a credit to themselves and a help to their families. Up to the present, means have not failed; they are in the hands of Divine Providence, which is able to do great things by means of the weakest instruments."

"Nevertheless," answered the Marquis, you must promise me to stop these meetings; it is no use raising further difficulties."

"But," replied Don Bosco, "will you not grant me

this favour on behalf of so many boys, who would probably fall into evil ways if left to themselves?"

This persistence of Don Bosco annoyed the Marquis, who answered, with growing impatience:

"I cannot argue the point with you. Your Oratory is a disorder which I must and will prevent. Do you not know that all assemblies, unless legally authorized, are prohibited?"

"My assembly," replied Don Bosco, betraying no sign of yielding, "is entirely a religious one, and has no political bearing whatever. I only give instructions in Christian doctrine with the approval of the Archbishop."

"Is the Archbishop informed of these matters, then?"

"He knows everything, since no step has been taken without his consent."

"If the Archbishop were to tell you to stop this ridiculous undertaking, would you oppose him?"

"Not at all; I have begun this work and carried it on until now, with the advice of my ecclesiastical superior, and at a sign from him I would at once give it up."

"Very well, I have finished with you for the present; and I shall see the Archbishop as soon as possible. I hope you will not be obstinate with him, or I shall have to adopt severer measures."

Thus the interview terminated, but it was followed by other unpleasant occurrences, evidently attempts on the part of the enemy of souls to make Don Bosco lose courage, and so to destroy his work.

CHAPTER VIII.

*Another notice to quit. — The word of a prophet.
— Don Bosco gives up his position. — To the
Asylum. — A pilgrimage. — The sound of bells.*

WHEN speaking of the early days of Don Bosco's work, an illustrious French writer made use of an apt simile which is suited admirably to the stage of the Oratory at which we have arrived. "On a winter's day," he says, "one may see a number of little birds gathering round the kindly hand which scatters seeds for them on the ground; so also might one have seen a crowd of boys, of whom the world had little care, gathering round Don Bosco."

His comparison was truthful, for Don Bosco did indeed dispense to them the food for their moral growth and well-being, in the shape of Christian doctrine, instructions, sermons, conversations, and amusements; "but," continues the simile, "as it may just as likely happen that some ill-natured person may frighten away the birds trying to snatch a little food, and force them to search elsewhere, so did it happen more than once to Don Bosco and his boys; they, too, had to search elsewhere, flying first from the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, then from the Hospital, next from St. Martin's Church by the mills, again from St. Peter's, then from the Moretta house, and finally from the field." This last removal must now be related.

After the mention of the Archbishop's sanction in his interview with the Marquis of Cavour, Don Bosco thought there was every likelihood of peace. What a blow it must have been to him to find, on his return from the Town Hall, a letter from the owners of the field; in it they gave him notice to quit, although the

lease had not yet expired. "Your boys," they said, "by their continual trampling will injure the very roots of the grass. We shall, however, not demand the rent due, on condition that you vacate the field within a fortnight. We cannot go beyond that."

There was nothing to be done but submit to the inevitable; plots seemed to be forming all around him; but they were trials Divine Providence was making use of to bring the newly-founded work into greater prominence.

These fresh difficulties could not be long hidden from Don Bosco's friends, and when the news began to get about, some suggested that this was a good opportunity to drop the whole thing and live in peace; few thought of encouraging him to persevere. Seeing that the Oratory was always uppermost in his thoughts, that he could not tear himself away from the boys he had adopted, that he visited them during the week, and spent the whole of Sunday with them, and passed long hours in the evening in their company, some persons began to think it a species of madness. For this reason they tried to interest him in other things. Don Borel, who has been mentioned as a staunch friend, in talking to Don Bosco at this time, said: "Considering the circumstances, why not try to save a part when there is danger of losing the whole? Suppose you send away the bigger boys and keep only about twenty of the younger ones. We can continue our work with a few, and Providence will provide us with the means of doing more later on."

Don Bosco, with the air of one who could read the future, and without betraying any uncertainty, replied:

"You know what sacrifices we have made to save this large number of boys from the danger of an evil life, and how well they have corresponded to all that we have done. I do not think it would be right for us to abandon them again, and let them fall away once more from their religion and a good life. Your chief argument against it is the want of place and means. Have no fear on that head; there are large schools and playgrounds, church

and priests and clerics, masters and assistants, almost ready for our needs."

"But where are they, then?" asked Don Borel.

"I cannot tell you where they are now, but they do exist, and they shall be ours."

When Don Borel heard this reply, he was, as he afterwards told us, deeply moved. These answers seemed to confirm his fears that Don Bosco was mentally afflicted, and he exclaimed: "Poor Don Bosco, it must be too great a strain!" Then embracing him, he went away in sorrow. A fellow priest who had been present during the whole interview also turned away, echoing the other's words, "Poor Don Bosco!"

God permitted this persuasion of Don Bosco's madness to enter other persons' minds as well, and among them was the friendly Marchioness who was mentioned in preceding chapters. This good lady wished Don Bosco to devote his energies to the welfare of her institution for women and girls; and although in the commencement she had no objection to his devoting some attention to boys, yet when she heard of his new difficulties, she was afraid the worry would affect his mind. She took occasion to try once more to turn him from his purpose so that he might take up her work; but it so happened that she brought about the opposite result. One day she went to his apartments, and when admitted, said:

"I am very grateful for the care you have bestowed upon my institutions, for introducing the singing of hymns and plain chant, and for the useful lessons in arithmetic and other subjects."

"There is no occasion for thanks," Don Bosco answered, "a priest regards his work as a duty imposed by conscience, so I have only done as I ought. I look to God for my reward, if I deserve one."

"I also wanted to say," the Marchioness continued, "that I am sorry your health has suffered from your many and arduous labours. It is not to be expected that you could continue to direct my institutions, and also to give your attention to such numbers of boys."

I must therefore ask you to keep strictly to your appointment and leave the prisons and the boys to others."

"God has helped me up to the present," Don Bosco replied, "and I hope He will not fail me in the future. You need have no fear for the work of the institutions. There are three priests here, and between us the work can be easily managed."

"But I cannot allow you to go on with such work; your many occupations must prove detrimental to your health and to my institutions. Besides, there is this opposition from the city authorities and the rumours about your mental faculties; all this will force me to advise you to——"

"To do what?"

"To give up one or the other. Think over it and give me your answer later on."

"I want no time to deliberate about that; you may have my answer at once. Your Ladyship has practically unlimited resources, and you will never be in want of priests to direct your institutions. It is not so, however, with the boys, and I would not think of abandoning them. For the future, therefore, I am ready to do whatever I can for the welfare of your work, but I shall cease to have any regular duties here, so as to devote my whole time to the boys."

"But how can you live without a stipend?"

"I have long experienced the generosity of Divine Providence, and I am confident that God will provide for the future."

"But your health is ruined; you can stand the mental strain no longer, and are in need of a complete rest. Now, take my advice, and I will continue your stipend, and even increase it. Leave your work for a time and have a complete change right away from the scene of your difficulties, and when you have recovered, come back to the Refuge, where you are welcome. If you cannot agree to this I shall be forced to ask you to leave my house; then, with this scheme for your boys you will soon be overwhelmed with debts and you will come

back to me for aid; but I tell you now, beforehand, it will be useless to apply to me. Now think over the circumstances."

"I have thought out my plans long ago; my life is consecrated to the welfare of boys, and I must hold to my purpose."

"Then, do you prefer these little vagabonds to my institutions? If so, you may consider yourself dismissed this very day; I shall get another chaplain immediately."

At this point Don Bosco pointed out to the Marchioness that such a sudden dismissal was unbecoming to both of them; that it would be better to act calmly, and preserve that charity between them, which they would have wished to have kept, when they stood before the tribunal of God.

The lady was considerably calmed by these words, and replied: "Well, I shall allow you three months' time, but after that someone else will be appointed to direct my institutions."

Don Bosco accepted this proposal, and full of confidence in God, he left the future completely to His guidance.

In the meantime, the rumour that the friend of youth, if not actually out of his mind, was fast breaking down under the strain, seemed to gain credence more and more in Turin. Those who had all along stood by him were grieved; others smiled with contempt or jealousy. In the end very few would have anything to do with him, so that for several Sundays Don Bosco was seen to be the only one in the midst of about seven hundred boys, with no one but the elder lads to help him in maintaining order. A less courageous spirit would have given way, but God sustained him, and he often said: *The Lord is my strength and my refuge; in Him I will place all my hope.*

It would not be right to leave the impression, however, that in those days of heavy trials Don Bosco was abandoned by all his fellow clergy. Among others, Archbishop Fransoni and Don Cafasso were especially

kind, and helped him with advice and encouragement. It was truly fortunate that in those troublous times the See of Turin was governed by an Archbishop who had special gifts in discerning the ways of God, and who never changed his attitude towards Don Bosco and his Oratory. Had it been otherwise, nothing but a miracle could have saved Don Bosco's work from destruction.

In connection with Don Bosco's supposed madness, an amusing incident is worth relating. A few of his well-intentioned fellow clergy thought it would be doing him a charity to find a means by which he might be cured. "This good priest," they argued, "is plainly losing his mind. If steps are taken in the beginning, he may be able to overcome the unfortunate ailment, and a total collapse would be prevented. If we could only manage to get him to an asylum, kindness and medical skill would do the rest."

Arrangements were accordingly made with the superintendent of the asylum, and a room for Don Bosco was at once prepared. So far the plan was simple enough; but how was Don Bosco to be brought there? Two well-known priests were appointed to invite Don Bosco out for an afternoon drive, and they were to engage him in pleasant conversation on general topics, while the carriage gradually neared the appointed place. These two priests accordingly drove to Don Bosco's rooms to carry out their apparently easy plan.

He greeted them heartily, took them to his sitting-room, and once they were comfortably seated, there was no lack of conversation. The visitors gradually came round to the subject of the Oratory, dwelling on its future developments, both in buildings and in personnel, and Don Bosco spoke quite freely of his plans, with the certainty of one who is describing something taking place beneath his very eyes. The two priests exchanged glances, and one whispered to the other: "There can be no doubt about it," referring of course to his being mad. But from the unexpected visit of these two well-known ecclesiastics, their persistent questions about his Oratory and its future, which he

knew to be a subject of contention among the clergy, and their significant glances and whispers, Don Bosco concluded that his visitors were among the number of those who thought him mad, and he smiled in his quiet, knowing way. Thinking the two priests had now concluded their afternoon call, he rose and offered to show them out; but they professed themselves in no hurry, and invited him to come with them for a short drive. "A little fresh air is just what you want, dear Don Bosco," said one; "come, our carriage is waiting outside." Don Bosco immediately saw the trick they wanted to play upon him, and appearing to accept the invitation, went down with them to the carriage. They urged him to enter, but protesting against such a breach of manners, he made them get in first. When they looked round, expecting to see him follow, they found that he had shut the carriage door and that the horses were already on the move. In fact, as soon as the two had stepped in, Don Bosco said to the driver: "To the asylum, where these gentlemen are expected." No wonder then that there was little delay in starting, and that the pace never slackened till the asylum was reached. The warders immediately came out to receive the expected lunatic, but on opening the carriage door they found two, who, in order not to be carried off to the cells, had to prove that they were quite in their senses, which was not altogether an easy matter.

We can very well understand what the two priests thought of Don Bosco, who had made them look so foolish, and had done it in such a polite way. At any rate, it was enough to convince them that either Don Bosco was not a madman, or that he was one of a new kind; one of those, in fact, whom God chooses to carry out His great designs: *Quæ stulta sunt mundi elegit Deus, ut confundat sapientes*: "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise." (I Cor. i, 27).

The 5th of April, 1846, was Palm Sunday, and that was the day on which his use of the field was to cease. It was one of the most distressing days for Don Bosco.

and one of great affliction for a heart already broken and sorrowing under other anxieties.

In view of the change, it was necessary to let the boys know where they were to assemble on the following Sunday, but in spite of enquiry and search, he had as yet been entirely unsuccessful in finding a suitable locality. Although greatly distressed at this, his confidence in God did not waver, and he therefore determined to put to the test the value of the boys' prayers. On that Sunday morning, after hearing many confessions and performing the usual devotions, he gathered the boys around him. He announced to them that they were going to hear Mass at the Church of Our Lady of the Campagna, about a mile away; they were going there on a pilgrimage in honour of Our Lady, so that she might find another Oratory for them without delay. The boys heartily agreed, and lined up at once.

The rosary and litany took the place of the usual merriment, as this was to be a pilgrimage and not a walk. When, towards the end of their journey, they turned off the main road into the avenue leading to the Monastery, all were surprised to hear the church bells ring out. Their astonishment arose from the fact that, although they had several times attended Mass at this church, their arrival had never before been announced by the sound of bells. So extraordinary did it appear, that soon afterwards it was a general belief that the bells had been ringing of themselves, and though the Father Guardian made a strict inquiry, nobody belonging to the Monastery had rung them or ordered them to be rung, nor was it ever discovered that human hand had touched the ropes.

At the Mass which followed, many of the boys went to holy Communion, and Doñ Bosco gave an instruction suited to the occasion, after which all joined in some prayers for the special intention which had brought them to the church. They then made their way back to the field where they were to assemble for the last time.

CHAPTER IX.

*Affliction.—A ray of light.—The shed at Valdocco.
—The agreement.—Commotion.—Farewell.*

BY their pilgrimage and prayers in the morning, the boys of the Oratory had placed their lot in the hands of Our Lady; but at the same time Don Bosco was determined to seek and get others to seek and inquire for another site. The possibility of delay, however, was a source of great anxiety to him. Early in the afternoon the boys assembled were almost at full strength, to the number of some four hundred, and knowing that it was for the last time, they seemed to enjoy their games the more; they were more boisterous and trampled over every corner of the meadow. The valuable patrimony of the two brothers was treated with very little respect on that occasion.

Catechism and hymns took place as usual. The boys then resumed their games, but it was now with a half-heartedness quite unusual in them; for they noticed that Don Bosco, who generally took part in their amusements and organised all sorts of games, was now standing alone at one side of the field, sad and thoughtful. They had never before known him to be so serious and even disconsolate, for when some came round to speak to him, or to take him away to their games, he said: "Not now; leave me alone for a while."

What was he distressed about? No pen could describe the affliction that Don Bosco suffered that afternoon. The distress of the peasant who sees the hail storm destroy his only crop, of the shepherd who is forced to abandon his flock to the wolves, was nothing compared to his abandonment; it was more than that of a father or mother constrained to leave their little

ones for ever. "Those who helped me," he thought, "have now turned their backs upon me, and left me alone with these four hundred boys; my strength is exhausted, my health has now given way, and to crown all, but two short hours remain of our tenancy of the field; I require another place for the boys to meet together in, and I must tell them of it to-day, or else they will not know where to go next Sunday. Such a place cannot be found, and my Oratory must apparently come to an end this very evening. Are all my labours then thrown to the wind? Have I toiled in vain? Must I send all these boys away and bid them good-bye for ever? Am I to leave them again to roam about the streets and squares to the danger of both soul and body?" These considerations were an agony to Don Bosco, and he was seen to wipe away the tears from his face.

Some will say: "Where were all his visions about the future Oratory and the certainty with which he had spoken of it?"

It may be, that as God intended to give to the Oratory that day a special grace in the shape of a permanent abode, He willed that its founder should experience all the weight of abandonment, so that the favour and relief might be the more welcome and a reward for his sacrifice; for it seems that, as a rule, the greater the trials, the more signal are the favours of Divine Providence.

During this affliction, Don Bosco never lost hope, and the words of St. Paul concerning the Patriarch Abraham may be applied to him: *Contra spem in spem credidit, ut fieret pater multarum gentium secundum quod dictum est ei*: "Who against hope believed in hope; that he might be made the father of many nations, according to that which was said to him." (Rom. iv, 18). Some of the boys standing round saw him raise his eyes, full of tears, to heaven, and heard him exclaim: "Oh, my God! why dost Thou not make known to me where I am to gather these children together? Either show us some place or other where we may go, or tell

me what I am to do." The prayer, no doubt, was the outcome of a sorrowful, yet still hopeful spirit, and the Father of the poor was not long in answering.

Don Bosco had scarcely finished this petition when a man, well known to him, entered the field. The poor fellow stuttered very badly, and it was always difficult to understand him. He came up to Don Bosco and asked, as well as he could:

"Is it true that you are looking for a site on which to build a *laboratory*?"

"Not exactly a laboratory," said Don Bosco, "but an *Oratory*."

"I don't know what is the difference between them, but I know of a site that might do; come and see it. It belongs to a man named Joseph Pinardi."

The dense clouds seemed to have been pierced by a ray of light. Turning round at that moment, Don Bosco saw a priest approaching. It was Don Merla, who had been one of the faithful few remaining true to Don Bosco through all his troubles. Whenever he had finished his own duties he was ready to devote himself to the care of the boys, and approaching Don Bosco on this occasion, he said: "What is the matter with you this evening; I have never seen you look so troubled before. Has some misfortune happened?"

"Not exactly a misfortune, but I am in great perplexity. To-day my lease of the field expires, and it is now evening; before we disperse, the boys must know where to assemble next Sunday, and I have no idea where it is to be. This man tells me that there is a place not far off that may be suitable, and I want to go and see it. You have come along just at the right time; do me the favour of looking after the boys while I am away."

"I am free for the rest of the evening and will stay as long as you like," replied Don Merla; and Don Bosco went off with the man.

When they reached the place, he found that the premises in question consisted mainly of a small house with one storey above the ground floor, with a balcony

reached by a shaky staircase. Don Bosco was about to go up the stairs, when Pinardi appeared on the scene. "Oh, no," he said, "the place I meant for you is round at the back." The two men accompanied Don Bosco on his inspection of the remainder of the property. This turned out to be a long shed slanting down gradually so that on one side it was only about three feet high. Don Bosco, on entering, had to be careful not to knock his head against the roof. There was no flooring: only the bare ground, as in any out-house or wood-shed.

After a brief inspection, Don Bosco said: "It is too low; I'm afraid it won't do."

"I could overcome that difficulty," said Pinardi, "by digging out a foot or two, and flooring could be put down; I should like your *laboratory* to be established here."

"It is not a *laboratory*, my friend, but an *Oratory*; that is, a little church for the boys to assemble in."

"All the better; I am more pleased than ever. I can sing and shall come and help you. I shall put two chairs in it, one for myself and one for my wife; I have a lamp also which will serve as an ornament. An *Oratory*! I couldn't desire anything better."

The good man was delighted at the thought of his place being turned into a church, and his eagerness to make the contract was equal to Don Bosco's desire to find a place of assembly.

"I must thank you for your offer of assistance," said Don Bosco, "and for the promise of alterations. If you can lower the floor not less than a foot, I'll take it. By the way, now much are you going to charge for it?"

"Three hundred lire; others might pay more, but I should prefer you to take it, since it is for a religious purpose and the public good."

"I shall give you three hundred and twenty for it, if you will let me have this strip of land beside it for recreation, and agree to have it all ready for us by next Sunday."

"Very well; by next Sunday all shall be ready."

Don Bosco returned to his boys, and gathering them together, said :

“ You may rejoice now, for we have found an Oratory ; there will be a church and sacristy, a room for lessons, and plenty of space for a playground. We shall go there next Sunday. It is at the back of Pinardi's house, over there,” and he pointed out the place as he spoke.

Some of those present on that eventful evening have endeavoured to describe the scene which followed as soon as the boys were in possession of the information. The expectant crowd that had gathered round Don Bosco immediately sent up a shout of joy, which, as the boys ran hither and thither in their excitement, was echoed all over the field, so that it was no wonder that the neighbourhood was soon in possession of the news that Don Bosco's Oratory was making a new move. At last their sorrows and disappointments were at an end. Their prayers had been heard, and their thanksgiving to Our Lady, Help of Christians mingled with notes of gladness for her powerful and maternal protection. As soon as their enthusiasm had abated, Don Bosco called for silence, and reminding the boys of their pilgrimage and prayers, proposed that the rosary be said in thanksgiving. It was the last prayer offered in the field and was regarded by all as a farewell. The setting of the sun behind the Alps was usually the signal for departure, but on that particular evening, darkness had already fallen when the boys went home to tell the events of the day.

CHAPTER X.

The new Oratory. — Beginnings.

THE owner of the new Oratory had made an agreement with Don Bosco, and he kept it. Considering that there was a great deal to be done, and a short time to do it in, he called in several workmen and directed the alterations and decorations. By the end of the week, for Easter Sunday, April 12th, 1846, the premises were ready; the long coach-house was to do duty as a chapel, and the ground adjoining had been cleared and made suitable as a playground.

Don Bosco had arranged for some of the boys to come early to carry in the church furniture and the rest of the Oratory equipment, and as he had obtained permission to use the building for divine worship, the ceremony of blessing it was performed, and the new chapel dedicated to St. Francis of Sales. The Archbishop extended to Don Bosco all his former privileges, and, for the benefit of the boys, gave the Oratory all the rights of a parish church.

A brief description of the chapel must be given. It was about sixty feet long and twenty-one wide. The wooden flooring with which the bare ground had been covered was old and badly worn, and damaged here and there by rats' holes. It was roofed with tiles which were plastered and whitewashed. But its most serious drawback was undoubtedly its height, or rather its lack of it, for when the Archbishop stood up on his throne, as he had occasion to do later on for Confirmation and other ceremonies, there was danger of his mitre coming in contact with the ceiling; and yet for six years this old shed served for Sunday and weekday services, for owing to the permanency of the tenure, Don Bosco was very

glad to put up with the inconvenience which, one may conclude, was not slight. There was, besides, another drawback. This was the presence in the vicinity of a tavern which, apparently with good reason, had long had a bad reputation. However, Don Bosco took precautions that no harm should come to the boys from this quarter; on the contrary, the very presence of the boys, and consequent publicity, caused the occupiers to regard their position as untenable. Before long it was to let, and Don Bosco rented it, keeping it closed up till he afterwards bought the property. The Oratory thus had the effect that holy water has: it made the devil afraid, and put his followers to flight.

Many circumstances now concurred to give prosperity to the Oratory. Marks of approval from ecclesiastical superiors, the solemnity displayed in the divine service on the greater feasts, offerings from benefactors, the gradual formation of an excellent choir, the variety and abundance of the amusements, in the invention of which Don Bosco was a master, all of these tended to swell the youthful congregation, so that six hundred and seven hundred became the usual attendance. To Don Bosco's great relief, many of his former helpers came to lend their services again, and the seven years of prosperity were now in progress.

The order of the Sunday's proceedings gradually fell into the following permanent arrangement. The chapel was opened at an early hour, Don Bosco immediately took his seat in the confessional, as large numbers of boys usually went to holy Communion. Mass was fixed for eight o'clock, but if no other confessor was available, Don Bosco had to put it off till the confessions were finished. Prayers and preparation for Communion were conducted by the elder boys. After Mass, Don Bosco gave a short sermon, which was at first an explanation of the Gospel of the day. Later on, when things were more settled, he commenced his explanation of the Bible history narrative, and of Church history, which he continued for the next twenty years.

When the instruction was over, the boys left the

chapel for recreation and breakfast, after which Sunday classes began and continued till twelve o'clock. This was the hour for dinner and the boys were free to go home, or, if they had brought something to eat, stay in the playground. Then followed games, which continued till half-past two, that being the hour for the chief catechism lesson of the day. Don Bosco found that most of his boys were very poorly instructed, either through their own or their parents' fault, and it was necessary to organize several classes to meet the requirements of all. Of course it was impossible for him alone to teach more than one class at a time, so that when neighbouring priests could not come, some of the older boys taught catechism in their stead. After the instruction, there was rosary or vespers, followed by Benediction. The interval that followed, the boys were at liberty to pass as they wished. Some of the very backward boys sought extra religious instruction, others passed it in learning to read and write, others in learning music; the remainder resumed their games in the playground. The recreation was therefore no time of rest for Don Bosco; it was rather his busiest. He had to keep large numbers under control, and this he did by passing from one boy to another, or one group to another, joining in different games, and giving advice to certain boys whom he wished to see particularly. He usually took this opportunity to mention the days for confession and communion, and reminded the irregular ones of their duty.

Sometimes, when Don Bosco was not at first successful in getting wayward boys to go to the sacraments, he would have recourse to methods rather out of the ordinary.

He had often tried to induce a certain boy, about seventeen years of age, to go to confession; the boy always promised readily enough, but he never kept his word. One Sunday, after the church service, the boy in question was running about in some game or other, when Don Bosco suddenly called him, and asked him to come with him to the chapel. Thinking he was

wanted to help in some work, he did not trouble to put on his coat, which he had laid aside for convenience during the game.

"You had better get your coat," said Don Bosco, when he noticed the boy's dress, and then the two went on to the chapel. Don Bosco pointed out a *prie-dieu*, and the boy took it up to take it away.

"Oh, leave it there; it is for you to kneel on."

"Why, what am I to do?"

"You are to go to confession."

"But I am not ready."

"I know that quite well; but you must get ready now, and keep the promise you have so often made."

The boy fell in with the idea, and while Don Bosco said his breviary, he made his preparation. When he was prepared, the priest sat down, and the boy made a good confession — the commencement of a regular attendance at the sacraments when once the first step had been overcome. He often related this incident, or trick, as he called it, and the remembrance went far to keep him from ever again being careless in that regard.

At nightfall, when it was time to go home, Don Bosco often had great difficulty in getting the boys to leave him. So many wanted to have a last word, or wait till others went, that it seemed as if they would never go. Hundreds came to say good-night, and when at last the boys had apparently all left, a few chosen ones came forward to see Don Bosco safely home, for he was often quite tired out and at times very nearly exhausted.

CHAPTER XI.

The Marquis of Cavour again perturbed. — Town Council's decision. — A protector. — Politics. — Sunday and evening classes. — Honorem cui honor.

THE doings at the Oratory were nothing if not peaceable and well-organized, so much so, that everyone spoke favourably of the good discipline and tranquillity which reigned there; however, the Marquis of Cavour, whom we have met before in these pages, persisted in regarding the meetings as dangerous, and had by no means given up his idea of putting an end to them. He was unsuccessful in his efforts to get Don Bosco to view the matter in the same light, nor could he induce the Archbishop to forbid the priest to exercise his sacred ministry. The Marquis therefore determined to see what the authority of the Town Council could effect in the matter, and he, being at its head, took the leading part.

For some weeks he satisfied himself with inflaming the minds of his subordinates against the Oratory, and then called together a special meeting. He had not been able to win the Archbishop over to his views, for the prelate was as intrepid in the exercise of his duty as he was zealous for the good of souls; but the minister wished to ~~be~~ have the Archbishop present at the meeting, and as the latter was at the time in failing health, the assembly was held at the Archbishop's House instead of at the Town Hall. The councillors attended in state and took their places, and the whole affair seemed to have such formality as to make the Archbishop remark afterwards to a friend: "One would have thought the general judgment was taking place." Speeches were made, some favourable, others disparaging in tone, and the Marquis would finally have obtained a majority

in favour of closing the Oratory altogether, had there not been higher powers ranged on Don Bosco's side. These were nothing less than friends at Court. Count Collegno, Minister of Finance, had several times sent Don Bosco sums of money both on his own account and in the name of his Sovereign, Charles Albert. The King was among those to whom Don Bosco regularly sent the reports on the work he was doing. Moreover, he not only gave his contributions, but expressed the desire to see the Oratory increase and spread into all the towns of his dominions.

With such a friend, therefore, the Oratory could afford to pay little attention to the threats of the Marquis. As soon as the King heard of the meeting, he arranged for Count Collegno, who at that time was a member of the Turin Corporation, to attend and convey the royal message to the assembly. During the discussion the Count appeared to take no part either for or against the Oratory, but when he saw that an adverse vote was about to be passed, he rose and asked if he might be permitted to say that his royal master wished him to deliver the following message: "It is the King's wish that the meetings of the Festive Oratory be promoted and protected; if any disorder arise, means shall be taken to prevent it, but nothing further." When the message was delivered, the Count sat down and silence fell upon the assembly. After a few moments Cavour declared the meeting adjourned. Thus at the very moment when all seemed lost, some powerful patronage intervened and not only prevented harm, but secured an advantage to the Oratory, for several of the councillors, who had adopted a hostile attitude merely on account of the representations of their chief, now became entirely favourable to the work, and were amongst Don Bosco's benefactors.

The Marquis of Cavour, however, maintained his animosity. He summoned Don Bosco to the Town Hall, and after calling him an obstinate priest, concluded his interview with these words: "You may be doing all this with a good intention, but there is danger

in your method of procedure; and as I am responsible for order and peace, I shall have to appoint someone to keep an eye on yourself and your assemblies. On the very first appearance of trouble I shall have your vagabonds dispersed, and you shall be held responsible for whatever happens."

Don Bosco went back as confident as ever, and it was the last time he saw the Marquis at the Town Hall. The disturbances in the city, and an incurable attack of gout, forced the nobleman to relinquish his office. But during the short time that yet remained of his term, he sent policemen to pass the Sunday in the vicinity of the Oratory, so as to be present at whatever was done, both in church and outside. The doings of the boys and their master greatly edified these guards, who, far from stopping the games and services; themselves often took part in them. One of them afterwards described his conversation with the Marquis when giving in his report:

"Well, what have you seen and heard in the midst of those urchins?"

"I have seen hundreds of boys at play, amusing themselves in various games, and not a sign of a quarrel among them. When I saw their behaviour, I said to myself: 'If all the boys in Turin were like these, there would soon be no need of policemen, and the prisons would be empty.' Besides that, the sermons I have had to listen to in the church have brought me back again to the sacraments."

"And what about politics?"

"I have ~~not~~ heard them mentioned, and it would be ridiculous to expect such boys to know anything about them. As far as I could see, Don Bosco's politics consist entirely in teaching his boys to be good Christians; in teaching them how to read and write; in preventing evil; in getting good situations for the boys, in visiting them during the week, and taking the place of a parent in their regard."

"But have you not heard whispers of revolution and war?"

“ Not a word was passed on such topics ; there is no danger of any kind.”

The guard's report was correct : such were and still are the politics of the Oratory.

Even when the Oratory was attached to the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, Don Bosco had seen the necessity of giving his boys some schooling, for many of them did not know even how to read, and some of the older ones were entirely ignorant of the truths of Faith. Don Bosco saw that it would take too long to teach such boys verbally. Accordingly he began on Sundays to teach them how to read, so that they might be able to study the catechism by themselves. This class, however, had at that time to be somewhat limited in number, owing to want of suitable accommodation. At the Refuge, and afterwards at Moretta House—as we saw before—Sunday and evening classes took place fairly regularly, and greatly increased in numbers when the Oratory was moved to its present site.

In order to attain quick and visible results from his pupils, Don Bosco made use of the following method. For several Sundays he made the boys repeat the letters of the alphabet, and then gave them a lesson in spelling. After this they were made to read and repeat a few questions and answers from the little diocesan catechism, and they were given the same to study during the following week. On the next Sunday these questions were gone through again, and others added as the task for the ensuing week. In this way he was gratified to find, as a result of his labours, that, after a few weeks, some of the boys were able to read, and to learn whole pages of Christian doctrine by themselves. This was a real benefit, for otherwise the older and more ignorant boys would have had to wait for months before knowing enough to make their confession and go to holy communion. The Sunday classes were useful to many of the more intelligent boys, but they were hardly enough for the backward ones, who, during the week, usually managed to forget what they had tried to learn

on Sunday. To remedy this, Don Bosco, as we have already seen, pushed on as vigorously as possible the work of the evening classes. By his zeal and energy, these were established on a much larger scale than at Moretta House, and they quickly produced two good effects.

In the first place, by these means, Don Bosco found it much easier to keep the boys from mischief in the evening; and, secondly, their minds were filled with useful knowledge, especially with regard to religion. To direct the souls of his boys to God, so that they might become good Christians, was the special object of all Don Bosco's labours.

But it may be asked how he found masters for these increasing classes. He formed a plan for training his own teachers, and this he did in the following way. Among those who frequented the Oratory were some who possessed ability and were anxious to get more advanced instruction, so that they might attain a better position in the world. Don Bosco chose some of these, and gave them free lessons in Latin, Italian, French and arithmetic, on the understanding that they, in their turn, were to help him in teaching catechism and in holding classes in the evenings and on Sundays. In this way there began at the Oratory the system of having students who were also able to teach, and to fill various responsible posts.

During the early years this was still the practice in many Salesian Houses in all parts of the world. With help of this kind the Sunday and evening classes succeeded beyond all expectations.

After finishing the little catechism, Don Bosco had some difficulty in finding a more advanced text-book suited to his purpose. He examined all the Bible Histories then in use in the schools of Piedmont, but none of them seemed to supply the need. Want of easy, popular treatment, too ambitious a style combined with long and unnecessary questions, were the common defects of these works. Many facts, also, were explained in a way likely to suggest unsuitable ideas in the minds

of boys. In addition to this, almost all these books neglected to bring out the most important points which ought to lay the foundation for the truths of Faith. The same was true of books dealing with such subjects as the sacraments, purgatory and the papacy, as well as with explanations of the sacred ceremonies.

How then did Don Bosco act in this matter? Although he felt great diffidence (as the writer has often heard him say), in giving his writings to the Press, he nevertheless overcame this feeling out of regard for his boys. Accordingly, he wrote a Bible History free from the defects we have mentioned. In this way was published Don Bosco's *Bible History for the use of Schools*. In this book, the most important facts contained in the Holy Scriptures are related and explained in correct language and clear style, so that children have no difficulty in understanding and remembering them. Joined to the history are short moral considerations suitable for the young. An index is added, containing Biblical geographical names and their modern equivalents. The Bible History was followed by the publication of *A Compendium of Church History*, which did much good among the boys. The reasons which induced Don Bosco to undertake this work are worthy of special mention.

"Devoted for many years," he says in his preface, "to teaching boys, and wishing to impart the most useful knowledge to them, I sought everywhere for a short course of Church History which would be suited to children. Although I found a few books which were all that could be desired from many points of view, yet, for my purpose, they were either too voluminous, or they dilated too much on the subject of secular history. I could not refrain also from observing with indignation that some authors seemed ashamed of referring to the Roman Pontiffs and to the most important facts which directly regard the Holy See." Don Bosco dedicated his little work to the Provincial of the Christian Brothers in Turin, to whom, amongst other things, he said: "I know very well that I am acting

in opposition to your modesty and humility; but, as the work has been written only for the greater glory of God, and in a special manner for the spiritual advantage of the young, you will see that all reasons for opposition vanish."

Don Bosco's two works were found to be very suitable for children, on account of the judicious selection of facts, the easy style in which they were explained, and the delicacy of language employed. The books were therefore very popular and enjoyed a wide circulation, to the great advantage of the young, whose welfare was always uppermost in the mind of the saintly writer.

The classes, meanwhile, continuing to prosper, Don Bosco added a drawing class and another for arithmetic, introducing the metric system which, shortly afterwards, was to be enforced by law. Another book was now necessary, as no work on the subject had ever been written. The indefatigable teacher was not dismayed, and, being a good mathematician, he produced a little book entitled: *The Metric Decimal System Simplified*. This work, compiled with great clearness of ideas, and published in a popular form, was also well received.*

At the conclusion of this chapter, it may also be pointed out that Don Bosco must be acknowledged as the founder of Sunday Schools and Evening Classes. They are now to be found in every part of Italy. Of great service to persons of limited means, they are, in consequence, a real boon to the Nation.

Honour to whom honour is due.

CHAPTER XII.

Don Bosco at Sassi. — The pupils of the Christian Schools. — Juvenile outbreak. — Double dilemma. — Charity supplies for a miracle. — Death of Pope Gregory XVI, and election of Pope Pius IX. — Fatal illness. — Affection of the boys for Don Bosco. — A happy feast. — Visits to Becchi.

BOYS have always shown themselves well disposed towards those who love them sincerely and who seek their real good. Crowds of children thronged round the person of our Divine Saviour, because He loved them better than a tender father. St. Philip, the "Apostle of Rome," went about everywhere surrounded by boys, whom he treated with winning kindness. And, in our own times, Don Bosco was intensely loved by his boys. This is clearly proved by the way they behaved, as the following incident will show.

In addition to the work of the Oratory and the schools, Don Bosco also exercised his sacred ministry in the prisons, the Cottolengo Hospital, and the Refuge. Hence he had very little free time for himself. He worked incessantly during the day-time, so that, in order to compile the books which, we have seen, were necessary, he had to study and work at night. This almost proved fatal to him. After a few weeks his health, none too robust at the time, became so much worse, that the doctors advised him to give up all fatigue unless he wished to die in the prime of life. Don Borel, who loved him as a brother, seeing that he was in a dangerous state, sent him to stay for some time in the house of Don Peter Abondioli, parish

priest of Sassi, a little village at the foot of Soperga Hill. Don Bosco remained there during the week, and used to return to the city to spend Sunday at the Oratory with his boys. In spite of the care which he received at the hands of Don Abondioli, Don Bosco's health did not improve very much. One of the causes of this was that, being so near Turin, the Oratory boys often came to see him, and as the boys in the country did the same, the result was that he had not a little to do. The pupils of the Christian Brothers also came, and on one particular occasion he was placed in a double dilemma which was by no means the first. It happened in the following way.

Among the schools under the wise direction of these Religious, were the St. Barbara Municipal Schools in Turin, frequented by several hundred boys. Don Bosco used to go to these schools every week to hear confessions in the adjoining chapel; a few boys went to him at the Oratory, and almost all were his penitents. At the end of Spring in that year these boys had their spiritual exercises. During the retreat they had been waiting for Don Bosco, and, hoping that he would go to them as usual, scarcely one of them had thought of going to confession to anyone else. Meanwhile, the last day of the retreat had come, and the boys came to the college, expecting to find Don Bosco there. Not seeing him, they asked their masters' permission to look for him at Valdocco. Finding that he was not there, and hearing that he was at Sassi, they went off, two or three together, in that direction. Some of them thought that Sassi was a house of that name, and others that it was a place not far from Turin. The little fellows did not know, that to go and return, they would have a tramp of several miles. When they understood that they would have to go beyond the city and cross the river, they ought to have given up their expedition and returned to school. But thoughtfulness has never been the virtue of the young, and the boys, listening only to the pleadings of their hearts, followed the lead of those in front and pushed boldly on. The weather was rainy,

and after reaching a certain point, they lost their way, and went in search of Don Bosco through meadows, fields and vineyards.

"We are going to Sassi, and we want Don Bosco. Where is Sassi? Where is Don Bosco?" cried the lost boys.

"You have missed your way," answered the villagers. "You must turn round and go up the hill. But the parish priest of Sassi is not called Bosco, and we do not know who he is. We have never heard of him."

"Anyhow," answered the boys, "we have been told that Don Bosco is at Sassi, and so he must be there."

Some of the others, thinking they might have mistaken the name, asked: "Where is Sassari?"

The people answered, laughing, that Sassari was in Sardinia, and that the boys would have to cross the sea to get there, and so the poor little fellows were just as dismayed as ever. Finally, after being put on the right road, the boys eventually arrived in straggling groups at the priest's house. There were some three hundred of them turning up at different times, in a state of perspiration, covered with mud, and quite worn out with weariness and hunger. Don Bosco was asked to come, and, at the sight of such a crowd of his young friends, he was very much touched.

"What do you want, my dear boys?" he said to them. "Have you your masters' permission to come here?"

One of the boys answered for them all:

"We have just been making our retreat, and it finished this morning. We want to go to confession to you. We were expecting you yesterday evening at St. Barbara's. As even this morning we did not see you, we asked leave and went to look for you early at Valdocco." He then went on to explain, that not finding Don Bosco at Valdocco, the boys, two or three together, set out to walk to Sassi, arriving there, as we have seen, at all hours. They had not returned to ask fresh leave of absence from their Superiors because

they had imagined that they would be able to get back to their college in time for Mass and holy communion. Many of them wanted to make a general confession, and most of them their annual one.

The astonishment of Don Bosco and his kind host can be easily understood. They could not help admiring this boyish escapade, but at the same time they found themselves rather nonplussed by it. What could they do with such a number of boys all wanting to go to confession immediately, and to the same priest? A dozen priests would hardly have been enough to cope with the demand of such a number of zealous young penitents!

It was easy to persuade them that Don Bosco could not hear so many confessions himself, and that they would have to put off their communions till Sunday. When this was done, although Don Bosco* was feeling very weak, he went into a confessional. Don Abondioli and two assistant priests did the same, and they all remained hearing the boys' confessions till one o'clock, when they were obliged to stop before every boy could have his turn.

Nor did the difficulty end here. In leaving Turin so suddenly, the boys had acted like the crowd that followed Jesus into the desert. Thinking only of finding Don Bosco, and of going to confession to him, they set out without food, intending to be home again before breakfast. It was necessary, therefore, to quiet the craving of their stomachs as well as to satisfy their devotion, for by this time, owing to the distance they had walked, they were all very hungry. Although the parish priest was not able to work the miracle of the multiplication of bread, he did not leave Don Bosco in difficulties. He placed before his unexpected guests plenty of bread, *polenta*,* beans, rice, potatoes, fruit and cheese; indeed all that he had in the house was not enough, and he was obliged to borrow food from the

* *Polenta* — a thick kind of porridge made of Indian meal, and eaten in the North of Italy in winter time.

neighbours, too. In this way the army of boys was fed, and none of them went away hungry or exhausted.

But, if, on that morning, Don Bosco and his generous host had been in a state of perplexity, what must have been the mortification felt by the masters of the Christian Schools and by the preachers of the retreat? When the time came for Mass and for the general communion, only a few dozen boys were present out of more than four hundred. All the others had either arrived at Sassi or had lost their way.

It can easily be understood, from what has just been related, how much Don Bosco was loved by the boys who knew him; nor is it to be wondered at that his health did not profit very much from his visit to Sassi.

In June of that year, the Oratory boys had the opportunity of showing how great was the veneration and affection which they felt towards the visible Head of the Church of Christ. At the beginning of that month, sorrowful news spread in Turin, and was quickly confirmed by the mournful tolling of the bells. Great emotion was felt in every heart, for Pope Gregory XVI had passed away in Rome. On the following Sunday, Don Bosco spoke to the boys about the late Pontiff's unflinching spirit, and of the great loss which the Church had experienced in his death. At the same time he mentioned a beautiful instance of the goodwill which the departed Pope had shown them the year before. At Don Bosco's simple written request, the great Pontiff had granted a special plenary Indulgence to be gained at the point of death by fifty persons, on the following condition: "That they should, in Don Bosco's judgment, be among those who had shown the most earnest zeal in furthering the spiritual and temporal welfare of the boys at the Oratory." After making a fervent exhortation, he invited them to recite a third part of the Rosary in suffrage for the soul of Pope Gregory XVI. It is scarcely necessary to say how heartily they joined in this supplication.

After paying this tribute of gratitude to the deceased Pope, Don Bosco went on to say that the Church can-

not remain without a visible Head to govern her, any more than can a flock of sheep remain without a shepherd. Therefore a new Pope would soon be given to the Church. In the meantime the boys were asked to implore the Holy Spirit to illumine and direct the Cardinals in their election of another Pontiff. The boys responded to Don Bosco's appeal, and prayed with singular fervour. On the 16th of the same month, Cardinal John Mastai Ferretti, Bishop of Imola, was elected, and he chose the name of Pius IX.

The humble vaults of the little Chapel of St. Francis of Sales soon re-echoed with a hymn of gratitude to God for giving another Head to His Church, another Father to the Faithful. The new Pope was already renowned for his rare gifts of mind and heart, so his election was received with indescribable joy, not only in Rome, but throughout Christendom. No Pope had, perhaps, ever before been greeted with such enthusiastic and prolonged demonstrations of joy. Good Catholics rejoiced to celebrate the event with due solemnity, while they sang praises inspired by faith and love. The wicked made pretence to do the same, but it was with hypocrisy and evil intent. To say more than this hardly falls within our province.

At the same time, the sons of Don Bosco received their share of sorrow from Our Divine Lord, but it was followed by rejoicing.

Don Bosco, as we have seen, was in rather poor health, and the labours of the Oratory were very arduous. On Holyday, though feeling more than usually weak, he did not spare himself at all, and at length fainted. In spite of himself he was obliged to be confined to his bed. The illness quickly developed into bronchitis, with a violent cough and serious inflammation. Within eight days he was at death's door. After making his confession he received Viaticum and Extreme Unction. In perfect resignation and tranquillity of soul he awaited his last hour. His mother was at once informed of his state, and hastened to Turin. On the next Holyday, Don Borel brought several boys from the

Oratory to accompany the Blessed Sacrament which he carried to Don Bosco. The poor boys did nothing but weep all the time. Meanwhile, all hope was gone of the sick man's recovery. Don Borel, who had attended him with the greatest care and affection, already thought all was over, and wept audibly.

At the beginning of the week, the sad news of Don Bosco's illness was known everywhere and caused indescribable anxiety and sorrow to the boys of the Oratory. Every hour they came in little groups to the door of the sick-room, to get the latest news. Not satisfied with news only, some wanted to see him or speak to him, and others longed to serve and help him.

The doctor had forbidden anyone from outside to be admitted, so the infirmarian was obliged to refuse them entrance.

"Do let me just see him," said one.

"I shall not let him speak," assured another.

"I only want to say one word to him," added a third, "and I cannot bear that he should die without my saying it."

"If Don Bosco knew that I was here, he would let me come in," said another; and the plea was echoed on every side.

But the attendant was inexorable. He made them understand that their presence would disturb the invalid too much and might, indeed, be the cause of breaking the slender thread which still united his soul and body.

"Besides," the man went on to say, "if I admit one, I must do the same for others, and there would be no end to it." Finding themselves refused, the poor lads sobbed aloud, and everyone who heard them was deeply touched. "Poor boys," said the people, "how much they all love him!"

But the boys did not show their affection for Don Bosco by tears alone. Seeing that human remedies were unavailing, they had recourse to supernatural ones. They made their way to the sanctuary of the Church of the "Consolata," and, each little batch of boys relieving another till late at night, with intense fervour implored

Our Lady to preserve the life of their beloved friend and master. For this intention they kept wax-lights continually burning before the miraculous image of Our Lady; they heard Masses and offered their communions. Some never went to rest at night without saying special prayers for Don Bosco, nor without asking their families to join in. Some even watched in prayer throughout the night; others vowed to say the Rosary daily, for a month, some for a year, and not a few for their whole lives. During this anxious time, many boys fasted on bread and water, and promised to fast for months or years if Our Lady would restore their beloved Don Bosco to health. It is a fact that several lads who were working as bricklayers fasted strictly for several days without in the least relaxing their labours.

And how were so many prayers and good works to be rewarded? One of the Sundays in July was a day consecrated to the august Mother of God. Many prayers, communions and mortifications had been offered up, but, notwithstanding this earnest devotion, evening seemed to bring no hope that heaven had deigned to hear. It was fully expected that the priest would die during the night. The doctors who were called in to hold a consultation, quite confirmed this opinion. Don Bosco, on his part, felt that his strength was failing. He had already offered his life to God and was wholly occupied with commending his soul into the hands of its Divine Maker. During those last moments, while many were weeping around him, he was feebly and serenely bidding them to take courage. Indeed, at times, he even showed a sense of humour which helped to console them and made them wish that they were in his place. But the hour had not yet come when death was to cut down that cherished life, nor to wound the hearts of so many children with a cruel blow. The Mother of God listened to the prayers of the little ones who had placed their hopes in her. She was moved to pity by their tears, and, gathering together their prayers and vows, she offered them before the throne of God. Showing herself to be a loving and tender mother,

she obtained for them the longed-for favour. Through God's mercy and Mary's maternal goodness, the very night which, according to human calculations, was expected to end Don Bosco's life on earth, brought to a close instead that time of fearful anxiety.

Towards midnight, Don Borel was standing at Don Bosco's bedside in order to receive his last sigh, and to commend his soul to God. Something seemed to inspire Don Borel to ask the dying man that he, too, should say a prayer for his own recovery.

"Let us leave God to do His Holy Will," was Don Bosco's reply.

"Say at least, 'Lord, if it be Thy Will, let me recover.'" But Don Bosco would not say the words.

"Grant this favour to me, dear Don Bosco," whispered his friend. "Say only those words, and say them with your whole heart."

Then the sick man, in order to console Don Borel, said in a weak and faint voice: "Yes, Lord, if it so please Thee, let me recover."

When the good priest heard this he ceased weeping, and his face becoming quite serene, he exclaimed: "That is enough. We may rest assured that his life is now safe." Don Borel seemed quite confident that Don Bosco's prayer had but to be offered in order to be favourably heard; and he was not mistaken. The sick man soon afterwards fell asleep, and when he awoke he was out of danger. It seemed as though he had been called back from the dead and been born to a new life.

The following morning the two doctors, Botta and Cafasso, came, fearing they would find Don Bosco dead.

"Dear Don Bosco," they said to him, after feeling his pulse, "you must thank Our Lady of Consolation, for you have every reason to do so."

My pen has not the power to express the gladness which flooded every heart when it was known that Don Bosco was better. So great was the joy, that the boys showed it by their tears, for they were unable to put it into words.

"Blessed be God! Blessed be Mary!" they exclaimed, full of delight. "Blessed be Our Lady of Consolation, who has indeed consoled us."

The joy and enthusiasm were renewed more solemnly when Don Bosco, supporting himself with a stick, came once more to the Oratory. This happy event took place one Sunday afternoon. The boys were told beforehand that he intended to pay them a visit, so they came to meet him at the Refuge, where he was still staying. Some of the stronger ones carried him in a large chair; while the rest surrounded him in order to form an escort. They did not dare to press close round him because they feared that they might make him ill again. Their emotion was so intense that they were almost overcome, and Don Bosco himself was no less moved. Such a scene of deep rejoicing is beyond description, and can only be left to the imagination.

Don Borel soon afterwards preached a sermon, in which he spoke of the grace obtained from God by the intercession of Mary. He urged the boys always to place their confidence in her, and to show their gratitude by persevering in good, and by continuing to come to the Oratory. Don Bosco, too, spoke a few words to them.

"I thank you," he said, among other things, "for the proofs of your affection which you gave me during my illness. I thank you for the prayers offered up to God for my recovery. I am convinced that He has granted my life through your prayers. In gratitude, therefore, I must spend that life entirely for your spiritual and temporal welfare. I promise that I will do this as long as God leaves me on this earth, and I ask you, on your part, to help me.

"My dear children," Don Bosco concluded, "God, in His goodness, and moved by your sorrow, has brought me back from the gates of death. Let us thank Him with all our hearts, but let us remember that the time must come when, willing or unwilling, you, as well as I, must die. Let us, therefore, live like good Christians now, so that we may one day meet together

in heaven, where death shall be no more, and where sorrow and tears are put aside for ever." The Blessed Sacrament was afterwards exposed, and the *Te Deum* sung in thanksgiving.

When it came to Don Bosco's knowledge that some of the boys had taken really serious vows without due reflection, he, as a wise director, took great pains to commute them into something practical that would be to their greater spiritual advantage. Fasting was changed into some simple mortification, the recital of the whole Rosary into a third part, or some other devout practice; while perpetual vows were altered to temporary ones.

The illness which had brought Don Bosco to the brink of eternity, and had been the cause of so much anxiety, took place in the beginning of July, 1845. In that year he was obliged to leave the Refuge and move to the Oratory at Valdocco. As that place was not yet ready, and as rest and change were important for his health, he went, after his illness, to Castelnuovo d'Asti, his native place, in order to pass some time at Becchi with his family.

"Out of sight, out of mind," was not a proverb which could be truly applied to Don Bosco and his boys. They were always the object of his thoughts and desires, and he of theirs. Although the Oratory continued to flourish under Don Borel, Don Pachiotti, Don Vola, Don Carpano, and several other priests, yet in Don Bosco's absence its heart and soul were wanting. The boys continually talked of him, and asked when he was coming back among them, for they ardently longed for his return. After he had been away for some weeks the boys began to write letters to him; then they planned to visit him a few at a time.

To go and return from Turin to Becchi was an expedition of not less than twenty miles, and they usually set out in the morning and got back the same evening. Besides wishing to see him back among them, their visits also had another object. They knew that the boys at Castelnuovo had begun to gather round him and to

form a little Oratory in his house. Some of the Turin boys frankly confessed that they felt rather jealous, and feared that his new friends would snatch him from them.

"Please come back to Turin, or we shall bring the Oratory out to Becchi," said one of the boys to him, smiling; and he consoled them, saying:

"Go on being good and saying your prayers well, and I promise that I shall come back among you before the fall of the Autumn leaves."

CHAPTER XIII.

Unwelcome advice. — Mother and son. — A noble and generous woman. — Mother's grief. — Departure from Becchi. — A happy meeting. — Arrival at Valdocco. — Poverty, misery and content. — Sacrifice of a bridal trousseau. — New lodgings. — Results from the Sunday and night schools. — Visits and rewards.

AFTER Don Bosco had passed three months at home he was quite restored to health. The fresh country air and complete rest, added to the loving care of his family, had their desired effect. Touched by the frequent visits which the boys made in their efforts to get him back to Turin, and by their affectionate letters in which they implored him to return, he had promised to grant their request. He seemed every day to grow stronger and more fit to take up his work among them once more. Two things continued to perplex him and to delay the fulfilment of his desires: the advice of his friends, and the circumstances connected with his new dwelling place.

"You must rest for a year or so, quite away from the Oratory," one of his companions would say. "Unless you do that, you will always be in danger of a relapse. You will be utterly unfitted for work, and will perhaps lose your life. If you remain some time at home and occupy yourself with light work and reading, you will be able to go back later on, quite well and strong again."

It must be owned that there was much sense in these remarks. It was true that the work of the Oratory caused Don Bosco great fatigue, and that his health gave great anxiety. He had only just escaped, as it

were by a miracle, from an all but fatal illness. Yet a powerful magnet was drawing Don Bosco to take charge of his boys again, and he felt a sadness and an indescribable reluctance to follow the advice of his friends. So by means of word and letter he thanked them for their kindness, and answered, with the Apostle St. Paul: "Let me go where God calls me: He who is omnipotent, and who casts down and raises up, He will know how to give me strength and help necessary for my purpose. And indeed, even if I were to yield my life, it would not be of any consequence. *Nihil horum vereor, nec facio animam meam pretiosiorum quam me:* I do not fear what you say to me, neither do I hold my life more precious than my ministry: I should even be glad to end my days in the service of my boys."

Seeing that his resolution was formed, and discerning in it the guidance of Heaven, Archbishop Fransoni, Don Cafasso and several other priests agreed that Don Bosco should return to the Oratory. They recommended him, however, to limit himself for some time to being among his boys to direct and to advise them, but to refrain altogether from teaching, preaching, and hearing confessions. Don Bosco promised to act as they suggested, but afterwards it was observed that he did quite as much work as formerly. The author once heard him speaking of this arrangement:

"At first," he said, "I certainly intended to obey and to keep my promise, but when I saw that Don Borel and his colleagues were unable to attend to all, and that on Sundays many boys had to go without confession and instruction, I could no longer remain idle. So I took up my wonted occupations again, and for upwards of twenty-five years I have had no further need of doctors or medicine. This has made me believe, that after all, methodical work does not injure bodily health."

After allaying the fears and objections of his overtimid friends, the next thing was to overcome a far more serious obstacle. When Don Bosco returned to

Turin, he intended to decide on a more permanent residence at Valdocco, near the Oratory. For this purpose he had already made an agreement with the man Pinardi, to take some rooms close to the Oratory chapel. In the meantime it came to his knowledge that it would be dangerous to live in that place, owing to the proximity of the "Gardener's Tavern," and to the fact that there were some very bad characters in the neighbourhood. In his new dwelling, Don Bosco could no longer depend on the domestic and other help which he received in the Institution belonging to the Marchioness Barolo. A servant living in the house was really needed, but, for the reasons mentioned, Don Bosco feared to engage one, dreading to expose her to dangers which can easily be imagined. He was, therefore, much perplexed as to how the affairs of the house were to be kept in order, if he determined to settle down in Valdocco.

Woman always enters into the principal events in the affairs of mankind, and she takes part also in the salvation of souls. This is not the place to recall the great heroines who, through Divine Providence, have taken noteworthy parts in the great deeds of the Old and the New Law. The foundation of the Oratory and the Institute of St. Francis of Sales was an event of great importance to boys in general, and to Salesians in particular. In this work Almighty God had decreed that a special part should be taken by women. They did so from the first by gladly sending their sons to the Oratory, and by alms and offerings in support of it. Nuns did their part by working, day and night, for the boys who were received. But there was one woman among them all who had a special share in the labours of the Oratory, and who gave an example and incentive to all others. This woman had, from the very beginning, earned the title of "Mother" among the poor boys who surrounded her. She stands at the head of a long line of women who have followed in her footsteps, and who will perhaps continue to do so till the end of the world. Her name is Margaret Occhiena, the widow

Bosco and mother of our revered Founder. Even in Don Bosco's lifetime, an interesting biography of her was written by the fluent pen of the Salesian priest, Don Lemoyne. But as she now enters into this history as the adopted mother of the Oratory, it will be a pleasure to speak of her whenever occasion offers. However, it is not intended to anticipate her biography by recording in the present volume the story of events which took place later on, up to the time of her death, 1856, and which the author heard from her own lips during the time that he was privileged to enjoy her friendship and to know the kindness of her motherly love.

After thinking a great deal over his difficulties with regard to the new house, Don Bosco resolved to talk the matter over with his mother.

"I have been thinking, mother," he said, "of returning to my boys at Turin. As I shall no longer be at the Refuge, I shall need someone to take care of the new house. Valdocco, where I shall have to live, is a very dangerous place, on account of certain bad people who are in the neighbourhood. You are the only person who would be able to remove all my fears, if you could only come and live with me there."

At these words the good woman looked rather sad, but she answered readily:

"My dear son, you can imagine how much it would cost me to leave this house, and to part from your brother Joseph and all the others who are dear to me. But, if it seems to you that such a step would be pleasing to Our Lord, then I am ready to follow you."

Don Bosco assured her of this, and after thanking her very affectionately, he concluded the conversation, saying:

"Let us, then, get everything ready, so that we can go to Valdocco after the Feast of All Saints."

In leaving her home, Margaret Bosco indeed made a great sacrifice. She had been the sole mistress there, and regarded as such by great and small. Beloved by everyone, nothing was wanting to complete her happi-

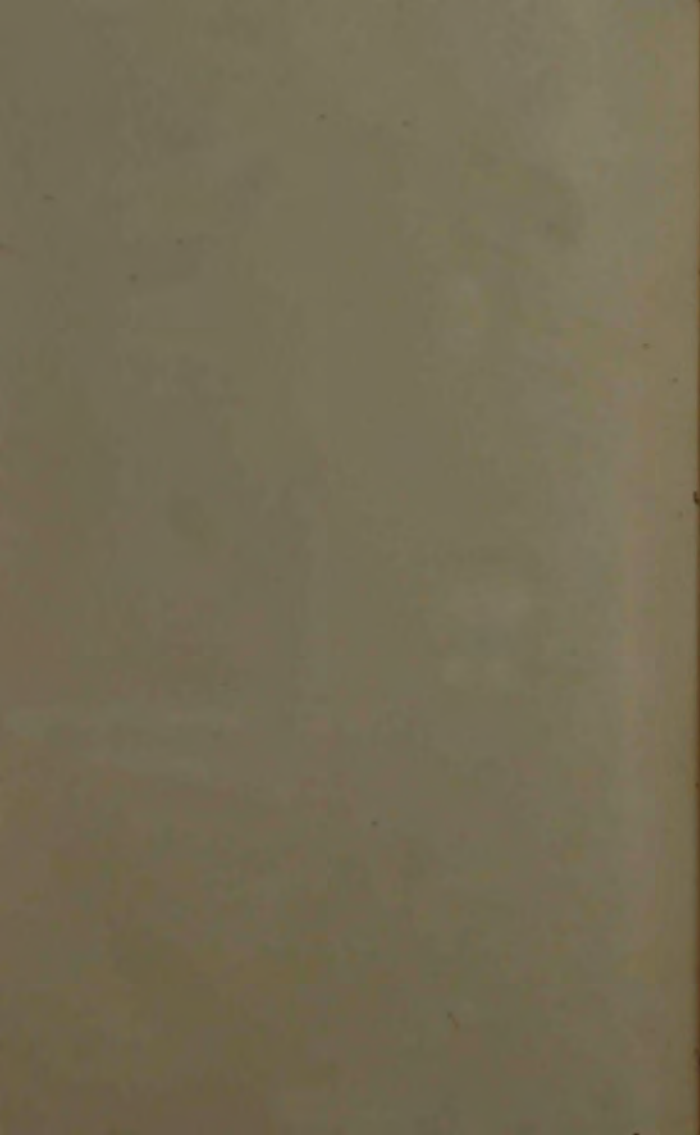
ness. The sacrifice was not less painful on the part of her family, who were very unhappy when they knew that she was going away. But the holy fear of God reigned in that home, so when they learned why she was leaving them, they made no objection, and soon became resigned.

Don Bosco's mother had, indeed, a truly noble end in view. She resolved to make her home with her son, not for the sake of leading an easier and more pleasant life, but to share toils and hardships with him in the service of over a hundred poor, neglected boys. She was not attracted by selfish motives of temporal gain, but by the love of God and of souls. She realized that, in order to carry out the holy work he had undertaken, Don Bosco would be obliged to spend all his own means, and to seek for additional alms also. Such a life would certainly never lead to riches, yet this reflection did not cause the holy widow any anxiety. On the contrary, admiring her son's courage and zeal, she felt herself all the more drawn to become his companion and follower, even unto death. Fortunate indeed is the priest who possesses such a mother as Margaret Bosco was.

The 3rd of November, which was the day fixed for their departure, came at last. The intervening time had been busily spent in sending provisions of vegetables and grain to Turin, and in setting household affairs in order. When the news became general in the neighbourhood, Don Bosco was the centre of a most unexpected scene. During the time of his convalescence at Becchi, as we have seen, he had (following his irresistible bent), gathered a number of the boys round him, and thus commenced another Oratory. Drawn by his attractive manner, the boys already loved him so much, that throughout each week they did nothing but long for the Sunday, so that they might be with him again. When their parents, and especially their mothers, saw how happy their children were, and how well they were instructed, they were so pleased that they wished the good priest would never leave them, but continue his



DON BOSCO, WITH MAMMA MARGARET,
MEETS WITH DON VOLA.



work of charity among them. So when they heard that instead of staying on at Becchi, Don Bosco was preparing to go away altogether and was taking his mother with him, they went to his house to implore him to remain. Speaking from their hearts, they used every argument they could think of to persuade him not to leave them.

"Whatever expenses there may be, we are ready to pay," they said.

"If I cannot give money," said one, "I will make up for it with clothes."

"I will give you eggs and provisions," promised another.

"Don't be afraid," added others in their turn, "we shall not let you want for anything. We will bring you wheat and maize and everything else you want. Only stay here and do not disappoint us and our boys."

Then seeing that their prayers and entreaties were unavailing, some of these good women and their children began to weep, which naturally moved Don Bosco a good deal.

Margaret's little grand-children cried very much when they saw that she was just on the point of leaving them. The courageous woman consoled them with hopes of seeing her again soon, and, unclasping their arms from her neck, she and her son set out on their way to Turin. Don Bosco took with him his breviary, a missal, and some manuscripts, and his mother carried a basket containing a few indispensable things. They journeyed in a truly apostolic way, on foot, talking of God and holy things. When they reached the town of Chieri, they stopped a little while at the house of Vallimberti, a lawyer, whose family was intimately connected with the Boscos. After rest and refreshment they set out again, and arrived in the evening at Turin.

When they reached the "Rondo," a short distance from their new home, they met Don John Vola, a priest of Turin, who has been mentioned before and who had often been to the Oratory to help Don Bosco.

After hearty congratulations to Don Bosco on the

recovery of his health, Don Vola asked him where he was going to live.

"My mother is with me now," answered Don Bosco, "and we are going to live in Pinardi's house, near the Oratory."

"But how are you going to live in this town without employment or salary?"

"You are asking me a question," Don Bosco said, "which I cannot answer yet. But we are putting ourselves into God's hands, and I am sure He will not fail to help us."

"I admire and commend you for your trust in God. I am only sorry that I have no money with me, but please accept this little offering which is all I have to give you now." So saying, Don Vola pulled out his watch and gave it to Don Bosco, who thanked him warmly, and said, turning to his mother: "Here is a proof that Divine Providence will take care of us. Let us go on, therefore, with perfect confidence."

After saying "good-bye" to Don Vola, they went on through the streets a little way, till they came to their new dwelling. It consisted of two little sleeping rooms, one of which had also to do duty as kitchen. The furniture was composed of two small beds, two benches, a box, a table, and a small pot and saucepan with a few dishes. The watch may be included in the list for the first night, but it was sold next day to procure necessities. Poverty, indeed, reigned supreme in Don Bosco's new home, but the want and meagreness of surroundings which would have caused others to repine, only made the mother and son rejoice.

Margaret turned to him, smiling. "At Becchi," she said, "I had to be always busy, keeping everything in order, and telling the others what to do from morning till night. Here, as far as I can see, I shall have quite an easy time with hardly anything to do. I shall be able to have a long rest!" Then, out of sheer good humour and content, she began to sing.

But to tell the truth, their position was a very critical one. As Don Bosco was no longer attached to the

Institution belonging to the Marchioness Barolo, he received no stipend, and on the other hand his expenses were very great. He and his mother were in want of actual necessities; they needed money for the rent, besides which they were continually called upon to provide food and clothing for poor boys suffering from hunger and cold. Many children came to the door every day asking for bread, shoes and clothes, without which they could not go to work. Margaret could not find it in her heart to send them away without help. At the end of a few weeks the small stock of provisions that had come from Becchi was quite gone, and they had given away all the articles of clothes and linen that they had brought with them. The question then arose as to how they should manage to provide for the future. Although they placed their confidence in the Storehouse and Treasury of Divine Providence, yet they did not refrain from doing all they could in a practical way to help themselves. They did not ask God to work unnecessary miracles. Don Bosco was therefore obliged to sell some pieces of land and a vineyard which belonged to him. Even the money raised in this way was not enough to meet the need, so his mother sent for her bridal trousseau which she had left at home. It consisted of a silk dress and several articles of jewelry. She sold some of these things, and used the rest to make sacred vestments for the chapel, which needed them very much.

Although the good woman was very detached from the things of this world, nevertheless the despoiling herself of these precious memorials cost her no little pain.

"When I saw these things in my hand for the last time," she was heard to say, "I felt very sad, because I saw that I was about to part with them for ever. But I then thought that I must not repine, because there could be no greater happiness than to honour our heavenly Spouse by supplying the needs of His Church, and feeding and clothing His little ones. After this act I felt so joyful, that if I had possessed a hundred

wedding outfits I should have given them all to God without a murmur."

With this and other similar help, Don Bosco was able to rent from Pinardi three other rooms close by, which were of great service to the Oratory. They were used at first for the work which soon became permanently known as the *Festive Oratories*, since the boys met together on Sundays and feast-days, and for evening school.

Owing to want of space, one of the classes, at the beginning, was held in the kitchen, and another in Don Bosco's own room. A class took place in the sacristy, one in the choir, and several others in the chapel itself. We need not say how very unsuitable these places were for the purpose, but nothing else could be done at the time. When Don Bosco had more rooms at his disposal, he organised other classes, and these he divided and sub-divided according to the requirements of the boys. This was conducive to better and more methodical teaching, and consequently more rapid progress. The attendance became much larger, and in the summer there were sometimes as many as 300 boys present at the same time.

In the beginning of 1847, after the Festive Oratory had gone on for some months, Don Bosco's boys went through a public examination in catechism, bible history and the geography connected with it. Several important persons in Turin were invited to assist, among whom were the celebrated Don Aporti, the Deputy Boncampagni, Don Barico, Brother Michael, Superior of the Christian Brothers, Professor J. Rayneri. These well-known men examined the pupils in the above subjects and were much pleased with the answers they received. They congratulated the boys on their examination, and gave prizes to the most deserving.

Encouraged by their first success, the boys, a short time afterwards, took another examination in the subjects taught in the night school. This second experiment was quite an important function. Throughout Turin the night schools were spoken of as some-

thing quite novel, and many professors and men of distinction frequently came to see them. This attracted the attention of the municipal authorities, who, when they heard of the examination, sent a special commission to find out whether the popular accounts of it were real or imaginary. The commission was composed of several gentlemen, with Signor Joseph Dupré at their head. They examined the boys in reading, arithmetic, recitation, the metric system and other subjects, and were astonished to find that boys who had learned nothing till they were sixteen or seventeen years of age, had been able to make such wonderful progress within a few months. When the examiners saw that a large number of big lads came to Don Bosco so willingly in order to get instruction (instead of idling about the streets of the town), they went away full of admiration and enthusiasm.

The commission afterwards gave a full account of their visit to the assembled members of the Municipality. The result of this report was that an annual subsidy of 300 lire was granted to Don Bosco's schools. He continued to receive this sum until the year 1878, when, without any reason being given, it was no longer granted.

Signor Gonella, whose charity and zeal have left a glorious and undying memory of him in Turin, was Director at that time of the charitable Institute, having for its object the care and instruction of mendicants. He had heard many wonderful accounts regarding the night-schools, so he also came to visit them. He questioned the boys, enquired into the method that was followed, and was greatly pleased. He referred the matter to the administrators of the above society, and obtained a grant of a thousand lire, to be made over to Don Bosco for his schools, in order to help and encourage such an excellent work. In the following year, 1848, he introduced the same methods in the Institute he directed. The Municipality followed his example, and in the course of a few years had established night schools in the principal cities of Piedmont.

CHAPTER XIV.

Rules for the Oratory. — The officials. — The Confraternity of St. Aloysius. — Its rules. — The six Sundays. — Announcement of Archbishop Fransoni's visit. — The preparations.

AFTER Don Bosco had settled down at Valdocco, he turned his attention to promoting unity of spirit and better organisation in the Oratory. At the beginning of 1847, after night schools had been established, he set to work to draw up a book of rules, and in a few weeks it was completed. In this book he explained all the traditions which had already been handed down and put into practice at the Oratory; and he appointed the different offices to be held by the boys in church, at recreation, and in class. These rules were printed, after being revised and altered as experience suggested. They were divided into three parts. The first explained the scope of the Festive Oratory, with its various duties and rules. The second contained the practices of piety to be observed by the boys, including the way in which they were to behave, both in church and elsewhere. The third referred to the day and night schools, and gave general regulations for their management; for several bishops and parish priests had, from the beginning, asked Don Bosco to introduce oratories similar to his own into their respective dioceses and parishes.

After establishing the principal offices to be held by his boys, Don Bosco entrusted them to those who, on account of their good conduct and common sense, seemed best able to fulfil the special duties they entailed. They became, so to speak, his officials and *aides-de-camp*. As each boy was made responsible for

the particular work entrusted to him, it was no longer necessary for Don Bosco to see to so many details personally, for each official took great pains to understand and perform his own task as well as possible. In this way the work of the Oratory was organised to the advantage of the boys and the great relief of the Director. He used to assemble the officials once a week, and, like an able leader, to encourage them, in fervent words, to remain constant and faithful to their posts. He also used to suggest things that might be done or avoided so that their efforts might be successful. He would sometimes, too, reward them with a book or sacred object, although he took care to encourage them to work for a higher motive. Such words and acts of confidence were a very powerful stimulus to good conduct, and it very seldom happened that he was obliged to dismiss any boy from his office on account of negligence or bad behaviour.

After establishing unity of administration by the above regulations, it was necessary to give some incentive to piety by means of permanent practices which might be observed by all. Don Bosco, therefore, founded the Confraternity of St. Aloysius, for the purpose of teaching his boys how to practise those virtues which were most conspicuous in that Saint, and thus begin early to lead good lives. With this object in view he drew up a few short rules, which he knew would be far more practical for boys than lengthy regulations. He sought approval of them by the Archbishop, who examined them himself and submitted them to others. The Archbishop finally approved of them on April 12th of the same year. The Rules are as follows, and it will be seen how wise and practical they are:

Firstly. St. Aloysius was such a model of good example, that all who desire to be inscribed in his Confraternity must try their utmost to avoid everything which might give scandal, and should also do their best to give good example in all things. They must do this especially by conscientiously fulfilling the duties of good Christians. St. Aloysius, from a child, was so

exact in performing his duties, so fervent and devout in his prayers, that people used to come on purpose to see his reverent demeanour and recollection.

Secondly. Every member shall endeavour once a fortnight to go to confession and receive holy communion. Members are advised to do this even oftener, especially on great feast-days. The sacraments are the weapons by means of which a complete victory is gained over the evil one. St. Aloysius, even when he was a little boy, used to go to the sacraments once a week, and as soon as permitted, with greater frequency. Those who, for some reason, cannot fulfil this condition, may, with the advice of the Director of the Confraternity, change it into some other practice of piety. Members are also exhorted, in addition, to frequenting the sacraments, to assist devoutly at sacred functions in their own chapel and thus edify the other boys.

Thirdly. Members are exhorted to avoid bad companions as they would the plague, and to beware of using bad language. St. Aloysius not only avoided evil conversations, but was so recollected that no one dared to say an unseemly word in his presence.

Fourthly. Members are enjoined to use the greatest charity towards their companions, forgiving any offences willingly. To do an injury to St. Aloysius was enough to make him a friend at once.

Fifthly. Members should also be very zealous in showing reverence in the House of God, and they should do their best to help others to be good, by inducing them to join the Confraternity.

Sixthly. Members should be very diligent in their work, in performing their duties, and in showing exact obedience to their parents and superiors.

Seventhly. When one of the members is ill, the others should be ready to pray for him and to give him any practical help that may be within their power.

The announcement of this Confraternity raised great enthusiasm among the Oratory boys, and all of them ardently desired to be inscribed as members. But Don Bosco bore in mind the words of the Prophet: *Multi-*

plicasti gentem et non magnificasti lætitiã: "Thou hast multiplied the people and not increased the joy." In order, therefore, that the boys might have a stronger motive for good conduct, Don Bosco made two conditions of membership. The first condition was that the aspirants should pass some time in probation, giving good example in church and elsewhere; the second was that they should avoid bad conversation and should frequent the holy sacraments. These conditions soon produced a marked improvement in the boys' behaviour, both with regard to general conduct and also in their piety.

The first reception of members into the Confraternity of St. Aloysius took place on the Sunday in May, which was the first of the six Sundays immediately preceding the feast day of that great Saint. In order to prepare well for the feast, the boys kept the six Sundays with particular fervour. Many went to the sacraments on each of them, in order to gain the plenary Indulgence granted by Pope Clement XIV. On this occasion, Don Bosco gave the boys leave to go to him for confession at any hour so that they might all be able to go to communion. On the Saturdays he often heard their confessions till late at night, even till after eleven o'clock, and on the Sunday mornings he was in the confessional again from four o'clock until time for Mass, which was sometimes delayed till nine or ten o'clock. The piety of the boys and the untiring zeal of Don Bosco were indeed admirable. For the good of souls, he used to remain in the tribunal of penance for many hours at a time, and only take a very short rest in the middle of the night. It even happened several times that he went on hearing confessions all night long, so that the first penitents in the morning found that the last ones of the night before had not yet gone.

Thus Don Bosco was obliged, at times, to stay in the confessional for even eighteen hours at a stretch. This occurred not only at the special time of which we are speaking, but on many other occasions during the year. Such devotion could not but have its effects on the boys.

Many of the more careless among them were deeply impressed at seeing the holy priest sacrificing his very life without any temporal interest in view. They were far more easily influenced for good in consequence, than if they had heard the very best sermons in the world; and they began to think their own souls must be of great value, if Don Bosco thought it necessary to spend so much time upon them.

This was not all. Many of the boys who came to the Oratory — especially strangers — had not yet received the sacrament of confirmation. Don Bosco therefore thought that the Feast of St. Aloysius would be a good opportunity to have it administered to them. He called on Archbishop Frasoni, and respectfully invited him to have confirmation at the Oratory. His Grace welcomed this invitation most cordially, and promised that he would come, not only to administer the sacrament of confirmation, but also to celebrate Mass and give holy communion. The joy among the boys was indescribable when Don Bosco told them this good news, and needless to say, the labour which consequently fell on the shoulders of the Director was enormous.

As the time drew near, it was found that catechism on Sundays only was not enough instruction for the confirmation candidates. Accordingly, Don Bosco made an arrangement to hold a class every evening in the week. The attendance was very large, and yet, with the help of some zealous priests and a few gentlemen from the town, he was able to prepare the young lads well, so that on the appointed day everything was ready.

This was the Archbishop's first visit to the Oratory, and such a function had never taken place there before. However, although the boys were poor, they spared no pains to render the feast as splendid as they possibly could. Those among them who were musical, practised hard for days beforehand, so that the singing might be perfect, and the sacristans did their best to decorate the church. A little porchway was erected outside, and an inscription giving welcome to the Prelate was worked

upon it. The joyous sound of bells was not wanting on the great occasion. As the boys did not possess a peal to ring on feast days, they laid hold of a single large bell and carried it about in triumph, ringing it in season and out of season. They did this in order to let everyone know — whether they wished to or not — that the Feast of St. Aloysius was going to be kept in a few days at the Oratory, and that it was to be honoured by the presence of the Archbishop himself. Indeed, the coming feast occupied everyone's mind to the exclusion of all else.

At length the longed-for day arrived. The Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, the 29th June, to which it had been transferred, had been chosen because, besides being a day of obligation, it was also a holiday for the lads who worked in the town; consequently all the boys could take part in the solemn function. At a very early hour a good number of them surrounded the confessionals of Don Bosco and several other priests, while towards seven o'clock the crowd was greater than it had ever been before. It seemed as if all the boys in Turin had come to the Oratory. There were so many, even of those who were not candidates, that a great number had to stay outside the church, and hear Mass at the Sanctuary of the "Consolata."

CHAPTER XV.

The Feast of St. Aloysius. — The function in church. — An amusing incident. — The confirmation. — The little theatre. — Words of the Archbishop. — Honorary associates.

SHORTLY after seven o'clock, the Archbishop, accompanied by several ecclesiastical dignitaries from the town, and two Canons from the Cathedral, arrived at the Oratory. All the priests who had already assembled, went to meet him in procession, vested in their cottas. When the Archbishop and his escort reached the porchway, Don Bosco met them and read an address which expressed the joy which he, the priests, co-operators and all the boys, experienced at seeing among them their beloved and worthy pastor. Above all, he wished to show his ardent desire of giving the Archbishop a welcome suited to his high dignity and to the kindly interest he had taken in them. Don Bosco begged him not to look at the poverty of the outward preparations, but rather at the good intentions of all who were gathered there.

"We should wish," the address ran, "to possess precious tapestry to adorn the walls of this house, and that flowers might be strewn along the roads over which you pass. If we had the means we should have offered you gifts not unworthy of your greatness. But all this would, after all, only be symbolical of our esteem, gratitude and love for you. Since our poverty does not permit us to offer you the symbols, we beg that your Grace will accept the reality. We ask you to receive our homage and affection, and we ask God to bless the prayers we offer for you this day. We implore Him to pour down graces upon you, and to preserve your life for many years, so that we may continue to enjoy your benevolence, and that you may

live to see the fruits of your charity abound more and more."

After entering the chapel and vesting before the altar, the Archbishop celebrated Mass, during which he gave the Bread of Angels to several hundred boys. When he saw so many, who had once been ignorant or heedless of religion, approaching holy communion with such great recollection and devotion, the good Prelate felt a thrill of holy joy. He afterwards confessed that the function he had just beheld had especially moved and delighted him.

"How could I help being overcome with joy," he said, again and again, "when I found myself surrounded by hundreds of boys, all so pious and devout, and yet who, had it not been for Don Bosco's providential work, might perhaps, like so many others, have fallen into sin and vice? How could I keep back the tears of delight which rose to my eyes when I saw so many little ones of the flock safe in the arms of the Good Shepherd? Without this sheep-fold and pasture they might all have wandered away to feed on poisoned herbs, or to fall victims to the fangs of wolves."

After Mass, His Grace invoked the Holy Spirit, and administered the sacrament of confirmation to about three hundred boys. At the end of the ceremony he said a few suitable words suggested to him by the occasion. Just before he did so, an amusing thing happened. According to the usual custom in other churches, a kind of episcopal throne had been erected near the altar in the Oratory chapel. It was merely a raised platform covered with a carpet. When the Archbishop was about to speak to the boys, he mounted this erection, forgetting, as he did so, that the roof of the chapel was not quite so lofty as that of his Cathedral. So he did not bend his head, the consequence being that he knocked the top of his mitre against the ceiling. At this circumstance he smiled and said in a whisper: "I must show respect to these boys, and preach to them with my head uncovered." This he accordingly did.

Archbishop Frasoni never forgot this little incident, and used often to enjoy telling it. When he was urging Don Bosco to build a larger church for his boys, he would graciously say: "Do try to build it high enough, so that I may not have to take off my mitre when I am preaching."

The Archbishop briefly reminded the newly-confirmed boys of the meaning of the sacred ceremonies which had just been performed. He exhorted them to fight valiantly against temptation like good soldiers of Jesus Christ. "Fight especially against human respect," he said. "Never fail to do good, and never do evil from vain fear of foolish talk, or from the contempt and insults of bad people. What would you say of a soldier who was ashamed of his uniform, and who blushed at the name of his king?" After giving some further useful advice, he concluded by saying:

"In administering confirmation, the reign of peace has just begun in each of your souls with the words *Pax tecum*: 'Peace be with thee.' I am now going to invoke that sweet peace upon you *all* by saying *Pax vobis*: 'Peace be with you.' Yes, my dear children, may you always be at peace with God, at peace with yourselves, and at peace with your neighbour. Be at peace with everyone except the devil, sin and the maxims of the world. Against those enemies you must wage an implacable war. But console yourselves with the thought that this war, which must endure to death, will lead to victory, and that victory to an everlasting peace."

After leaving the chapel the boys sat down to a bountiful repast, provided by the charity of the Archbishop himself. He wished their feast to be at his expense, so that he might show them, in this way, that he had their material as well as their spiritual welfare at heart.

As in the chapel the ceremony had been remarkable for the boys' devout demeanour, so the feast which took place outside was no less delightful in its way. After a short rest, His Grace deigned to take part in it, and as

the 29th of June was his feast-day too, the boys took advantage of the occasion to read him several compositions in prose and verse. The Archbishop was much pleased with, among other things, a pleasing dialogue between two boys, which was carried on with surprising skill. After these recitations, a short entertainment took place, and a comic piece was acted, entitled, "Napoleon's Corporal." This was a witty farce which served as an expression of the delight which everyone felt on that happy day. The illustrious Prelate was so much amused at it, that he said that he had never laughed so much in his life.

When the entertainment was over, the Archbishop rose to compliment the boys and say a final word. He began by speaking of the great consolation that he felt at the sight of the immense good which was being done at the Oratory. He compared his sense of joy to that of missionaries who, though working amongst people poor in the goods of this world, rejoiced because the newly baptised Christians were rich in the wealth of charity and zeal. He praised in glowing terms all that was being done at the Oratory, both by priests and by laymen, and spoke of the exalted grandeur of this part of their ministry. In words that sprang from the heart, words full of zeal for the Church, for souls, and especially for the young, he urged them, everyone, to persevere in that charitable work, assuring them of his own special goodwill. Then, turning to the boys, he exhorted them to continue their attendance at the Oratory with perseverance. He pointed out to them the great advantages that they gained by it, spiritual and temporal advantages, which would endure for the present life and for the life to come.

"How many unfortunate people," he exclaimed, "are this day groaning in the depths of some obscure prison. They are a burden to themselves, a disgrace to their families, and a dishonour to their country. And why? Because in the springtime of their life they had no kind friend to gather them together away from the dangers of the streets, away from immorality and bad

companions. They had no messenger of God to teach them their duties as Christians and as citizens, nor to show them how honourable is labour and how disgraceful vice. My children, I hope it is very different with you. I exhort you to come here as often as the circumstances of your life will let you. May the instruction you receive now be a lasting treasure to you. Make it the rule of your conduct through life, and I assure you that, during your manhood, you will bless the day when you learned the way to this home of knowledge and goodness. I cannot end without thanking you for the hearty welcome you have given me. I thank you for the affectionate expressions which the poets and prose writers have used towards me. I thank the actors for their amusing performance. I thank the musicians who have sung so well. I thank also those who have worked so hard in putting up pavilions and arches. Above all, I thank those who have laboured so zealously at your education. And since, in your compositions, you have called me your 'Pastor' and 'Father,' I assure you that on my part I always will regard you as the dearest portion of my flock and my faithful children."

Archbishop Frasoni had such gracious and affable ways, that everyone who came in contact with him, even for a moment, was irresistibly drawn to love him and to feel all a son's confidence towards him. Consequently a touching scene took place when, at mid-day, he prepared to return to his palace. The boys began to crowd round him so that he could scarcely move. Some of them wanted to kiss his hand, others to touch his clothing and get his blessing. It seemed as though our Lord Himself were walking in the midst of them. Had they been allowed, the boys would have made their arms into a throne (as men did of old to honour their kings) and would have carried the Archbishop home in triumph. But at last he got to his carriage, and, after Don Bosco had expressed his gratitude, amid a perfect storm of cheers from the boys, he was driven away from the Oratory, leaving his blessing and good wishes for the future.

CHAPTER XVI.

Necessity of a Home. — Meeting with young rogues. — A bad beginning. — The first boarder. — The few words before rest. — Wise precautions. — A humble and obscure beginning. — An orphan's tears.

WHILE everything was being done to make the religious and other classes a success, and while every effort was being made to attract the boys to virtue by means of suitable practices of piety — another need began to be much felt. Daily experience had made it quite plain to Don Bosco that many boys from Turin and elsewhere would be quite willing to lead regular and hard-working lives, but as they had no food, clothing, nor a roof over their heads, it was necessary first to give them permanent help. These poor boys were at times obliged to inhabit such dangerous places, and lead such wretched lives, that the good they learnt at the Oratory was quickly forgotten. Seeing all this, Don Bosco, in his desire to give lasting assistance to those boys living in the midst of evil, began to make plans for establishing some sort of place where the poorest and most neglected of them could sleep. At first a hay-loft close to the Oratory was the only place he could get for the purpose. He furnished it, as best he could, with straw and also with a few sheets and bed-coverings. But Don Bosco's fatherly care was very badly rewarded at the outset.

One evening, in the April of 1847, he had been obliged to remain in Turin for a long time with a sick man, and was therefore late in coming home. He passed through the part which was then called the "Fields of the Citadel," and which is now covered with fine

houses. When he reached the beginning of the Corso Valdocco, he met about twenty rough lads who were loitering about. They had not yet heard of Don Bosco or his Oratory, and when they saw a priest coming towards them, they began to indulge in some remarks which were not altogether polite.

"Priests are all close-fisted," said one.

"They are proud and overbearing," went on another.

"We will prove it with this one," cried a third.

At these words, Don Bosco began to slacken his pace. His natural inclination would have been to avoid the roughs, but, seeing that he was too near to do so, he went straight up to them as though he had not heard what they had said.

"Good evening, my friends," he said to them, "how are you?"

"Very poorly, Father," answered the most impudent among them. "We are thirsty and we haven't a farthing. Will you treat us to a drink?"

"Yes," they all shouted, "treat us to a drink or we will not let you pass." Saying this they surrounded him in such a way that it was impossible for him to go on.

"With the greatest of pleasure, my friends," he replied, "and, if you like, I shall come also and have a drink with you."

"You are a good sort of priest, you are!" they all exclaimed.

"That is just what we want! Come along to the 'Alpine Tavern' close by."

Don Bosco had two reasons for following these young rogues. In the first place he wanted to avoid greater mischief, and he also wanted to seize an opportunity of doing them good. Imagine what it must have looked like to see a priest in a public-house surrounded by such a set of young scamps. All eyes were fixed upon him as he entered, but everyone found out before long who he was, and why he had come.

The young rascals seated themselves with Don Bosco

in their midst, round a table, and in a short time several bottles of wine had been consumed. When Don Bosco considered that they had had enough, and were in a better humour, he asked them to grant him a favour.

"Oh, as many as you like, Don Bosco," they replied, for he had already told them his name, "because we should like to be friendly with you in the future."

"I ask only one favour, my friends," the good priest said. "You have blasphemed God several times to-night. Will you promise me never to do so again?"

"I am sorry, Don Bosco," said one of the lads, "but, you know, a word sometimes escapes without our noticing. It shall not happen again. I'll correct that bad habit at any cost."

And the other boys promised the same thing.

"That is right. I shall go home quite happy. On Sunday I shall expect you at the Oratory. It is late now, and you ought to go home to bed." Several of them told Don Bosco that they had no homes.

"Where do you sleep?" he asked them.

"In a stable, sometimes, when the grooms let us. Sometimes in a lodging-house, where we can get a bed for twenty centesimi. Sometimes in a friend's house."

"Poor fellows!" sighed Don Bosco, thinking of the dangers which surrounded these unfortunate lads.

"Now, listen to me," he went on. "Let all of you who have a home, go back to it at once, and let the rest come with me and we shall see what can be done." The boys agreed to this, and so the party divided. Some said good-night to Don Bosco and went off in the direction of the town. The rest, about ten or a dozen in number, set out with him for Valdocco.

When he reached home, where his mother was anxiously waiting up for him, he took the boys up to the hay-loft and gave them sacks of straw and all the sheets and blankets that he could spare. Having persuaded them to join with him in saying an "Our Father" and "Hail Mary," he wished them good-night and left them.

This chance event seemed to him to be the first step towards his cherished plan. But God had ordained otherwise.

When morning came, Don Bosco went to call the boys and to send them to work for the day. On reaching the ladder that led to the hay-loft, he stopped a moment to listen, but not the slightest sound could be heard. Thinking that they were still asleep he mounted the ladder, only to find that the loft was stripped and empty. His ungrateful guests had stealthily decamped, taking with them Don Bosco's sheets and blankets!

The failure of his first attempt at founding a permanent home for poor boys did not discourage Don Bosco at all, but only served to incite him to do more than ever. He considered that the greater number of little vagrants he could rescue from vice, the fewer there would be to grow up as thieves.

Late one evening in May, as he and his mother were sitting at supper, a knock was heard at the door, and on opening it they saw a poor boy who was drenched to the skin. His scanty rags were no protection against the rain which was pouring in torrents. The poor little fellow implored them to give him food and shelter. Mother Margaret took him in, and with much kindness put him by the fire and gave him all that remained of the frugal supper. When he had eaten and rested, Don Bosco asked who he was and where he came from.

"I am an orphan," he told them, "and come from Valsesia, in search of work. I am a bricklayer, and when I started out I had three lire in my pocket, and now I have nothing at all." After sympathising with the boy's troubles, Don Bosco went on to ask him:

"Have you made your first communion?"

"No, not yet."

"Have you been confirmed?"

"No."

"Have you been to confession?"

"Yes, when my mother was alive."

"And where do you intend to go now?"

"I don't know. Please have pity on me, and let me

stay here to-night." The poor lad began to weep, and Mother Margaret, moved by the sight of the boy's tears, wept too. Don Bosco was deeply touched and stood looking on silently for a few moments, until at length he spoke.

"If I were sure that you were honest, I would give you a lodging, but others have deceived me, and stolen my sheets and blankets."

"Oh! Father, I am poor, but not a thief."

"If you wish it," Margaret said to her son, "we will keep him here to-night, and to-morrow God will provide."

"Where can we put him?"

"In the kitchen."

"And suppose he goes off with the porridge pot?"

"I will see he doesn't do that."

So the matter was settled, and the mother and son, helped by the young lad, made up a temporary bed with some planks, on which they placed a mattress with a couple of sheets and a blanket. This was the first bed and the first dormitory of the Salesian Oratory at Turin, which now accommodates about a thousand boys, and contains upwards of forty rooms.

The workings of Divine Providence can easily be recognised in all this.

Before retiring to rest, Mother Margaret said a few words to the lad on the necessity of religion and work. Thus she was the originator, without being aware of it, of a custom which is still kept up at the Oratory, and has been introduced into all Salesian Houses: namely, the practice of saying a few kind words to the boys immediately after night prayers, with the object of sending them to rest with pious thoughts and good resolutions.

Margaret ended her little talk by asking the boy to say his prayers.

"I have forgotten them," he replied.

"Repeat them after me," she enjoined; and kneeling down together, he repeated them after her, word by

word. After wishing him good-night, Don Bosco and his mother retired.

Next day Don Bosco found work for the lad, who still remained Margaret's guest, coming to meals and sleeping at the Oratory. He continued doing this until the beginning of winter, when he returned to his own part of the country. Since then, nothing was heard of him, and it is thought that he died soon afterwards. In spite of all the efforts that have been made, the name of the first "guest" has never been ascertained, because Don Bosco had not then begun to keep a register of names. The boys whom he sheltered at first were not regular inmates, but were like birds of passage. It may be that Our Lord so willed everything, in order that His own intervention in this great work — the origin of which was so lowly and hidden — might be made more striking.

In the beginning of June in the same year, a second boy was sheltered under Don Bosco's roof. The latter was returning one day to the Oratory from the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. On reaching the street now called the *Corso Regina Margherita*, he saw a boy of about twelve leaning against a tree and crying bitterly. The good priest went up to him and asked why he was crying.

"Because," answered the poor boy between his sobs, "because I am all alone. My father died when I was very young, and my mother, who loved me dearly, was buried this morning." And saying this, the child began to sob more bitterly than ever.

"Where did you sleep last night?" Don Bosco asked.

"I slept at home last night, but to-day the landlord seized the few clothes and furniture that we had, and turned me out."

"What are you going to do now, and where are you going?"

"I don't know what to do nor where to go. I am tired and hungry, and I have not a friend in the whole world."

" Will you come with me, and I will do what I can to help you? "

" But I do not know who you are! "

" That doesn't matter. I will tell you later on. For the present it is enough to know that I am going to be a good friend to you." Saying this, he took the poor little fellow with him, and when they got home he gave him into Margaret Bosco's care.

" Here is another son, mother," he said, " who is sent to us by God. Will you take care of him, and get another bed ready? "

The boy belonged to a respectable family, and showed considerable capability, so he was placed as a clerk in a business firm in Turin. Being intelligent and trustworthy, by the time he was twenty he was receiving a good salary, and had attained an honourable position in the world. He married and became the father of a family, and always continued to be a good Catholic and an upright citizen. Time only strengthened his affection for Don Bosco and for the Oratory, which was the means of saving him from destitution and of giving him a good Christian education.

Many other boys were sheltered by Don Bosco after these first two, but during that year the number was limited to seven, owing to want of room. The good conduct of these boys was a constant source of pleasure and delight to the priest, and it encouraged him to persevere in his arduous undertaking.

CHAPTER XVII.

A branch Oratory indispensable. — In search of a strategical position. — A thunderstorm. — A good omen. — The opening. — A mother's gift.

THE large number of boys who attended the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales increased in proportion to the devotion of Don Bosco, and of his faithful friend, Don Borel, in teaching both secular and religious subjects.

On feast-days boys came in such crowds that only a portion of them could get into the chapel. About two hundred had to remain in the playground while devotions were going on. That place, too, though far from small, was not nearly large enough for so many boys to play in.

One day in August, after night prayers, Don Bosco took Don Borel aside and spoke to him about it.

"You must have seen for several Sundays, and especially to-day, what a great number of boys we have had at the Oratory. There must be not less than eight hundred. There is not even standing room in the chapel, and the boys are so crowded together that one feels quite sorry for them. As time goes on this state of things gets worse and worse. It would not be right to lessen our numbers by sending any of them away, because that would expose them again to the dangers of the streets, where they may so easily fall into evil ways. Can you think what we can possibly do?"

"I have noticed it, too," Don Borel answered, "and I am convinced that this place, which at first seemed so large, is now far too small to hold so many boys. We shall have to migrate again, as the cranes and swallows do every year."

"It seems to me," said Don Bosco, "that we can do without migrating. From enquiries I have made, I find that a good third of our boys come here from the west side of the town. Some of them walk as far as two miles to get here. If we were to open a second Oratory in that quarter, do you think that we could make it a success if we stayed on here as well?" Don Borel thought over Don Bosco's words for several minutes, after which he exclaimed:

"The idea is excellent!"

"In that way we should gain a double advantage," continued Don Bosco. "We should lessen the number of boys at this Oratory and so be able to give more attention to those who remain here. We should also attract many others to the new Oratory who do not yet come to this one because it is too far away." The project was thus proposed and agreed upon by the two friends.

Next day Don Bosco went to call upon Archbishop Fransoni, and laid before him the plan of starting a second Oratory, asking at the same time his advice on the subject. His Grace praised and approved the new design, and suggested that the second Oratory should be planted in the very heart of the city.

Thus encouraged, Don Bosco soon afterwards went in search of a suitable site in that part of the town near Porta Nuova. After weighing the reasons for and against different places, he at length decided on one in the *Viale Vittorio Emmanuele*, close to the river Po.

That neighbourhood, now covered with stately buildings and intersected by spacious roads and pleasant gardens, was at the time only a stretch of vacant land, with a few cottages scattered here and there, inhabited mostly by washerwomen.

On feast-days swarms of young lads were to be found playing about there instead of attending the services at their parish church or going to catechism. They grew up ignorant of religion, and exposed to wickedness of every kind. Don Bosco saw that the place was very well suited for the purpose he had in view, and

like an experienced general, he chose it as the strategical position on which to pitch his camp.

There was a small house close by, with an adjoining yard and a tumble-down shed. Upon inquiry he found that the owner was a woman named Vaglienti. He went to see her, and after explaining the object of his visit, asked her to let him rent the house from her. She was inclined to do this, but they could not come to terms about the yearly payment. After a long discussion, during which there was great danger of the negotiations being broken off, an unlooked-for event removed every difficulty. The sky became overclouded and, almost without warning, a vivid flash of lightning threw the excited woman into a state of extreme fear. She turned to Don Bosco, exclaiming in terror: "If you will pray God to preserve me from the lightning, I will let you have the house for the sum you offer."

"Thank you," said Don Bosco, "and I pray Our Lord to bless you now and always." After a few moments the lightning ceased, and the contract was made for four hundred and fifty lire.

So the lightning came as a blessing to Don Bosco, and played the part of a benevolent mediator. The tenants of the house were given notice to quit, and workmen were sent to prepare a chapel.

Don Bosco assembled his boys one Sunday and announced that very soon he was going to open a second Oratory. He used a beautiful example in telling them the good news. "My dear children," he said, when bees become too many for one hive, some of them fly away and form a new family. There are, as you see, so many of us here that we hardly know where to turn. During recreation, every now and then, one of you is lifted right off his feet and thrown down, which is evidently dangerous. We are packed together in chapel like sardines. If we made room by pushing our backs and shoulders against the walls, the place might come down on our heads. What can we do? We must imitate the bees, go somewhere else to open another Oratory, and start another family."

These words were hailed by the boys with a shout of joy. When their youthful enthusiasm had calmed down a little, the good priest went on to say, "I suppose you are all curious to know where the new Oratory is to be, and which of you are going there. You want to know, of course, when it is to be opened, and also what its name is to be. Keep quiet, and I will tell you in a few words. The Oratory will be planted near *Porta Nuova*, a short distance from the iron bridge over the River Po. So those who live in that part of the town will have to go to it, because it will be nearer to their homes, and also because their example will attract other boys in the neighbourhood.

"When is it to be opened? Men are already working at the chapel, so I hope we shall bless it on the 8th of next December, the Feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception. We should like to open our second Oratory on the same Festival as we did our first one — a day consecrated to the great Mother of God. And we shall place our new House under her powerful protection.

"What name shall we give it? It will be called the Oratory of St. Aloysius, and there are two reasons for giving it that name. The first one is that our boys should have a model of innocence and every other virtue to imitate. St. Aloysius is exactly the model we want, as he is proposed to us by the Church herself. The second reason is to show our gratitude to our venerated Archbishop, His Grace Aloysius Frasoni, who loves us so much, and who is so kind in extending to us his patronage. I hope, boys, that you are pleased with the news I have just told you?" A resounding chorus of assent was the answer, followed by loud cheers for St. Aloysius, the Oratory of *Porta Nuova*, and for Don Bosco.

The news was carried by the boys to their homes, schools and workshops, and very soon went the round of the neighbourhood. Bands of children continually went to see the place where the new Oratory was to be, and they were full of joy when they saw how well-

suited it was for their favourite games. The 8th of December was eagerly looked forward to, and several weeks before the opening ceremony everyone in those parts knew about the new institution.

When the time drew near, His Grace's permission was asked for the blessing of the new Oratory, as well as for other favours which the boys needed. The zealous and benevolent Archbishop granted them all without restrictions of any kind.

On the previous Sunday, Don Bosco had given notice that the inauguration of the new Oratory would take place on the coming Feast. He invited the boys in the south part of the town, to be at the place already so well known to them. They were asked to be there early in the morning, so that they might have an opportunity of going to confession. The chapel was then to be blessed, after which, holy Mass would be celebrated.

"Come, and take part in this Feast," Don Bosco said, "because by doing so, we can worthily honour our dearest Mother, the Immaculate Queen of Heaven. We must beg her to turn her eyes upon us, to take the new Oratory under her protecting mantle and to make our new work prosper, so that many boys may benefit by coming here."

Those boys who lived in the part of Turin near the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, were asked to assemble there on the same day and at the same time.

"So," Don Bosco continued, "we shall be like two families, who are united in spirit although separated in body. We shall join together in celebrating the praises of the Mother of God."

A crowd of boys gathered round Don Bosco and Don Borel when they came out of chapel, and promised eagerly to bring their parents, friends and companions to the new Oratory. The two priests felt very glad indeed to see the enthusiasm shown by the boys, and foresaw that, through God's goodness, their labours would not be lost.

On the vigil of the feast, the chapel about to be dedicated to St. Aloysius was illuminated. A picture

of the Saint, candlesticks, candles, altar-cloth, alb, cope and veil had been given by various benefactors, as well as other useful articles, such as a table, a press for vestments, seat and prie-dieu, for use in the sacristy. These benefactors were the forerunners of those who are now called the Co-operators of Don Bosco. The few articles still required for carrying out the sacred functions were brought from the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, or borrowed from a neighbouring parish.

The 8th of December, 1847, came at last, and the morning dawned in a perfect whirlwind of snow. It was the third anniversary of the day on which Don Bosco had blessed the first Chapel of the Oratory in honour of St. Francis of Sales, when he was at the Refuge belonging to the Marchioness Barolo. He had given his first Oratory the name of that gentle Saint, and it had prospered and increased in a wonderful manner. It was certain that the second Oratory would, like the first one, do a great deal of good to the young, and would be equally successful in every way. Begun, as it was, on a day consecrated to the Immaculate Virgin, Don Bosco was sure of her protection, for she is always the powerful helper of all good works. The white flakes of snow that fell from Heaven were counted a joyful omen. It seemed as though our Lord wished to show how the children of the Oratory should, later on, be multiplied like the snow-flakes, while the whiteness of the snow was a symbol of that innocence which should especially adorn the souls of the young. The Saint who had been taken as their patron and model was a certain pledge of great good. Results afterwards proved that these ideas were not mere illusions. The bad weather did not prevent the boys from coming to the Oratory in large numbers. About six o'clock in the morning several were already there for confession, and by eight o'clock the chapel was quite full. As Don Bosco was obliged to be at Valdocco, he could not, of course be present at "St. Aloysius." The function was performed by Don Borel, who blessed the little church and celebrated holy Mass, after which he gave

from the altar a short and touching address, the gist of which was as follows :

" I cannot refrain, my dear children, from showing the great joy that floods my heart at this happy moment. The bad weather and the cold have not discouraged you. Devotion to our Holy Mother Mary, and love for your new Oratory have warmed your hearts and brought you here in great numbers. Some of you have been to holy communion, and all have heard holy Mass with special recollection. This makes me feel very glad, and my heart is filled with confidence that you will continue coming here with regularity and willingness. I hope that your example and advice will attract many of your companions to follow you, and I trust that this Oratory of St. Aloysius will be exactly like that of St. Francis of Sales, so that both institutions may be the means of leading many souls to God. May the Immaculate Virgin, on whose feast we have begun this work, aid, protect, and defend us."

After this introduction, he went on to exhort the boys to flee from sin, and, above all, to practise the virtue of purity. He set St. Aloysius before them as their model, and told them many edifying details of his life. When the sermon was finished, some prayers were said, after which all the boys filed silently out of chapel in regular order.

This is hardly the place to dwell at length on the progress of this institution. It is enough to say that the rules of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales were introduced, and everything was carried on according to the same methods as in the other House.

Since Don Bosco was not able to direct the new Oratory in person, he consulted Don Borel, and they decided to entrust it to various zealous priests who, every feast-day, took with them some of the elder and more intelligent boys from Valdocco to help them in their task.

Don Carpano was nominated Director of the new Oratory at its commencement, and Don Bosco and Don Borel often went there themselves. Don Ponte

was the next Director, and was succeeded by Don Rossi, who was a man of great zeal but whose health was not at all good. He died while he was still quite young, and then followed an interval of some years during which there was no fixed Director. By this time Don Bosco began to have at his disposal some clerics, whom he sent to " St. Aloysius " every feast-day. Each week he secured the services of a priest of Turin, who went there to hear confessions and say Mass, as well as to preach. Occasionally another priest used to come for the sermon and devotions in the evening.

Later on, Don Bosco asked Don Leonard Murialdo to accept the position of Director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius. The boys profited very much while he remained with them, which he did till he undertook the government of the school for young artizans, another very useful institution in Turin. Don Theodore Scolari became the next Director of the new Oratory, and laboured there for some years with admirable zeal. Don Bosco finally sent various priests from his own institute to take charge of the new one. That institution still exists and is now connected with the School and Church of St. John the Evangelist, which have been erected on the same property.

We shall speak in the next chapter of the persecution which arose against the Oratory of St. Aloysius at its foundation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Injuried washerwomen on the site of the Oratory of St. Aloysius. — Emancipation of the Waldenses. — Evil results.—The bride.—The call to battle.— Pistol shots. — Master of the situation.

WORKS that have for their object the glory of God and the good of souls are, as a rule, targets for malignant attacks and fierce persecution. One would naturally suppose that the contrary would be the case, and that the "just man" and his works would always triumph, while the wicked efforts of the evil-doer would come to nought. Yet who was more "just" than our Divine Saviour? Who was more zealous for the glory of His Father and for the salvation of souls? Yet, who has ever suffered more than He? The Garden of Olives, the Hall of Pilate, and the heights of Calvary stand out clearly to show us how far the wickedness of man can reach.

The history of Christ's Church, — His own creation and work — is but a repetition of His own life's story. Wicked men are ever at work to harass and oppress Her. Even in our own age of enlightenment, we see her ministers and institutions slandered and persecuted. This is but the continuation of her past history and will endure so long as the life of man is a trial and a combat. Till the end of time pious institutions will suffer persecution, through fanatical hatred and wicked slanders; worse still, they will always be treacherously oppressed by persons who ought to stand by and defend them. Don Bosco's institutions are a proof of what we have just said, because, being blessed by God, they are necessarily marked with the seal of suffering.

Among Don Bosco's foundations, which were bitterly persecuted from the very first, was the Oratory of St.

Aloysius. The washerwomen who lived in that part began the hostilities. As soon as they heard that Don Bosco had rented the tenement, they became furious, and having warmly discussed the matter among themselves, they resolved to assail the poor priest in a body, and oblige him, by means of invectives and threats, to break off the contract. It happened that Don Bosco and the landlady were examining the house to see what alterations and repairs would be necessary before he took possession of it. While they were doing this, they were surrounded by about a dozen washerwomen with arms akimbo, and fiery countenances. Their eyes blazing with rage, they looked indeed like so many Furies.

Accosting Don Bosco, they poured forth a perfect torrent of abusive language.

"You hard-hearted, uncharitable priest," burst out one of them, "what harm have we done you, that you should come and throw us out of house and home?"

"Are there not more suitable places in Turin?" screamed another angry creature, "where you can collect all your little rascals round you?"

"How I should like to see you fall down and break your neck," was the gentle wish of a third. This was followed by much more of the same kind.

"Perdition take you and your Oratory!"

"If you don't take yourself off quickly we shall force you to go!"

"We have good pairs of hands and will give your face a washing!"

With these words, one of the viragos was approaching Don Bosco to put her threat into execution. Deeming it now time to speak, he addressed them.

"Listen, my good women, listen."

"No," they interrupted, "we will not listen. Get yourself out of this, and leave our rooms alone, or else you will be carried away more dead than alive." And indeed, they seemed quite capable of carrying out their threat.

At that moment the landlady interposed:

"You are mistaken, my good women," she said, "if you think that Don Bosco has come here to do you harm. On the contrary, his presence will be very much to your advantage. He intends, after founding an Oratory here, to establish a school, too, and he means you to have the washing and mending of all the inmates. You had better not be angry with the good priest, when you have every reason to be thankful to him. I intend, too, to find you lodgings somewhere near the River Po, so that you will have no difficulty in going on with your work. You ought to be more than satisfied now that you will have more to do, and better pay."

The landlady's words had the desired effect. The washerwomen, who, a moment before, had been so furious, were now as quiet as lambs, and even begged Don Bosco's pardon for their insolence. After this little incident they left the Oratory and its founder in peace.

But other more severe troubles were in store for Don Bosco. About this time a petition signed by a few citizens was presented to King Charles Albert, to plead for the Emancipation of the Jews and Waldenses. It received his approval, and the Jews soon became the richest landowners in Piedmont. The Waldenses, also, poured down like a torrent from the mountain valleys where they had lived isolated. They scattered themselves through the principal cities of northern Italy, doing their utmost to gain proselytes to their pernicious heresy by scattering broadcast tracts and pamphlets setting forth their false doctrines, establishing schools, holding meetings and erecting chapels. Indeed, if the Catholics had been pagans or idolaters, the Waldenses could not have done more, in their fanatical zeal, to win them to the sects of the three detestable apostates, Peter Waldo, Martin Luther, and Calvin. Amongst those who suffered bitterly from the effects of this Emancipation were Don Bosco and the inmates of St. Aloysius' Oratory. The Waldenses, without delay, settled near them and held meetings at which, under pretext of explaining the Bible, they audaciously and grossly

insulted the Pope, and said abominable things of the Blessed Virgin, the Sacrament of Penance, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the celibacy of the clergy.

The Waldenses expected that great enthusiasm would be kindled among the people, and that large numbers would be persuaded to join their ranks; but they were quickly undeceived, for only very few came to these impious meetings, or became their followers. These followers came from the scum of the population and merely wanted a pretext for not practising their religion. One of them in particular, Pugno by name and a cobbler by trade, having become tired of working at his last, took up preaching instead and became a champion of Peter Waldo's doctrines. He came to Don Bosco several times and challenged him to a discussion on Religion. Although it was impossible not to feel sorry for the poor fellow, it was also impossible not to laugh at the ranting and jargon of the ignorant cobbler who had suddenly turned theologian and wished to be an apostle.

The Waldenses, seeing that very few proselytes were to be gained among grown-up people, turned their attention to means which have, unfortunately, been successful at all times in leading souls astray. The heretics were rich, and they used their money to corrupt the young, who, of course, had no suspicion of the designs against them. The nefarious work was begun without delay, and the first point to attack was the Oratory of St. Aloysius, which was then attended by some five hundred boys.

Some sectarians, accordingly, placed themselves one Sunday along the road leading to the Oratory, while others took up their position near the recreation ground, with the intention of tempting the boys away by attractive promises.

"What is the use of your going to the Oratory? Come with us to a place where you will be able to enjoy yourselves to your heart's content. You will see and hear grand things, and we shall give you some money and a beautiful book to take away with you."

If we consider how fickle children are, it is not surprising that several lads were foolish enough to listen to these ministers of Satan. Consequently, about thirty of them were induced to attend one of the Waldensian meetings, in the hope of gaining the things which were promised. At the end of the meeting the lads received the promised money and a small book (which was an abominable pamphlet on Confession, by the notorious apostate, De Sanctis), and were invited to return on the following Sunday.

The greater number of the boys, not understanding the cunning designs of their enemies, went back immediately to the Oratory and frankly told their companions what had happened. The story soon reached the ears of the Superior, Don Carpano, who understood that wolves, in sheep's clothing were prowling round to the danger of the lambs entrusted to his care by Don Bosco. Filled with holy zeal, he at once took steps to avert the impending evil. Assembling the boys together, he spoke to them with intense earnestness, and took away the evil books which had been given to them. He applied the parables of the Good Shepherd and the hireling and the wolf, in such a way that the lads could not fail to understand the wicked devices of the Waldenses. He inspired the boys, too, with such a horror of those impious meetings that they all, without exception, promised never to go near them again for all the bribery in the world.

Thus the alarm was given, and sharp contests followed, which caused great anxiety to Don Bosco and Don Carpano. The heretics did all in their power to allure the boys to their meetings, but the result of their efforts was contrary to their expectations, for the elder lads, having had a previous understanding with their superiors, kept a sharp look out, and when they saw the sectarians try to speak to the younger boys, they were near at hand to urge them to hasten on to the Oratory. Seeing themselves discovered, the proselytising wretches had recourse to abusive language.

"You are utter fools," they said. "What will priests do for you? Would it not be better to come with us and have some money to spend?"

"You are a contemptible lot of fellows," returned the bigger lads from the Oratory. "No one will listen to you unless you bribe them. You had much better spend your money in a better cause."

The followers of Peter Waldo, seeing their plans frustrated, would have liked to revenge themselves by attacking their enemies, but seeing that they were outnumbered, and fearing that they would get the worst of it, they slunk away, muttering that their "time would come."

It can easily be understood from these events, that matters were likely to become still more serious in the future. In order to avoid risks, the boys were advised to pass their tormentors by in the street without saying a word, and to get to the Oratory as soon as they could. It was soon proved that the anticipation of evil was not without foundation. The plot of ground adjoining the Oratory was occupied on the following Sunday afternoon by a number of miscreants, but the Oratory boys, in obedience to orders, took no notice of them, and went on to their destination without delay. This so exasperated their enemies, that they picked up some loose stones and began throwing them with such force, that the Oratory seemed like a besieged castle. Stones struck against the doors, flew through the glass windows, rattled on the roof and fell among the frightened boys, several of whom received some ugly cuts. Such ruffianly behaviour so enraged some of the elder boys, that, losing all patience, they went out and put the enemy to flight.

This was by no means the only occasion on which the sectarians attacked the Oratory. Nearly every feast-day for several months following they renewed their attempt, causing Don Bosco and the other Superiors great anxiety for the safety of the children. It was clear that the Waldenses, furious at their lack of success in tempting the boys away from the Oratory, were de-

terminated to frighten them into staying away. Consequently some of those scoundrels were continually prowling about the neighbourhood, and never neglected an opportunity of tormenting the boys as they passed by. On several occasions they waited until all were assembled in the church, and then, without warning, hurled a shower of stones at the door and through the windows, producing a panic, causing the smaller boys to cry, and obliging the Superior to stop the devotions. Nor was this the end of the mischief they tried to do. One day, as Don Borel and Don Carpano were in the sacristy, vesting for Benediction, a man appeared at the window, which opened on to the public thoroughfare, and fired two pistol shots at them, fortunately missing aim.

These outrages clearly showed that the sectarians did not hesitate to use any means, however foul, in their endeavour to close the Oratory, but Don Bosco and his colleagues firmly resisted the iniquitous attacks, and at length had the satisfaction of seeing their enemies obliged to desist. Many years have passed since then, and the Oratory of St. Aloysius has always continued to prosper.

Moreover, on the site of the little chapel where the pistol shots were fired, there now stands the beautiful Church of St. John the Evangelist, one of the most perfect religious monuments in Turin. Through the generosity of the Salesian Co-operators, Don Bosco was enabled to erect this church as a permanent mark of love and gratitude to Pius IX.

CHAPTER XIX.*

Sad consequences of misconceived liberty.—Attempts on Don Bosco's life.—The early years of the Oratory.

WE now come to the year 1848, in which several striking events took place. King Charles Albert, after granting many civil reforms and emancipating the Jews and Waldenses, formulated,* on the 14th March, the so-called *Constitution* or *Statute* whereby all citizens were declared equal in the sight of the law. At the same time he proclaimed the liberty of the Press. The latter proclamation was good in itself, but many persons made the Statute serve their own interests, interpreting it as giving them the right to do evil at their pleasure, thus purposely mistaking liberty for license. This was especially the case in things concerning our holy religion. Many people foolishly reasoned that one religion was as good as another, and thus, equally pleasing to God, just as if white and black, light and darkness were the same thing. Indeed, the evil went still deeper than this. The sectarians shamefully abused the liberties granted to them, and showed their spite by slandering the Catholic Church. Base calumnies were invented and published against bishops, priests and religious; in fact, no effort was spared to discredit and lower the Church and her ministers in the eyes of the people. The natural consequence of these abominable accusations was that in a short time the greater portion of the people became so perverted in their ideas, and so hostile to their ancient faith and its ministers, that it was no longer safe for a priest to go out alone in the streets of Turin.

Two of the daily papers published in that town (*L'Opinione*, and *La Gazzetta del Popolo*) allowed their columns to be continually polluted with lurid and infamous articles specially contributed with the object of poisoning the public mind against the clergy. No one helped more to swell the torrent of popular dislike, than a certain Vincent Gioberti, a man of genius, it is true, but proud, ambitious and unscrupulous. This man, having dishonoured his sacred calling, joined with several men of bad character in a political intrigue. This was eventually discovered, and he was exiled from Turin. During the years of his exile he misused his talents, and sold his pen to the enemies of the Church, publishing, in that very critical period, a work entitled *Il Gesuita Moderno*. This was a virulent book, full of malicious insinuations and slanders against the venerable Society of Jesus. In the vile publication, Gioberti did not spare even the Nuns of the Sacred Heart. He well knew how to put malicious constructions on their devoted exertions on behalf of the young ladies entrusted to their care. His abominable work surpassed even the foulest romantic fiction.

It is obvious that the object of Gioberti and his colleagues was to turn the tide of public opinion against Religious communities in general, and the above institutions in particular. These apostates succeeded only too well in their wicked intentions. The multitude, ever inconstant and seeking for something new, soon took up the hue and cry against the Religious, and did not content themselves with this alone.

Their passions had been excited, and a period of downright persecution consequently followed. One evening in March, 1848, bands of ruffians broke into the two Houses of the Jesuit Fathers in Turin, and after breaking or stealing whatever came in their way, they laid violent hands on the Religious themselves, dragging them out into the street amidst insults of every kind. A few days later a similar outrage was repeated at the Institute of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart.

The vicious animosity which had full outlet in Turin, was directed also against the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, for the mere fact of Don Bosco's being a priest, was enough to give him many enemies, and his life was several times in danger. Many incidents might be related on this subject, but one only is mentioned here, so as to preserve chronological order.

Behind the Chapel of St. Francis of Sales, a low wall separated the playground from the fields of Valdocco, which stretched away down to the banks of the River Dora. One Sunday afternoon in spring, when Don Bosco was in the chapel giving religious instruction, a ruffian jumped over the wall and fired a pistol shot at him through the open window. The bullet passed under his arm, tearing his cassock and hitting the wall behind. The boys were terrified and panic-stricken at this sacrilegious attempt to murder their beloved Superior, but Don Bosco stood unmoved, and said, smiling, that the Blessed Virgin had protected him.

Then, looking at his torn cassock, he added, calmly :
" I am really sorry, for this is my only cassock."

We shall have occasion later on to mention several wicked attempts against Don Bosco's life, which took place especially when he began to publish his short monthly treatises called *Catholic Readings*. These were written to refute the errors which the Waldenses were trying to propagate.

We shall clearly see how it was entirely due to the protection of God that the life of that noble friend and father of poor children was mercifully spared. The Almighty ever watched over His servant, protecting and defending him more than once in a truly providential manner.

Meanwhile, seeing the many dangers to faith and morals that menaced his boys, Don Bosco contemplated enlarging the boarding school, making it possible to take in more boys. For this purpose he desired to get possession of the whole of the house belonging to Pinardi, but as that gentleman required sixty thousand lire (£2,400), a really exhorbitant price, Don Bosco

began to look elsewhere. Hearing that the neighbouring property, Moretta House, was for sale, he thought it suitable, and finally bought it. His intention was to enlarge the building and transfer the Oratory to it, but when the time came for the necessary additions, it was found, on close examination, that the walls were built of bad materials, and still more badly constructed. They were not in a condition to bear any extra weight, so Don Bosco's project had to be abandoned for the time. However, he was able, not very long afterwards, to find a purchaser for that same house, and even to profit by the sale. A plot of land was bought with the proceeds, which changed hands several times, till at last just before Don Bosco's death, he again obtained possession of it. On that property now stand the workshops of the Oratory and the Sanctuary, while on the other side of the road is the school of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, who also direct a flourishing Festive Oratory for girls.

Don Bosco, seeing that it was useless to hope to acquire Pinardi's house at that time, thought of another way of enlarging the Oratory. Pinardi had other lodgers as well as Don Bosco's boys, and when their tenancy expired, Don Bosco succeeded in renting the extra rooms by offering a larger sum than the former tenants had paid. In this way he was able to increase the number of boarders to thirty.

It may not be out of place to say a few words here regarding the timetable followed by the inmates of the Oratory. They rose early and came down to the chapel to hear Don Bosco's Mass, during which they said aloud their morning prayers and a third part of the Rosary. Some of the boys also received holy communion. In order that all of them might do this as often as possible, Don Bosco placed himself every evening, and in the morning before Mass, at the disposal of anyone who desired to make his confession. This was practised for some time by the Superiors of all Salesian Houses.

After Mass, the boys had a light breakfast, after

which some of them went off to the town to their day's work; (the workshops attached to the Oratory did not come into existence until the year 1856). At mid-day they returned to the Oratory for dinner. It was quite amusing to see the lads crowding round Don Bosco or Mother Margaret with bowls in their hands, eager for their portion of soup or *polenta*. The refectory was quite simple. Each boy seated himself where and how he could; some in the courtyard on a large stone or log of wood, and others on the steps of the stairs. This informal arrangement only seemed to improve their appetites, for the bowls were emptied as if by magic. A spring of fresh water supplied abundant and wholesome drink. Although the dinner was of the poorest, meal-time was full of animation and merriment. Don Bosco possessed an endless amount of vivacity and gaiety, and he amused and interested the lads so much during dinner that they always looked forward to that hour with pleasure.

The good Father's own dinner was hardly better than that of the boys. He had only one extra dish, and that was not of a very tempting description. About twice a week his mother made some pastry, which was used both for his dinner and supper for several days. Don Bosco needed no variety as others did, and even in the hot weather, when all food was spoiled by keeping, he cheerfully ate his monotonous fare. He continued this sort of diet till his table was shared by other priests and clerics, when it was found absolutely necessary for them to have better food.

Dinner over, the boys washed their bowls at the spring and put them away. Each boy jealously guarded his own spoon, for, if it was lost, he had to provide another at his own expense. During supper, many boys living in the town, who attended the Festive Oratory, began to arrive, and at a fixed hour the night schools began. As we have already seen, the duty of teaching the different classes devolved almost entirely on Don Bosco. Very often he had no time to have his supper beforehand and was obliged to eat while he was

teaching. It was quite a touching sight to see him amidst the pupils, pausing an endless number of times during his wandering meal correcting the bad readers, enlightening others concerning the mysteries of arithmetic, or giving the right note to singers who had gone hopelessly wrong.

Not only in the evening, but also during the daytime, was Don Bosco busily engaged. While the artisans (this name was given to boys apprenticed to a trade) were at work in the town, he devoted certain hours each day to teaching some boys from Turin who wanted help in their studies, and who, in their turn, helped in the Festive Oratory and evening classes. With a method all his own, and with his characteristic patience, he enabled them in a very short time to fit themselves for good situations, or to be of great service to their parents in business.

He constantly visited the prisons and the Cottolengo Hospital and was confessor to several Institutes; while, as we have already seen, he found time to write a number of works for the use of the young and of the people. And these were not his only occupations, for he still had others at home. Being too poor to pay wages to servants, he and his mother had to discharge many domestic duties. It seems that Don Bosco found in manual labour a relaxation from the tension of mind caused by the cares of administration and literary studies. He was a great help to his mother in the house, for he did not disdain to draw water, to sweep, saw wood, light the fire, shell beans or peel potatoes. It was not beyond his skill to cut out and make a coat, waistcoat or pair of trousers, and he was quite an adept in sewing up some formidable rent in the garment of a juvenile wearer. Nor, in case of need, was he too proud to gird on an apron and prepare the *polenta*, which on such occasions was always pronounced to be exceptionally palatable.

The boys never seemed so happy as when they were in Don Bosco's presence. Most of them had known but little of the comforts of a cheerful fireside, and

many had been entirely without the care of father or mother. It is easy to understand that their hearts were touched by Dón Bosco's paternal affection, his never-changing sweetness of temper, and his unwearied patience; his young charges became deeply attached to their benefactor, and vied with one another to win a word of praise, a look of encouragement, or a smile of approbation. If true peace and happiness reigned anywhere on earth, they were certainly to be found at the Oratory of Valdocco.

CHAPTER XX.

The beginning of the War of Italian Independence.

— *Juvenile enthusiasm. — Feast of St. Aloysius. —*

“ *Lost Sins.* ” — *Fresh opposition.*

IN MARCH, 1848, King Charles Albert declared war against Austria, and, at the head of a large army, crossed the River Ticino to deliver that part of Lombardy which still lay under the Austrian yoke. It is not our intention to comment upon that event, which was the cause of much distress in Piedmont, and which ended by depriving a magnanimous king of his crown and the Oratory of a noble benefactor. We shall only mention such political events as have direct connection with Don Bosco's early apostolate.

But we cannot pass over in silence the excitement caused by the War of Italian Independence, for everyone was deeply agitated by it. That war was the topic of discussion and conversation everywhere: in schools, shops, theatres, and in the streets. The young especially were in a state of ferment, which might have proved dangerous for many of them, had no remedy been forthcoming. When the school was over, or the day's work done, many young lads, armed with long sticks, united together in bands and paraded the streets, going through all sorts of military manoeuvres. When one party met another, a sham fight was generally the result. These battles, too, were not always of a harmless nature, for the young combatants, in the excitement of the moment, laid about them with such force, that the greater number generally retired from the fray with bruised limbs.

Turin was a unique spectacle, especially on Sundays and feast-days, when long streets and squares were

filled all day with these warlike bands, giving the effect of a battlefield. Catechism classes, on the contrary, were but scantily attended, and sometimes entirely deserted. It was quite impossible, under these circumstances, for the lads at the Oratory not to catch the infection. Some of them gave up coming to the Oratory, while others attended it half against their will, and passed the few hours there in a restless state of mind. Religious functions seemed no longer to have any attraction for them, and very few came to the Sacraments. Even games seemed dull to them, while real war was being thought of. Meanwhile something had to be done to ward off the religious indifference which threatened the boys, and it was not long before Don Bosco, in his zeal for the salvation of souls, began to try everything in his power likely to bring the boys back to their duties. But even Don Bosco's zeal did not give him much hope of doing this. He adapted himself to the needs of the times in all that was not contrary to religion or morals, and did not hesitate to give the boys leave to drill in the playground. Moreover he obtained for them a large number of imitation rifles, the only condition which he laid down being that they should not come to blows, in imitation of the Piedmontese and Austrians; and that at the sound of the bell they should at once lay down their arms. He also established some games in the gymnasium, which were not so dangerous as the mock warfare, and he provided the boys with bowls, quoits and other playthings. They had sack-races, and were allowed to get up and act among themselves comedies and amusing farces. In short, he spared no effort so that everyone at the Oratory should have amusement in some shape or form. He also watched over and took a fatherly interest in each of the lads. The music class was a capital means of keeping the boys together. In addition to singing, Don Bosco taught also the piano and organ to those who had a taste for it, and some even learnt instrumental music, which excited great enthusiasm.

He saw that he would have to act as teacher of

subjects in which, as he said, he was hardly more than a pupil. But his goodwill supplied for everything, and he was always able to keep ahead of his pupils, so that he was well able to teach them. While he was organising the band, and keeping his eye on the boys who were strumming on the piano (with a view to torturing the organ, later on), the vocal music was being practised. When the choir had practised enough, Don Bosco began to take them to services in the public churches of Turin where the boys could take part in the singing. This attracted them more and more to the Oratory, and the devout people in the churches enjoyed hearing the sound of boys' voices. Up to that time, men's voices only had been heard in church choirs, so that the solos, duets and choruses sung by the boys suggested the songs of angels, and it was no rare thing to see men and women weeping from emotion during these devotions. Don Bosco's music was talked of everywhere and sought after for feasts and solemnities. The boys often sang, not only in the Churches of Corpus Domini and the "Consolata" in Turin, but they also went as far as Moncalieri, Rivoli, Chieri, and other places round about. Don Aloysius Nasi, a distinguished Canon in Turin, and Don Michelangelo Chiatellini, of Cangrano, nearly always accompanied the rising philharmonic society, and by their musical skill prevented any risk of a breakdown, so that the boys were able to sing their best, and receive much praise. On a certain feast the boys went in procession from the Oratory to the Sanctuary of the "Consolata." The singing on the way, and the music in church attracted a great number of people to the feet of Our Lady, the Consolation of the Afflicted. Mass was celebrated and many went to holy communion. Don Bosco preached a short sermon, dwelling on the compassion Our Lady has always displayed for her afflicted children, and encouraging everyone to love her.

"Mary," said he, "is the most loving and at the same time the most beloved of all creatures. She is

loved by the Father, by Jesus, her divine Son, by the Holy Spirit, and by all the Saints and Angels. Every well-disposed heart must love her too. The existence of this Sanctuary is a proof of how Our Lady has always been loved in this town. She, too, loves us with the love of a mother, and loving all Christians in general, she has yet more tender love for the young. Mary acts in the same way as her divine Son Jesus, who was so good to children, that He would have liked them always near Him. *Si quis est parvulus veniat ad me:* 'Let the little ones come to Me,' were His loving words. Mary shows by her sweet love that she is the Consoler of the afflicted, *Consolatrix afflictorum*. In return, let us offer her our thanks, and for her sake let us try to keep from sin. In memory of this devout visit, let us leave our hearts here at the feet of Mary, begging her to accept them and to keep them always pure and stainless. If we do this we shall live happily and be consoled by her in the hour of death."

Holy Week, when the Church reminds us of the sorrows and sufferings of our divine Saviour, was also an opportunity of inspiring the boys with piety. On Maundy Thursday they went in procession, singing hymns, to visit the sepulchres of the different churches. Other children of every age and condition, drawn by the music and the good example, overcame all human respect and joined their ranks.

When they reached the sepulchre, the best voices sang parts of the Passion of Our Lord, or some appropriate motet. And at those sorrowful strains, many people could not restrain their tears, and followed the boys from one church to another, to weep anew at the tomb of Jesus.

In the evening, the Maundy, or "Washing of the Feet," was performed for the first time in the Oratory Chapel, in the presence of a large number of boys. For this purpose twelve of them were chosen to represent the twelve Apostles. They were arranged in a circle in the chapel, while the Gospel was sung; afterwards, Don Bosco, girt with a towel, knelt before each

one and washed his feet, as our divine Saviour did His disciples' at the Last Supper, drying them and kissing them with profound humility. Whilst the ceremony was going on, the cantors chanted the words of the holy rite, *Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est . . . Cessant jurgia maligna cessant lites, et in medio nostri sit Christus Deus;* "Let evil disputes cease, and quarrels come to an end, and let Jesus Christ reign in our midst."

* The sermon which Don Bosco afterwards preached, explained the meaning and brought out the lessons to be learnt from the sacred ceremony. It was one of the best, he said, for teaching the hearts of the young two of the principal virtues of Christianity — humility and charity.

After the function, the young "Apostles" sat down to a frugal meal with Don Bosco, who served them with his own hands. Finally, he gave them a little present, and sent them home full of joy. This sacred ceremony continues to be practised every year at the Oratory, to the great edification of those present. *

In order to prevent the boys being absent on Sundays, Don Bosco and Don Borel made use of all the means at their disposal. Besides often distributing little presents, such as holy images, medals, or fruit and sweets to the boys who came most frequently to catechism and were most devout, they began to give evening instructions in the form of dialogues. Don Borel would sit among the boys in the guise of a penitent or scholar, and was sometimes most amusing in propounding questions and giving answers. By making them laugh he helped to keep their attention, while Don Bosco, from the pulpit, instructed them and solved their difficulties. This kind of instruction was always looked forward to by the boys, and a dialogue always ensured the crowding of the chapel with young hearers. The custom of using the dialogue in the Festive Oratory during the Carnival, dates from that time, and was of great service in keeping the children away from the dangers of the streets.

The Feast of St. Aloysius was celebrated with more grandeur than usual, for the times seemed to require it. In that year, young men were often drawn into assisting at the demonstrations which took place in the town to celebrate the victories of Charles Albert: victories which were so soon to be changed into defeats. Whilst the world was decking itself out in finery to attract the attention of the people, it seemed necessary to counteract this influence by making religious feasts equally splendid. Outward magnificence is always attractive, and specially so to the young.

The festival was announced a long time in advance, and was preceded, as usual, by the "Six Sundays," with suitable devotions. The best possible music was prepared, invitations were sent to the benefactors of the Oratory, and to their friends and relations. On the evening of the vigil, and on the morning of the Feast itself, a volley of fireworks announced the eventful day.

Don Bosco and several assistant priests had more than enough to do. They had the consolation of seeing a very large number of boys come to the Sacraments. At twelve o'clock the Oratory contained such a crowd of boys that only a portion of them could get into the chapel. The procession, above all, was worthy of special mention. The first boys in the double column were already half-way along the Via Cottolengo, when the last ones, carrying the statue of the Saint, had scarcely got outside the precincts of the Oratory. In spite of the great concourse of people, everything was done in perfect order. A body of police came to show respect rather than to keep order, while the strains of the band were heard alternately with the singing of the boys.

A very edifying incident was noticed during the procession. Forming part of the escort of the statue were seen two distinguished personages, who afterwards became renowned throughout Italy, and one of them throughout Europe. They were the Marquis Gustavo, and his brother, Count Camillo Cavour. Each held a lighted candle in one hand, and in the other the

Oratory prayer book, while they joined with the clergy in singing the hymn in honour of St. Aloysius, *Inferus hostis gloria*.

These two brothers had soon become convinced that the fears entertained by the Marquis, their father, in the early days of the Oratory, were without foundation. When they saw how Don Bosco had the ability and perseverance to overcome every obstacle, and to gather round him all the young vagabonds and urchins in Turin, they became his ardent admirers. Both of them often went to visit him and to give him encouragement in his arduous undertaking. At that time there was no important feast celebrated at the Oratory in which they did not take part. They were delighted to see the boys playing together, and to know how well they were instructed and cared for in every way, and thus removed from temptation and kept at a safe distance from spiritual danger. Count Camillo often said, when he saw the boys assembled, that Don Bosco was indeed doing a beautiful and most useful work.

"It is a thing to be desired in every town," he would say. "The Government would not have to spend large sums of money in supporting numbers of young criminals. The State would have, instead, good subjects and honest citizens, who, trained in some useful art or trade, would live respectably and be of service not only to themselves, but to society at large."

Perhaps it may cause surprise to hear that the two Cavours acted and expressed themselves in this way. It must be said that, in those days, they showed themselves to be favourable to the interests of the Church. Gustavo especially was often to be seen in the churches of Turin, and used to approach the Sacraments in a most edifying way. He was, too, for several years, one of the most powerful writers for the *Armonia*, a publication first issued on the 4th of July in that year. Camillo, also, was seen receiving Holy Communion at the hands of Don Fantini, in the Church of the Annunciation, as late as the year 1850. (Don Fantini was afterwards elected Bishop of Fossano).

If Camillo's attitude to the Church afterwards changed, it was due to the political ideas by which he was influenced and which were hostile to the cause of Catholicism.

The object which Don Bosco had ever most at heart was that he should be surrounded by boys who were well grounded in virtue, and he continually sought for ways of bringing this about. With this object in view he determined to give them a short Retreat. He mentioned it to a few of the better disposed among his boys. Following his advice they obtained a week's leave of absence from their parents or masters, and thus he gathered a small band round him.

After making all the necessary preparations, and arranging with the priests who were to preach (Don Joseph Phemone, Canon of Rivoli, and Don Borel), the Spiritual Retreat began one Sunday evening in July, and ended with Holy Communion on the following Sunday morning, when a final exhortation on Perseverance was given. During the Retreat the boys remained all day at the Oratory, heard the meditations and instructions, and had their dinner with Don Bosco; but as there were not enough beds for all of them, some went home in the evening to sleep.

The preachers chosen by Don Bosco did their work admirably, and the instructions and meditations could not have been better adapted to boys, nor could the illustrations have been made more attractive. By God's grace, many of the young retreatants changed their lives, and began to behave in a most exemplary manner, to their own great good and that of the whole Oratory. Some of them afterwards became Religious, while others remained good Christians in the world.

An amusing incident occurred at this time. A good little fellow, who wanted to make his general confession with the greatest possible exactness, had written out all his sins. Whether he was scrupulous or had been very wicked, history does not tell, but the fact remains that he filled up about twenty-four sheets of paper with his misdeeds, intending to learn the whole by heart

or to read them to his confessor. But, unfortunately, he lost the papers containing this list of iniquities. He turned his pockets inside out many times, searched and researched everywhere, but his precious manuscript was not to be found. Then the poor little lad became very miserable, and it was impossible to console him.

Fortunately the manuscript had been found by Don Bosco himself. In the meanwhile, seeing that he was sobbing his heart out, his companions begged him again and again, without any result, to tell them what his trouble was. At last they took him to Don Bosco.

"What is the matter, my little man?" he asked the boy, whose name was Giacomino. "Do you feel ill, or has anyone been ill-treating you?" While Don Bosco was saying this, he patted the boy in a fatherly way, to make him stop crying. The little fellow at last paused between his sobs, and said, mournfully, "I have lost my sins." At these words the other boys began to laugh, and Don Bosco, who at once understood, said, playfully:

"You are a happy boy if you have lost your sins, and happier still if you never find them again, for you will go straight to Heaven if you have no sins."

But the boy still thought that Don Bosco did not understand him, and said, sadly:

"I have lost the exercise book where I had them all written down." Then Don Bosco drew from his pocket the great secret.

"Don't be afraid," said he, "your sins have fallen into safe hands! Here they are."

As soon as Giacomino saw his lost document, his face lit up and was soon wreathed in smiles.

"If I had known that you had found them, Father, I should have felt perfectly happy instead of crying, and at confession this evening, I should have said, 'Father, I accuse myself of all the sins you have in your pocket.'"

About that time some parish priests (among them those of Borgo, Dora, Carmine, St. Augustine, and of Our Lady of the Angels), complained to the Arch-

bishop because religious services were held, and the Sacraments administered, in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. Archbishop Frasoni, considering these complaints unreasonable, issued a formal decree, in which he renewed the faculties permitting all religious functions usually carried on in parish churches, to be performed at the Oratory, and gave permission also for children to make their Easter duties there.

"The Oratory Chapels," said his Grace, "shall be the parish churches of those who attend them." Then, adding the reason of his concessions, he went on to say: "Considering the fact that many of the boys are strangers, and that all children are, by nature, changeable and inconstant, many of them would not go to church at all, if it were not for the Oratories, and would certainly grow up undisciplined and ignorant."

CHAPTER XXI.

Don Bosco's solicitude for the welfare of his young charges. — The short evening "Sermonette." — Don Bosco's system of education.

DON BOSCO, as we have seen in previous chapters, devoted himself to the religious and moral training of more than 700 boys at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, and of over 500 at that of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. He never lost sight of the young lads in the latter school. Indeed, he regarded them as the apple of his eye, taking such personal interest in each one, that the most loving and affectionate father could not have done more. The greater part of the boys earned but little or nothing, so that he had to find them food and clothing. In order to do this, he went to one person after another, pleading for help for his *protégés*.

Owing to the war, and to other unfortunate events of that year, his numerous family was often reduced to great straits; yet Don Bosco's unceasing care never let his boys fall short of the necessities of life. He was especially careful to guard them from all danger to faith or morals. Means for perverting the young were daily becoming more numerous and fatal, and owing to the liberty of the Press, bad books and papers were being scattered broadcast in factories and shops. It was quite a common thing to hear masters and servants, merchants and tradesmen gravely discussing religious opinions of every shade, and dogmatising like so many Doctors of the Sorbonne. Consequently, faith and good morals were in great danger. Don Bosco was obliged to send his boys into the town to learn their trades, but he made careful enquiries beforehand about the character of the

persons to whom he was going to entrust them. Besides this, he often went to ask their masters what progress they were making, thus proving how much he had their welfare at heart.

When they were at home he kept them with him as much as possible, and made himself familiar with all the troubles they had met with during the course of the day. Like an experienced doctor, he at once applied the right remedy, and did everything in his power to expel all false maxims from their minds, and remove from their hearts any bad impressions they had received.

From the very beginning of the Oratory he used to give, on the Vigil of feasts, a little sermonette after night prayers. At the critical period of which we are speaking, he did this nearly every night. In a few words, lasting only two or three minutes, he would explain some article of faith, or point out a moral truth. His way of doing this was by means of some practical example, to which the boys listened with keen pleasure. He took special care to warn them against the extravagant opinions of the day, and against the errors of the Waldenses which were then beginning to creep into Turin. Sometimes, in order to hold their attention and impress a truth more deeply on their minds, he would tell them some edifying incident that had taken place during the day. At other times he told them stories from history or from lives of the saints. Now and then he would put a question to them, or give them a problem to solve. As a rule he used to give them several days in which to prepare their answers. The answers had to be written in the form of a little note bearing the writer's name, and a reward was given to the best one. In this way Don Bosco made the boys think, and at the same time taught them useful truths, which were never forgotten.

It can easily be understood from these instances, as well as those mentioned in other chapters, how Don Bosco's way of educating boys, especially by its studied avoidance of repressive measures came to be known as the Preventive System. He carried it out with such

happy results for the moral welfare of the boys, that he endeavoured to instil it into all his assistants, catechists, masters, and everyone who was given authority over boys.

In order that all might thoroughly understand, and thus put his paternal system into practice, he often used to hold conferences in which several priests from Turin took part. Amongst them was Canon Eugene Galletti, from the Church of Corpus Domini, who afterwards became Bishop of Alba. Later on, Don Bosco wrote a short pamphlet on the subject, in which he clearly showed that the preventive method is superior to the repressive, and he inculcated its practical application by proving its great advantages. This useful little work has been incorporated in the Regulations of the Salesian Society.

CHAPTER XXII.

Don Bosco's system suitable to the spirit of the times. — Its beneficial results. — The tree of life. — The little barber. — Defeat of the Piedmontese Army. — King Charles Albert's life in danger.

THE system introduced and practised by Don Bosco in the education of the young, besides being in harmony with reason and religion, seemed in conformity with the spirit of the times. Throughout Italy in that year, there was a general outcry against absolute governments. Loud complaints were raised against the tyranny with which the people were ruled, and the severity with which justice was administered. In order to prevent riots, even princes who were most tenacious in their adherence to the old regime, thought it well to accede to popular demands, and introduced sweeping reforms into their states with regard to both civil and judicial administration. Pius IX, one of the mildest of Popes, ascended the Pontifical throne in 1846, and, yielding to the innate goodness of his heart, granted an amnesty to all political exiles, thus winning universal admiration and applause. Shortly afterwards, he also granted administrative reforms that were useful to his people and to the Catholic Religion. Charles Albert and other Italian princes did the same. He widened the civil Constitution, thereby despoiling himself of part of his royal authority in order to invest the people with it. The latter were, from this time, represented by a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate, so his Government was thus changed from an absolute to a constitutional one.

Consequently, public festivities to celebrate the acquired liberty, and in honour of Pius IX and King

Charles Albert, took place frequently, while these two names resounded from one end of Italy to the other.

The popular demand for a milder form of government, seconded as it was by the rulers, had the effect of making subjects demand from their superiors a more kindly and lenient rule. Therefore a system of education which was stern and repressive, although practicable in former days, would have been opposed to the spirit of the times and productive of most serious results. It would have driven away the boys from the Oratory which they attended entirely of their own free will. Severe methods would, moreover, have strengthened the lying reports which badly-disposed people were circulating, saying that priests were tyrannical and were the enemies of freedom. By means of his gentle methods, Don Bosco prevented this evil as far as the Oratory was concerned, and it became so crowded that it was necessary to open others in different parts of the town. On the other hand, if any evil-minded person uttered a word against priests in the presence of the boys, it called to their minds the many touching instances of Don Bosco's goodness, and made them at once contradict such statements. Indeed, it happened more than once that the boys in the workshops brought forward this argument to refute those who spoke against priests. Sometimes these grumblers were at a loss for an answer, and could only say that if all priests were like Don Bosco there would be nothing to complain of. Boys who knew Don Bosco's colleagues and many exemplary priests (among whom may be mentioned Fathers Borel, Chiaves, Carpano, Murialdo, Vola and Marengo), were able to speak from their own experience and to prove that the malicious talk was without foundation. Thus the boys of the Oratory loved and esteemed the pastors of the Church, and these feelings strengthened their attachment to the Christian religion. There need be no hesitation in saying that these results were due to the education which Don Bosco and his patient assistants gave them.

As a proof of the efficacy and usefulness of that

system in the Sunday Oratory and School, the following illustration can be given. Although fifteen hundred boys from the town attended the two Oratories on feast-days, there were many others who, through the carelessness of their parents or employers, still wandered about the streets, ignorant of the existence of either Oratory or unwilling to go there. Among such boys there was a set of unruly young scamps, headed by a youngster active and bright, and capable of commanding a regiment of soldiers. One Sunday, in 1848, when these boys had met in their usual place to play, the leader, missing one of his companions, asked where he was.

"He has gone," said one of them, "to Don Bosco's Oratory."

"What on earth is that, and what do they do there?"

"They say it is a place where boys run about, play, sing, and then go to church and pray."

"Run about and play! Why, that is just what I like to do. Where is this Oratory?"

When he was told that it was at Valdocco, the boy gathered his playmates round him and they set off together. Having reached the place they found the door shut, for all the boys were just then in the chapel, so with the help of a companion the leader climbed on to the wall to see what was going on. From the top of the wall he saw nobody, so he jumped down into the yard on the other side. While walking about there, one of the Oratory boys met him and invited him to come into the chapel. Don Borel was speaking that evening about the wolves and the sheep, showing that the latter are the innocent children and the former their bad companions. "If you do not want," he said, "to be torn to pieces by these rapacious wolves, fly from bad companions, who blaspheme and use bad language, who steal and who are but rarely seen in the church. Come to the Oratory every Sunday and feast-day. You will then be in the sheep-fold; wolves never enter here, and even if they should do so, there are faithful watch-dogs to defend and take care of you." These words and others that followed made a deep impression upon

the newcomer, for he had never before heard such a suitable and homely sermon as this. When it was over, the litany was sung, and as he had a fine voice and loved music, he joined in the singing, with every sign of enjoying it thoroughly. As soon as he was outside, he was eager to know who Don Bosco was, and asked if it was he who gave the sermon. "No," replied his guide, "but come with me and I shall soon make you acquainted with him." So saying, they went off to the part of the playground where Don Bosco was already surrounded by a crowd of boys.

The welcome which Don Bosco gave him was most affectionate. He invited him to take part in the games, said he had heard his voice in the singing, promised to teach him music and many other things. A word spoken in his ear quite gained the heart of the boy and bound him to Don Bosco with lasting and sincere affection. After this the boy attended the Sunday Oratory with great regularity and brought his friends with him. As he had need of special instruction he was handed over to the care of one of the priests, and soon after made his first communion, with great devotion and delight.

But that is only the prelude to his story. It is necessary to mention that the boy's parents were rather his persecutors. He was continually ill-treated by them; and very often after a hard day's work they refused him the food he had earned and needed. For his spiritual welfare they had not as yet shown the slightest care, and as soon as they heard that he frequented the Oratory, they did all they could to turn him from it. Don Bosco, knowing the difficulties and danger that beset the poor lad, gave him every encouragement, and when one day he found the boy in tears, he said to him: "Remember that whatever happens, I will always be a father to you; and if your parents continue to treat you brutally, come and make your home with me." Subsequent events were very soon to bring this about. The boy's father was a compositor, and one day when they were both in the

shop, the conversation turned on Don Bosco and the Oratory. After some talk, his father, in language which cannot be repeated here, forbade him ever to set foot in the Oratory again. The boy, although respectful, had a quick tongue, and at once replied: "If they taught me to steal, to fight or do wrong at the Oratory, you would rightly forbid me to go there, but as a matter of fact, it is just the opposite. I certainly learn how to read and write, and other useful knowledge, so I shall continue to go there." "Will you," rejoined his father, and so saying he struck him severely on the head. The boy, fearing worse would follow, ran to the door and fled in the direction of the Oratory, but having got close to it, he feared that his father would come after him and drag him back; so instead of going into the house, he climbed up into a mulberry tree, which stood on the very spot where the choir of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, now stands, and hid himself among the leaves and branches. It was late in the autumn, and night was coming on.

The boy had scarcely concealed himself when he saw his parents coming to find him at Don Bosco's house. He was very much frightened, but God had willed to put an end to the boy's troubles that very night. The mother and father passed right under the mulberry tree without noticing the boy, and finding the door of the house ajar, they boldly introduced themselves into Don Bosco's presence without knocking, and demanded their boy. Don Bosco listened quietly to all they had to say, and then answered: "Your son is not here." "But he must be here," they replied. "I tell you he is not, and even if he were, you have no right to force yourselves into this house." "Then I shall go to the magistrate," said the father, "and have my boy dragged out of the clutches of the priests." "Yes, go to the magistrate, by all means," said Don Bosco, "but let me tell you that I shall go there as well and give evidence of your cruelty to the boy; and if there is any law or justice left in this land, you shall suffer its full rigour." On hearing these words, the unnatural

parents, whose consciences were not very clear, went away quite overawed, and never showed their faces at the Oratory again.

When they had gone, Don Bosco and Mother Margaret went out to the mulberry tree, for Don Bosco guessed where the boy was. He looked up at the tree and called the boy by name several times, but no answer was forthcoming. He looked up more closely, and by the light of the moon saw the boy lying motionless among the branches. Then he called out in a louder voice: "Come down, don't be afraid, there is nobody here now to harm you, and if anyone comes, I will defend you at any cost." But still the boy made no movement or sign. The fear that something serious might have happened made Don Bosco and his mother look at each other in dread. A ladder was quickly brought, and Don Bosco, still in fear, went up. When he got close to the boy he found him in a half-dazed condition, more afraid than anything else. Don Bosco spoke to him and shook him, and at last the boy, apparently waking up, began to scream, thinking his father was after him. He struggled and kicked about so much, that he nearly brought both himself and Don Bosco to the ground. The latter caught hold of a branch by one hand, and the boy by the other. "Don't be afraid," he again said, "It is I, Don Bosco; calm yourself, there is nothing to fear." At length the little runaway recognised his benefactor, and lay still. When he had somewhat recovered, he came down the tree with Don Bosco's help, and was taken into the house. From that evening the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales became his home, and Don Bosco was a father to him.

During the year 1848 and part of 1849, he worked in a bookbinder's shop; but as Don Bosco perceived in his *protégé* more than the average intelligence, and the best dispositions, he taught him Latin and a good knowledge of his own language. As he grew up he rapidly advanced in his studies, and showed unmistakable signs of a vocation to the priesthood. He

had also a natural inclination for music, and became the Oratory organist. He received the clerical habit on February 2nd, the feast of the Purification, 1851, and was of great assistance in the Oratory and School. In 1857, after completing his studies, he was ordained and was the first of Don Bosco's priests. He received an appointment in one of the parishes, and afterwards occupied a noteworthy position among the Turin clergy. He was warmly attached to the venerated memory of Don Bosco, by whose aid God had raised him up and placed him among the princes of His people: *Suscitans a terra inopem . . . ut collocaet eum cum principibus populi sui.* (Ps. cxii).

Another of Don Bosco's first boys deserves mention. Don Bosco one day entered a barber's shop to have a shave. There he found a young lad who was serving as an apprentice, and according to his custom, he at once spoke to him, and inquired if he attended the Sunday Oratory.

"What is your name?" Don Bosco asked.

"Charles Gastini."

"Are your parents living?"

"Only my mother."

"How old are you?"

"Eleven."

"Have you made your first communion?"

"Not yet, Father."

"Do you go to catechism class?"

"I go when I have the opportunity."

"That's right; now I want you to give me a shave."

"For Heaven's sake, sir, don't risk it," said the master of the shop, "the boy has only been learning a short time."

"That doesn't matter," answered Don Bosco, "if he never tries, he will never learn."

"Excuse me," said the master, "he will try at the proper time; I would rather he didn't try on a priest."

"Oh! I see, I suppose my beard is more precious than other men's. But provided your apprentice doesn't cut my nose off, I should prefer him to do it."

The little barber was therefore obliged to undertake the task. It need hardly be said, that under his trembling and unskilful hands, Don Bosco passed a rather uncomfortable quarter of an hour. When the operation was over, he got up and said: "Oh, it wasn't so bad after all; little by little you will become a famous barber." He then talked with him for a short time, and invited him to the Oratory for the following Sunday. Don Bosco paid for his shave and went off, but he could not help putting his hand to his face now and then, for it smarted a good deal. He was, however, quite pleased and satisfied at having gained another young heart.

Charles kept his word, and was at the Oratory on the following Sunday. Don Bosco gave him a hearty welcome, and when the afternoon's play and religious instruction were over, he took the boy aside and said in his ear a few of those words which gained hearts, and leading him into the sacristy he prepared him to go to confession. The boy was so pleased with his first experience at the Oratory that he went there regularly, spending there in fact all the time that he had to himself. The boy's father was already dead, and soon afterwards his mother died also. He was thus left alone with one little sister, and as the mother had not been able to pay the rent during her illness, the children were turned out into the street.

Don Bosco was returning home one evening about that time, when he met a boy crying bitterly. On coming close he recognised the little barber. "What is the matter, my boy?" he said. Broken with sobs the boy managed to tell his story. Don Bosco was touched by it, and taking the orphan by the hand he led him to the Oratory. His younger sister was placed in the home of a good Christian woman, and afterwards went to the convent at Casale Monferrato, where, however, she gradually fell into weak health and gave up her young soul to God in peace. The boy was brought up at the Oratory. There he learnt the trade of a book-binder, and grew up industrious and pious, and was

always much attached to Don Bosco. Later on he married, and by means of the trade which he had learnt as a boy, provided for himself and his family, living the life of a respectable citizen and fervent Catholic.

In the second half of the year 1848, many important events occurred. Towards the end of July, the Sardinian Army, overwhelmed by the vastly superior numbers of the Austrians, and demoralised by fatigue and suffering, had to fall back gradually from the position which it had held with great bravery. Charles Albert, with the main body, fell back on Milan, and there endeavoured to make a stand; but as the city was without provisions, he was compelled to capitulate to save useless shedding of blood. This act of prudence and humanity, however, was not approved of by a certain turbulent faction, and before many hours the majority of the townspeople were shouting around the king's palace: "Death to the traitor." The king did not hesitate to show himself at the balcony to calm the populace, but the act nearly cost him his life, for several of the rioters fired, but happily without touching him. The following night he managed to escape in disguise. This sad news was received with dismay at the Oratory, and as nothing else lay in their power, they offered up special prayers for the safety of their sovereign and illustrious benefactor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Flight of Pope Pius IX.—Peter's Pence.—Words of the Marquis of Cavour. — Sentiments of the Holy Father. — The battle of Novara and the abdication of King Charles Albert.

A MISFORTUNE, not unlike that which befell the King, happened soon afterwards to Pius IX. The Revolutionists determined to do away with the temporal power of the Pope, in order to bring about, as they thought, the end of the papacy and of the Catholic religion. Their first move was to get rid of Pellegrino Rossi, the Pope's Prime Minister, which they soon accomplished by stabbing him to death in open daylight. They next turned their attention to the populace, and excited them to rebellion. An armed mob gathered at the Quirinal, the residence of the Pope, and placing guns in position, threatened to destroy the palace. The insurgents kept up a heavy fire with their rifles, doing a good deal of damage. One of the shots passed through a window and pierced the head of Mgr. Palma, the Holy Father's Secretary, and he fell dead at the Pope's feet.

At the beginning of the Revolution, Pius IX was undecided whether to remain in Rome and risk the consequences, or seek safety by flight. Only a few hours before the attack on the Quirinal he received a precious gift which he could not help regarding as providential. The gift was a small pyx, which had been used by his predecessor, Pius VI, for carrying the Blessed Sacrament, when, in 1799, he was seized by the French in Rome and was dragged across the Alps to Valence, there to die in prison.

In the letter accompanying this precious relic, Mgr. Chatrouse, Bishop of Valence, said: "Holy Father, heir to the name, to the throne, to the virtue and courage, and likewise to the trials and tribulations of Pius VI, I humbly beg you to accept this small but precious relic which you no doubt already hold in high esteem, but which I sincerely hope may never be put to the same use. Yet who can penetrate the hidden designs of God, or know the trials He may have prepared for Your Holiness?" Pope Pius IX looked upon this gift and the letter as a sign from Heaven, and putting all hesitation aside, decided to save himself by flight, thus putting into practice the words of Our Divine Saviour: "When they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another." (Matt. x, 23).

On the night of the 23rd of November, which was chosen for this purpose, the Holy Father retired to his private chapel and there spent a few minutes in fervent prayer. He then put on the disguise which had been prepared, and set out with only one companion. Going through a secret door, they passed along several corridors, and at length emerged into the open air. Favoured by the night, which was very dark, they managed, with some difficulty, to elude the vigilance of the mob. At the place appointed he found Count Spaur, the Bavarian Ambassador, with a carriage ready, and without delay they crossed into the kingdom of Naples, arriving safely at Gaeta in the evening of November 25th, 1848. It had thus come to pass that the two Princes who, according to the testimony even of their enemies, initiated the era of liberty, were the first to suffer its bitter consequences.

If the misfortune that had previously fallen to the lot of their Sovereign, grieved the boys and Superiors of the Oratory, the outrages committed against the Vicar of Jesus Christ filled them with still greater grief. Later on there will be narrated the proof of filial affection shown by these poor lads for the Holy Father during his exile, and how they were rewarded by him for it. Since the Pope is the Father of millions of

Catholics spread over all the face of the globe, and since all peoples have been confided to his care, it is his duty to provide for their innumerable temporal and spiritual wants. Leaving a great many of these aside, I shall only mention that he has to provide for the several Congregations of Cardinals and Prelates, which assist him in regulating the affairs regarding the whole of Christendom; he has to provide for the maintenance of all his ambassadors, who safeguard the interests of their various districts; and he has to provide for the sending out and the support of the missionaries in various parts of the world where God is not yet known, and where the benefits of the Redemption and Christian civilization have not yet been felt.

When Pius IX was obliged to leave Rome and go into exile, he found himself deprived of all his possessions, and therefore unable to meet all these expenses, a circumstance which imperilled the salvation of many souls. At Gaeta, Pius IX found a staunch friend and supporter in Ferdinand II, King of Naples, who treated him with the utmost respect and cordial hospitality, and who endeavoured to help the Holy Father by every means that lay in his power. Still, under these conditions, it would have been impossible for him to discharge the heavy responsibilities relative to the good government of the Universal Church, and besides, it was evidently not fitting that the burden of his maintenance should devolve on one State only. The Bishops of France were the first to perceive this, and promptly had recourse to the faithful under their charge, exhorting them to come to the aid of their Supreme Pastor. The rest of the Catholic Church immediately followed their example; the appeal was generously responded to, and France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, England, Ireland, the two Americas, India and China, took part in this noble work. In this way, Peter's Pence, which had its origin in former ages of the Church, was revived; and whilst these offerings supplied the Sovereign Pontiff with the means to keep up his intercourse with the nations of the globe, and make the beneficent

influence of his high apostolate felt, even in the remotest regions of the earth, they were at the same time a splendid manifestation of devotion and attachment to the See of Peter.

When the news of the Pope's straitened circumstances became known in Northern Italy, the faithful hastened to his assistance with their alms, deeming it an honour to be able to do so. Piedmont vied with the other provinces in giving a proof of her attachment to the Vicar of Christ. A committee, consisting of a number of prominent ecclesiastical and lay personages, was formed in Turin for the purpose of collecting the offerings of both rich and poor. The boys of the Oratory thought this a favourable opportunity of giving the Head of the Church a token of their esteem and veneration. They raised a subscription, and many of the lads deprived themselves of what were almost necessities of life in their eagerness to contribute something. At the invitation of Don Bosco, the Promoting Committee of Peter's Pence sent two of its leading members to the Oratory to receive the offerings. Just before the presentation, which was made with due solemnity, an address was read by one of the boys in the name of his companions, and a chorus in honour of Pius IX was sung. The Very Rev. Canon Valinotti and the Marquis of Cavour, the two representatives of the Committee, also briefly addressed the boys in words of praise and encouragement, and on taking their departure, said: "Your generous sentiments deserve to be brought to the Holy Father's notice, and we shall see that they are."

A few days later, the Marquis of Cavour, who was a member of the editorial staff of the *Armonia*, a Catholic review published in Turin, wrote an appreciative article on the above event. In this article, which we produce here, he speaks at length on Don Bosco and his work.

"In one of the poorest quarters of this metropolis," wrote Cavour, "inhabited almost exclusively by the working classes, there has arisen within the last few

years one of those works of charity of which the Catholic Church is the inexhaustible fountain. A zealous and holy priest has generously devoted himself to the pious work of withdrawing from the paths of idleness, ignorance and sin, the many children living in that quarter, who, through the poverty or negligence of their parents, grow up without the least idea of religion and without any education. This good priest, Don Bosco, rented a few cottages and a small plot of land, where he has opened an Oratory, and placed it under the protection of the holy Bishop of Geneva, St. Francis of Sales. He gathered round him the most neglected and forsaken boys, and in this modest Oratory he imparts to them that instruction which above all others is necessary, namely, religious instruction. The Oratory, moreover, comprises a school where chiefly reading and writing are taught. The plot of land has been turned into a playground, where the boys, on feast-days and in the hours of recreation, amuse themselves with games and thus pass some time in honest relaxation, which powerfully contributes to keep body and mind in a healthy condition, especially in the time of youth. Don Bosco is always to be found in their midst, for he is their master, companion and friend.

“ On Sundays about four hundred boys assemble in the place. The buildings, to all outward appearances, are quite insignificant, and are, no doubt, unobserved by passers-by, yet the good that is done there is immense. That multitude of boys, the greater part of whom would, under ordinary circumstances, have grown up ignorant and vicious, are treading the paths of virtue and honest labour. Their zealous tutor and friend looks out for good Christian masters who are willing to accept the lads as apprentices; and, I may add, when a boy has been a pupil of Don Bosco, and is proposed by him to anyone for employment, it is a sufficient guarantee for the lad's good conduct, and greatly facilitates his being accepted. In this way, a good number of young men leave this nursery of industrious working-men every year, able to earn an

honest livelihood, and well instructed in their religious duties.

" It often happens that many of the boys, through the death or extreme poverty of their parents, are helpless and homeless. Several of these have come to live with Don Bosco, who maintains them during their apprenticeship, until they are able to support themselves.

" On the Feast of the Annunciation, two members of the Committee for the work of Peter's Pence were invited to the Oratory by its benevolent founder. This invitation was made at the request of the boys themselves, who had decided to make an offering to the Committee for the Holy Father. Moved by the sad events which have recently taken place in Rome, and by the fact that the Sovereign Pontiff is in exile, they manifested a desire to help to augment, by their offering, that tribute of filial veneration which the Turin people wish to offer to the Vicar of Christ.

" When the two members of the Committee reached the modest building, they were most cordially received by the Superior, and a moment later, they were led into a room, where they found themselves in the midst of a large number of boys, who were likewise ready with expressions of welcome.

" Two of the boys approached the visitors, and while one of them presented the thirty-three lire, the amount of their offering, the other read a suitable address. The visitors were deeply touched by this discourse, delivered in an intelligent and pleasing manner by a lad who is engaged during the week in carrying bricks and mortar, but who, nevertheless, showed himself capable of noble and generous sentiments. The reply of the members of the Committee was to the effect, that they were proud to have the boys as associates in a work which is a profession of faith — and of that Faith which ennobles man, in whatever condition he may be. They asked the little orator for a copy of his discourse, and this copy was later on given to the Apostolic Nuncio, who was highly pleased with the sentiments of devotion and

loyalty expressed in it. He moreover declared that he would forward it to the Cardinal Secretary of State, saying that this example deserved to be made known.

"I have thought it appropriate to speak at length of Don Bosco's Oratory, while at the same time bringing to the notice of the public an event which is worthy of the highest praise."

With these words the Marquis of Cavour concluded his account of the small but affectionate offering of the boys, which, on being sent to Gaeta, produced a deep impression on the Holy Father. Some persons who were present when the Pope received the gift, spoke of the circumstance in the following terms :

"The offering and the simple, sincere expressions that accompanied it, deeply touched the Holy Father. He took the sum of money and the accompanying letter in his hands and tied them up into a small packet. He then wrote on it the source whence it came, saying that he intended to use it for a very particular purpose. He also charged His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli to write to the Nuncio at Turin and request him to convey the Pope's satisfaction to the little donors."

In fact, shortly after, Mgr. Antonucci, the Papal Nuncio at Turin, addressed the following letter to Don Bosco :

"VERY REVEREND FATHER,

Having forwarded to His Holiness, through His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli, another offering of Peter's Pence collected by the committee founded for this purpose in Turin, I took the liberty to make particular mention of the sum contributed by your boys, and of the expression of their kind sentiments when they presented the offering to the committee.

His Eminence, replying to my letter, informs me that the Holy Father was deeply moved on receiving the affectionate offering of the poor artisans, and on reading the expression of filial devotion that accompanied it.

I would therefore ask you to tell your boys of the Holy Father's pleasure at the offering, which he regards

as most precious, because it is the offering of the poor. It is also a source of consolation to His Holiness to see them at an early age animated with such sentiments and sincere respect for the Vicar of Jesus Christ, a sure proof that they are intimately acquainted with the maxims of our Holy Religion.

As a token, moreover, of his paternal benevolence, His Holiness gives the Apostolic Blessing to you and to each of the boys under your care.

With sentiments of profound esteem and sincere regard,

I remain, etc.,

A. B. ARCHBISHOP OF TARSUS,
Apostolic Nuncio."

You can scarcely imagine, dear reader, the joy Don Bosco and the boys of the Oratory experienced on receiving the above letter. It was particularly consoling to know that the Holy Father, in the midst of his trials and sufferings in exile, and notwithstanding his many cares and his solicitude for the government of the whole Church, condescended to take special notice of the boys of the Oratory. Their countenances lit up with joy, and cheers for Pius IX echoed and re-echoed through the Oratory.

Mention is made of the boys' offering, and a portion of the discourse reproduced in Rohrbacher's *Ecclesiastical History*. The author, after giving several instances of the generous abnegation of the poor in favour of the exiled Pontiff, goes on to speak of the Oratory. The account of the incident is preceded by these words: "But still more noteworthy is the action of several poor lads, working at different trades. They put by five centesimi every day for some time, and in this way managed to realise the sum of thirty-three lire, which they deposited with the Promoting Committee of Peter's Pence."

An equal amount was subscribed under similar circumstances by the boys of the Oratory of St. Aloysius, a branch of the Valdocco Institute. In

reference to this, the following article was published in the *Turin Armonia*.

"In a previous issue of this review, a learned and esteemed writer has already called the attention of the public to the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, and to its worthy founder, Don Bosco, who, animated with the noblest sentiments of charity, has dedicated himself to the instruction and education of poor children. The many advantages to be derived from this establishment soon became known, and induced several ecclesiastics to join the good priest in his admirable work. They have opened other Houses, gathered round them both the children and grown-up people of the poorer classes, and are labouring for their moral and social improvement. In this way they are forming useful members of society, and diminishing the number of the idle loiterers whose endeavour is to prey upon society.

"A noble mission indeed! in which the priest is seen in all the greatness of his holy state, and in which he closely imitates our Divine Redeemer, Who set him the example by taking delight in being in the midst of children and by rebuking those who sought to turn the little ones away from Him.

"Is it then not to be wondered at if the names of Fathers Vola, Borel, Carpano and Ponte are dear to all good people, since these worthy priests gather around them, in a small Institute in the Valentine quarter, hundreds of poor boys to whom they impart religious and secular instruction.

"We were invited there a few days ago, to receive from the boys the offerings which they spontaneously made to the exiled Pontiff, and we had an opportunity of seeing and admiring the order and contentment that reign there, and the excellent relations that exist between the boys and their Superiors. An offering from such a source will be especially agreeable to the Holy Father.

"Let those who are loudly clamouring for 'social reform' visit these institutes, and they will see how effectually Christian piety is accomplishing it. Let them learn from those noble souls, who have renounced all

the attractions the world can offer, and who are leading a life of sacrifice, in their endeavour to secure for society upright and industrious members, that it is not idle talk but deeds, that are of avail in promoting this end. Let them take one step further, and imitate the 'Educator of the People' in his laborious and difficult mission."

In the beginning of March, 1849, there was published in Turin a sad announcement which occasioned much sorrow and brought desolation to many a homestead. King Charles Albert, at the head of an army numbering about a hundred thousand men, had entered the field against the Austrians with the object of driving them out of Italy. At the outset everything seemed to favour the Piedmontese arms and to point to a complete victory. But matters took a different turn when the Austrians, owing either to the treachery or neglect of the Italian General, Ramorino, succeeded in crossing the River Ticino, at a pass which he had been instructed to hold. They pushed on, under Marshal Radetzki, to Novara, where the main body of the Italian Army had encamped. On the 23rd of March, the two armies met in the vicinity of Novara, and after a whole day's hard fighting, the Austrians were victorious.

During the fierce engagement, the king frequently exposed himself to danger in order to animate his followers. Perceiving at last that his plans were doomed to failure, and recognising the necessity of a cessation of hostilities, he decided to give up the reins of government, and procure for his people honourable terms of peace. That same evening, surrounded by his sons, Victor Emmanuel and Ferdinand, and his staff, he abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son, who assumed the title of King Emmanuel II. He then bade adieu to the bystanders, thanking them for the services they had rendered to him and to their country, and about midnight he left Novara with only two attendants. A few days later, news was received that he had reached Oporto, the city chosen by him as the place of his exile.

There, Charles Albert, broken down by the weight of his misfortunes and attacked by an old malady,

lingered for a while and shortly after died, on July 28th of that same year, 1849, fortified with the rites of our Holy Religion.

The news of these sad events deeply concerned the boys and staff of the Oratory, and this was quite natural, seeing that their Sovereign had taken a deep interest in their welfare, and had protected them, especially at the time when the Mayor of Turin and the Municipal authorities threatened to close the Oratory.

A sure proof of the good king's devotion to the Catholic Religion has been brought to public notice. It consists of a letter which he wrote to the Holy Father, from Alexandria, and bears the date of the 10th of September, 1848. We give a few passages :

MOST HOLY FATHER,

The age we live in has become one of iniquity, and the chastisements of an angry God lie heavily upon us. How often I have desired to lay open my heart to your Holiness, to confide to you my many troubles. But by so doing, I feared to increase your own trials. We are now, however, arrived at such a desolating crisis, that I cannot any longer refrain from writing to your Holiness on the subject.

War has been of no avail in saving our country, or in breaking up the numerous factions. Your Holiness is doubtless aware how Religion and the Religious Orders were oppressed during my absence from Turin. The whole affair has made me sick at heart. The evil is so great that no human means are of any avail against it; what is wanted is a special grace from Heaven, for this wickedness has become so general, that without a miracle there is no hope of matters mending.

I am conscious of having done all I possibly could in the cause of our holy Religion and for the welfare of my people, but I have now decided to give up my throne. I am only waiting for the end of the war to carry my abdication into effect, and to retire into

some foreign country where I may pass the rest of my days in seclusion and pious practices.

With sentiments of profound veneration,

I have the honour to remain,

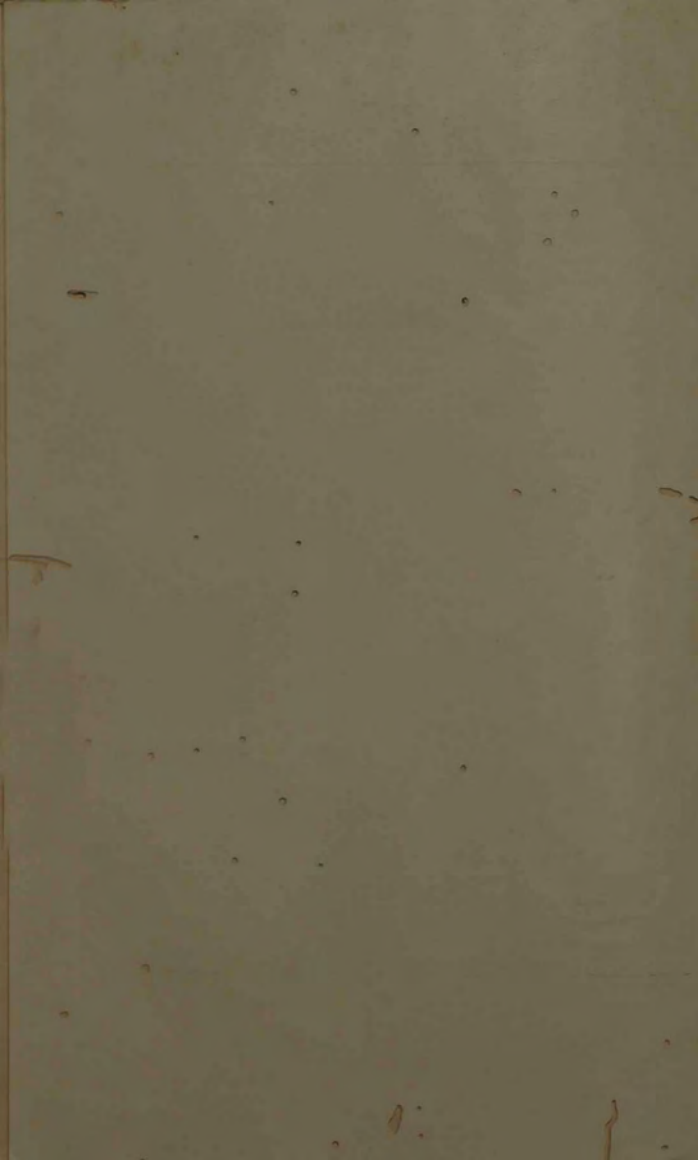
Your most humble servant,

CHARLES ALBERT."

A Sovereign animated with these good, religious sentiments, could not fail to be venerated by his faithful subjects and by those who had been the objects of his benevolence; among these latter were Don Bosco's boys. Hence it was that after the misfortune which befell Pius IX, none afflicted them so deeply as that which happened to the unhappy Charles Albert.



EARLY PUPILS —
JOHN CAGLIERO, FUTURE SALESIAN MISSIONARY BISHOP AND CARDINAL;
JOHN FRANCESIA, SALESIAN PRIEST, POET AND LATIN SCHOLAR.



CHAPTER XXIV.

The Oratory of the Guardian Angels. — The metric system. — The retreat.

TO the north-east of the city of Turin lies the suburb of Vanchiglia, which is inhabited almost entirely by the poorer classes. At the time we are now speaking of, there existed in this quarter a group of houses called the Moschino, the inmates of which, especially the youths, gave the police a good deal of trouble. Close by this place, Don Cocchis, one of the priests of the parish, founded an Oratory similar in aim to our own. It was frequented mostly by older lads, who were attracted to it mainly for the sake of the games and diversions. By this means the good priest managed to keep them from bad company and dangerous places of amusement.

But in 1849 this Oratory was closed, principally through poor attendance. The war had been renewed between Italy and Austria, and was the means of awakening a warlike ardour among the lads of the Oratory, who had already been accustomed to handle sword and rifle in many a sham fight. Anxious to see some active service, many of them enlisted and set off to join the main army. At first they were in high spirits. In imagination they already saw themselves returning covered with glory, after prodigies of valour. Unfortunately, however, after long marching, and before they reached the camp, they heard of the overthrow of the Italian arms. This was a shock to their sanguine hopes, and they sadly turned again in the direction of Turin.

But besides the absence of the greater number of the boys, another difficulty helped to bring about the closing of this Festive Oratory. Don Cocchis had contemplated a sort of Home for poor artisans, and he had actually made a commencement by renting a small house and taking in several boys. As he was poor he was obliged, like Don Bosco, to seek from charity the means for their support, and this benevolent work, together with his many occupations in connection with the parish, prevented him from re-opening the Oratory.

Matters had been in this condition for some months, when Don Bosco and Don Borel, fully aware of the great need of a Sunday Oratory in the Vanchiglia quarter, approached Don Cocchis on the subject. He was of opinion that Don Bosco should take over the work, and shortly afterwards, in the beginning of October, with the approval of the Archbishop, the Oratory was re-opened and dedicated to the Guardian Angels.

Don Carpano was appointed its first director. He was succeeded by Don Vola, and later by Don Murialdo. This latter priest, well known for his piety and zeal, held his difficult office for several years, and under his direction the Oratory flourished and prospered beyond expectation. The number of boys in attendance often reached three hundred, and was sometimes over four hundred, so that in a short time the little chapel could no longer contain them all, and had to be enlarged. With regard to the sacred functions, the practices of piety, the games, etc., the same were adopted as those in vogue at the Oratories of St. Francis of Sales and of St. Aloysius.

The Oratory of the Guardian Angels continued in the same place and under Don Bosco's superintendance until 1866. In that year the parish church of St. Julia was erected through the charity of the Marchioness Barolo. This rich and benevolent lady also desired that a Festive Oratory should be established beside the church, for the purpose of giving the children religious instruction during Lent and on feast-days. When it

was opened, Don Bosco seeing that it sufficed for the requirements of the neighbourhood, closed the old one, and sent the priests and clerics to the Oratory of St. Joseph, in the suburb of San Salvario, where they were greatly needed.

Mention must now be made of a theatrical piece given about this time at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales by the boys, which made some stir in the city.

According to an Act of Parliament passed in the month of September, 1845, the metric system of weights and measures was to be enforced in all Italy from January 1st, 1850. In order to prepare the minds of the people to receive and appreciate this innovation, the Government had tables of the weights and measures drawn up, and leaflets explaining them distributed in all parts of the country; at the same time the local authorities were requested to open night schools where the system might be taught to the working classes and the ignorant.

But in 1849, as though the Government were not sure of the wisdom of the policy, the President of the Board of Agriculture forwarded to the Bishops of Italy a circular in which he requested them, in the name of the Government, to exhort the parish priests of their respective dioceses to use their influence in furthering the knowledge of the metric system among the people confided to their care, so that its introduction might not give rise to discontent or fraud. The Bishops willingly acceded to this request, for they always have been, and always are, ready to promote the interests of Church and State; and the priests were not behindhand in complying with the wishes of their Pastors. Don Bosco, desirous that his boys should also be instructed in the metric system, had it taught in his schools several years before it became compulsory, and he afterwards compiled and published for popular use a treatise simplifying the subject.

But, not content with this, he devised a means of rendering the system acceptable, and it proved most efficacious. He wrote a comedy in three acts entitled

"The Metric System," which was acted by the boys of the Oratory. It represents a market-place, in which figure many buyers and sellers; the former, either ignorant that the new weights and measures have been enforced, or unwilling to conform to them, insist on using the old system. The sellers repeat that it can no longer be done, as the old system has been abolished; there is consequently a noisy scene, the buyers being quite confused and afraid of being cheated. The two parties become hot and excited, the one in trying to persuade, the other in not wishing to be persuaded; until at last, at the cost of a good deal of patience and explanation, the sellers succeed in making the buyers understand the utility and convenience of the new weights and measures, and the difference between them and the old ones.

In another scene, we find a poor working man in a fix because he is not acquainted with the metric system; he meets a companion and asks him to teach him something about it. In this way an enumeration is made of the weights and measures, and the difference between the systems clearly shown. Don Bosco also introduced a succession of amusing incidents, and he most happily contrived to change a dry and tedious subject into a source of real entertainment.

Among the audience was the celebrated Don Aporti, who was so amused by what he saw, that he afterwards said: "Don Bosco could not have made out a more effective means of rendering the metric system popular; here one takes it in by laughing."

The consoling results that followed from the Mission, or Retreat, preached to the boys in the preceding year, encouraged Don Bosco to make a second venture; and this time not only for the boys living in the school, but for all who frequented the three Oratories, and, if possible, for all the boys of Turin. Seeing that the chapel would not do for this purpose, both on account of its limited space and its distance from the centre of the town, Don Bosco made arrangements to hold the Retreat in the spacious church of the Confraternity of

Mercy, which was easily accessible from all parts of Turin. On the third Sunday of Advent, which was the Sunday, preceding that fixed for the opening, Don Bosco, after communicating the news to the boys, said : " Ask your parents and masters in my name to have the kindness to let you off a few hours during the day, in order that you may attend with the others. Promise them that you will repay them by greater diligence and punctuality in the performance of your duties."

To ensure the attendance of a large number of working lads, the Retreat was fixed for the last week of the year, as this is partly holiday time; the services were also so arranged as to give the masters as little cause for complaint as possible, and printed notices were affixed to the doors of the churches. Leaflets containing, among other things, some timely expressions, revealing the great zeal of Don Bosco for the welfare of the young, were distributed in the houses and workshops of the city. One of these leaflets has been preserved, and it is a pleasure to transcribe some of the expressions contained in it, as they give an idea of how Don Bosco wrote at that time.

" The portion of the human race, in which are placed the hopes for the future of society, and which is above all entitled to our regard and attention, is certainly the young.

" If we properly educate our youth, we shall have harmony and sound morality; if not, vice and disorder. Religion alone is capable of giving the key-note and completion to the grand work of true education.

" Seeing, therefore, the evil tendency of our times, and the efforts made by impious men to insinuate irreligious aims into the impressionable mind of the young, and in order to comply with the wishes of many parents and masters, it has been decided to give a spiritual Retreat to boys in the Church of the Confraternity of Mercy.

" Fathers and mothers and masters, you who have at heart the present and future welfare of the boys confided by Divine Providence to your care, you can do them a

great service by sending them to the Retreat, or by using your influence to bring about their attendance. Rest assured that God will not fail to compensate you for those intervals of time which you may have to sacrifice for such a holy purpose.

“And you, my dear children, the delight of the Sacred Heart, do not hesitate, if you are called upon to suffer some inconvenience during this cold season in order to attend the Retreat, for the outcome will be of immense spiritual advantage to you, an advantage that will endure for ever. Our Lord calls you to hear His minister, and gives you an opportunity of receiving His graces and blessings. Make good use of this time. Thrice happy will you be, if you accustom yourselves to live according to the Divine law from your tender years. ‘It is good for a man, when he hath borne the yoke from his youth.’ (Lamen. iii, 27).”

From the very commencement of the Retreat, the Church of the Confraternity of Mercy was crowded with boys, nearly all of whom were of the working class. The preachers chosen by Don Bosco were four in number: Canon Borsarelli, Don Borel, Don Ponte, and Canon Gastaldi, who was afterwards Archbishop of Turin; all of them possessed those qualifications that admirably fitted them to preach to the young. The results obtained were all that could be desired. In spite of the coldness of the season, several hundred lads made their way to church very early in the morning; whilst the attendance at the instruction and meditation in the evening was surprising. During the last few days, the confessionals were surrounded; and on the morning when the Retreat came to a close, there was a general communion. Parents and masters were unanimous in their praise and admiration of the Retreat, and thought one ought to be arranged every year. At the present time this most useful practice is carried on by a pious Catholic Society of Turin, about Eastertide.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Senate and Don Bosco's work. — The three Senators.

THE events related in the last chapter awakened a great deal of outside interest in the Oratory and its doings. In Turin, public opinion was greatly in favour of Don Bosco's work; the fears entertained by the old Marquis and the Town Council were forgotten, and all showed their esteem of the Oratory by speaking of it in the highest terms.

Popular opinion soon found an echo in Parliament, and the Government was induced to look favourably on a work that was evidently achieving great and good results. About that time, a certain benevolent person presented a petition in Don Bosco's name, but without his knowledge, to the Minister of Education, for a subsidy on behalf of the Institute of St. Francis of Sales. The Senate desired to have some detailed information regarding the young priest's work. Hence a Commission, consisting of Count Frederick Sclopis of Salerano,* the Marquis Pallavicini, and Count Lodis of Collegno, was appointed to visit the Oratory and report its observations.

Accordingly, in January, 1850, these three noble personages presented themselves at the Oratory in Valdocco. It happened to be the afternoon of a feast-day, and some five hundred boys were in the play-

* Count Sclopis, who belonged to one of the most illustrious families of Piedmont, was beloved by all who knew him, for his amiability and virtue. He was a conscientious and high-principled magistrate, the favourite Councillor of the Crown and the President of the Senate. He was chosen as arbitrator by England and the United States in the intricate question of the "Alabama."

ground amusing themselves. The three visitors were agreeably surprised. Their first impressions were distinctly favourable. After looking on for some moments, Count Sclopis said to his companions: "What a charming scene." "Indeed a very interesting one," replied the Marquis Pallavicini; "and Turin would be most fortunate did it possess several similar institutes," added Count Collegno. "In that case," continued Count Sclopis, "we should be less frequently distressed by the sight of such a great number of poor, homeless lads passing their time in idleness in the streets, and growing up in ignorance, and worse."

Don Bosco was in the playground, but he was, as usual, surrounded by a group of boys. When he caught sight of the newcomers, who were quite strangers to him, he approached them and bade them welcome to the Oratory. Then the following conversation ensued:

Count Sclopis. "We are filled with astonishment at the sight of such a great number of boys passing their afternoon in innocent amusements. It is certainly a rare sight. We are, however, aware that this is the outcome of the labours of a certain Don Bosco. Could you introduce us to him?"

Don Bosco. "There is no need for further introduction, gentlemen, I am Don Bosco." He then invited the three visitors to accompany him, and he led them into his little room.

Count Sclopis then said: "I am delighted to make your acquaintance, for your name, which I first heard a good time ago, is now on everybody's lips."

Don Bosco. "I must ascribe this popularity not to any merit of mine, but to the tongues of my boys."

Marquis Pallavicini. "But they are the best judges. What does the Prophet say: 'Out of the mouths of infants thou hast perfected praise.'"

Count Sclopis. "The Senate has been led to interest itself in your work, and we have been charged to gather some information regarding it. Allow me to introduce myself and my colleagues."

Don Bosco. "This lowly Institute has been honoured with several important visits, but this will certainly be numbered among the most welcome. I place myself entirely at your service; any question you may desire to put, I shall answer to the best of my ability."

Count Sclopis. "What, then, is the aim of your work?"

Don Bosco. "The aim I have in view is to assemble on Sundays and feast-days as large a number of boys as possible; and especially of those boys who, being either neglected or abandoned by their parents, or who, being strangers in Turin, would pass their time in idleness in the streets. Attracted here by the games and amusements, they spend their time in pleasant recreation under the care of several assistants. In the morning they have every opportunity of frequenting the sacraments, and they assist at Mass and a short sermon adapted to their intelligence. In the afternoon, after play, they assemble in the chapel for catechism, vespers and Benediction. In a word, my intention is to make honest citizens and good Christians of these boys."

Marquis Pallavicini. "A noble work indeed! It would be desirable to open several such Institutions in this city."

Don Bosco. "I am glad to be able to tell you that two others have already been opened: one, in 1847, near the Valentino; the other, quite recently, in the Vanchiglia quarter."

Count Collegno. "That is good news."

Count Sclopis. "How many boys are there attending this Oratory?"

Don Bosco. "Some five hundred, but they nearly always exceed that number. About as many frequent each of the other Oratories."

Count Collegno. "So that there are, on the average, about 1,500 boys of this town who are gathered together on Sundays and feast-days by your endeavours, instructed in our Holy Religion, and trained in good Christian principles. This will be a great work for our city and one of great utility to the Government."

Marquis Pallavicini. "How long ago is it since you started this work?"

Don Bosco. "I began as far back as 1841, by assembling a few of the most neglected lads in the neighbourhood; I was induced to continue it, on finding that the very many, though somewhat wild and uncouth, were by no means bad boys; but, if left to themselves, they generally became rogues and eventually found their way into prison."

Count Sclopis. "Your work is, indeed, a philanthropic one, and of the utmost social importance. It is the duty of the Government to promote works of this kind. You will, doubtless, be pleased to hear that the Royal Family and the Municipality take an interest in your Institute, and I am sure they will give you their support."

Count Collegno. "What means do you adopt to make the boys well-behaved and virtuous, and to keep such a multitude in order?"

Don Bosco. "Sound, Christian instruction and patient charity are the only means. Charity, indeed, has to take the place of punishment."

Marquis Pallavicini. "We should like to see your methods introduced into many other institutions. Then such a number of warders and gendarmes would not be required, and many of the prisoners would be induced to lead better lives, instead of becoming hardened and more vicious by years of imprisonment and punishment."

Count Sclopis. "Do all these boys belong to this town?"

Don Bosco. "Oh, no. Several are from the neighbourhood of Biella, Vercelli, Novara, and other districts; others are from Milan and Como, and even from Switzerland. These poor lads, who have come to the capital in search of work, being far removed from their homes and the influence of their parents, were in great danger of falling into bad company and into evil ways."

Count Sclopis. "You might also add: and a

danger to society, and that they would eventually give the authorities a great deal of trouble."

At this point of the conversation there was a knock at the door, and a boy about twelve years of age entered to tell Don Bosco something. When he had finished, he was told to wait a little while. Count Sclopis was taken by the candour and confidence of the boy, and thus questioned him :

"What is your name?"

"Joseph Vanzino."

"Where were you born?"

"At Varese."

"Are you apprenticed to a trade?"

"I am learning to be a wood-carver."

"Are your parents living?"

"My father is dead."

"And what about your mother?"

At this question the boy hesitated, and he appeared confused. The Count repeated his question, and at last the boy replied in a husky voice: "My mother is in prison," and with that he burst into tears.

All the company, in fact, was quite moved by this sad story, and after a few moments the Count went on :

"But where, then, do you sleep at night?"

"I have slept till now in my master's house, but to-day Don Bosco promised to receive me here among his boarders."

"Do you, then, keep a boarding school as well as a Festive Oratory?" asked the Count, turning to Don Bosco.

Don Bosco. "Such a work was indispensable, and at present I have about thirty boys, who were formerly quite homeless and neglected. They sleep and take their meals here, and go to work in the town."

Marquis Pallavicini. "This is, indeed, a wonder of Catholic charity."

Count Collegno. "But how do you find the means to support this work? For thirty mouths must consume a great supply of bread."

Don Bosco. "To provide food and clothing for the boys is truly a somewhat difficult matter, and I am

sometimes perplexed how to manage it. Most of them are serving their apprenticeship, and are therefore earning nothing, while others get a small sum — not enough to clothe them. But I must confess that so far Divine Providence has never failed to assist me, and my confidence in God encourages me to look to Him for the means to enlarge the present houses and increase the number of boarders."

Count Sclopis. "That reminds me; we should very much like to see the house."

Don Bosco. "Oh, certainly, but you will find nothing to admire, as the place is so poor and ill-adapted for its purpose."

In accordance with their desire, Don Bosco led them into the dormitory on the ground floor, the entrance to which was rather low. Count Sclopis went first, and as he was a tall man, his hat was knocked off, and fell in the face of the Marquis, who was following behind. The accident caused a few smiles, but the party were eventually conducted round the dormitory, and then into the kitchen, where Mother Margaret was then washing the dishes.

"This is my mother," said Don Bosco to the visitors, "and the mother of our poor boys."

Count Sclopis. "From all appearances, you are the cook as well as the mother."

Mother Margaret. "Quite so; for to earn our place in Heaven, we must be ready to do a little of everything."

Count Sclopis. "How many courses do you serve up to the boys at table?"

Mother Margaret. "Our circumstances only allow our giving bread and soup."

Count Sclopis. "And how many courses do you serve up to Don Bosco?"

Mother Margaret. "Only one."

Count Sclopis. "Why, that is too small a number. But, doubtless, you make it extra well?"

Mother Margaret. "Ah, yes! So well, that he partakes of the same course morning and evening from Sunday till Thursday."

These words caused a general laugh.

Count Sclopis. "And why not from Sunday to Sunday?"

Mother Margaret. "Because Fridays and Saturdays are days of abstinence."

Count Sclopis. "I understand. I see that you are very economical. But your method of cooking is, perhaps, a little behind the times."

Marquis Pallavicini. "Have you anyone to help you with your work?"

Mother Margaret. "Yes, but to-day he is occupied in other matters."

Marquis Pallavicini. "Who is the kitchen-boy?"

"There he is," replied Mother Margaret, pointing to Don Bosco, and laughing heartily.

Count Sclopis. "I congratulate you, Don Bosco. You are already well known as an educator of youth and as an able writer; but I was not aware before that you were also a master in the culinary art."

Don Bosco. "As for that, you should see me at work, especially when I am making the *polenta*."

This set the three visitors laughing; and bidding Margaret good-day, they followed Don Bosco out of the kitchen.

As it was now time for the recreation to end, Don Bosco sent a boy to ring the bell. What followed was a fresh surprise to the three gentlemen, for no sooner had the bell sounded than all the games were promptly stopped, the boys fell into ranks and proceeded to the chapel.

The visitors followed and went round the various catechism classes; then they assisted at the vespers, sermon and benediction. They afterwards spoke to several of the boys in the playground, putting questions on different subjects.

"What trade are you learning?" Count Sclopis asked one of the lads.

"I am learning to be a shoemaker."

"Could you tell me what difference there is between a shoemaker and a cobbler?"

"Oh yes! A cobbler mends boots and shoes, whilst

a shoemaker makes new ones. For instance, the pair you have on was made by a shoemaker."

"Well donè," said the Count, "you have answered very well."

Don Bosco. "The lad is very intelligent and he attends our night school regularly."

Marquis Pallavicini. "Have you then a night school also?"

Don Bosco. "Oh yes. We began in 1841, for the benefit of those poor working lads, who have only the evening hours at their disposal, or who cannot attend the public schools on account of their age. In about an hour's time the evening schools will commence.

Marquis Pallavicini. "What subjects do you teach?"

Don Bosco. "Reading, writing, grammar, history, geography and arithmetic. There are also special classes for those desirous of learning French, or who have a particular bent for drawing, singing and instrumental music."

Marquis Pallavicini. "And who then assists you in all this work?"

Don Bosco. "Several of the clergy and gentlemen whom I call my Co-operators. These kind friends help me in other ways besides. For instance, some of them undertake to find good masters for the boys who are out of work, and provide articles of clothing for many of the lads who would otherwise be unable to go to work at all."

Count Collegno. "Well done. These people are indeed benefactors of humanity, and deserve well of their country."

"Don Bosco," then concluded Count Sclopis, "I am not given to flattering, but I must say that I and my colleagues are filled with admiration at what we have seen, and as Catholics, citizens and senators, we applaud your work and wish it all prosperity."

Before leaving the Oratory, Count Sclopis gave Don Bosco a generous offering on behalf of his Institute, and from that day the three gentlemen were benefactors of his work.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A Parliamentary vote in favour of the Oratory.

A MONTH or so had gone by since the visit of the three Senators above related, when the news came that the affairs of the Oratory had been discussed in Parliament. On March 1st of that same year, the members of the Senate, presided over by Marquis Alfieri, held a discussion regarding two petitions which had been put forward in the preceding January. One ran as follows: "Professor Bruno proposes that the law provide shelter and education for poor lads leading an idle and wandering life." The other was as follows: "The Rev. John Bosco begs to inform the Senate that he has founded three Oratories in the environs of Turin, for the education and instruction of homeless lads, and he would appeal to the Senate for aid in maintaining the said institutes."

Marquis Pallavicini was responsible for presenting the petitions, and when the debate on the first one was opened, he rose, and, in the name of the Commission concerned with that affair, he thus addressed the Senate:

"Professor Bruno, attached to the boys' reformatory, is justly moved to compassion at the sight of a considerable number of idle lads who, because they have no home or have run away from it, sleep in the streets at night, and are engaged in precarious work, such as selling papers and matches by day. Without a home and without any fixed occupation they become idle and dissolute, and familiar with almost every crime. To remedy this sad state of affairs, Professor Bruno suggests that these unruly lads be withdrawn from their idle life and baneful surroundings, and be placed in

establishments where they may receive an education on a religious basis and learn a useful trade, so that later on they may be in a position to earn a respectable livelihood. For this purpose he proposes the Agrarian Institute, seeing that this Institute is able to offer the advantages of a good moral education and professional instruction. In support of his proposal, Dr. Bruno refers to the fact that a similar experiment has already been successfully made in Lausanne, Belgium and France; and therefore, he begs that the Law provide for the emergency in the present case. The Commission which has been entrusted with this proposal, applauds the beneficent and philanthropic aims of the zealous Professor, and with the conviction — a conviction that is doubtless shared by the whole Senate — of the great importance of at once taking this step in order to put a stop to such a disorder, and to diminish the number of adult malefactors, the Commission, I repeat, unanimously urges the Senate to forward a copy of this petition to the Minister of the Home Department, in order that he may remove without delay, and efficaciously, the cause of so much depravity among our poorer youth."

When the Marquis Pallavicini had finished, Senator Giulio asked permission to speak, and being allowed, addressed the Senate as follows :

"The sentiments manifested by the petitioner, and applauded by the Commission whose report we have just heard, are certainly shared by all present; and earnestly do we hope that an efficacious remedy be found for an evil which the petitioner and the Commission so justly deplore. Nevertheless, it is doubtful, nay, it may be regarded as certain that the means which the petitioner proposes, and which it would seem the Senate is about to approve by forwarding his proposal to the Home Office, far from removing the evil deplored, would only make matters worse, and bring about still greater disorders. Before giving its approval, the Senate would be wise to consider whether or not it is possible for the Government to take direct charge of the

education of all these children; and if so, whether by so doing, the encouragement given to parents to neglect their children would not be a greater evil than the one it is intended to remove. It is hardly necessary for me to make any further observation, as what I have already said will suffice to put the Senate on its guard against this sentimental humanitarianism, the consequence of which might be quite the reverse of what it is hoped to obtain."

Then Senator Giulio proposed the order of the day against the petition of Professor Bruno; that is, he proposed that the Senate should pass over the petition, without forwarding or recommending it to the King's Ministers.

The President. " Since the order of the day has been proposed by Senator Giulio, let those who are in favour of it signify their approval.

The words of the President gave rise to some altercation, but at length the order of the day was carried, and the petition of Professor Bruno fell through. The misfortune that thus befell the first application disquieted the members of the Commission entrusted with Don Bosco's petition, and made them fear that a similar fate would overtake the second application; but, fortunately, things took a favourable turn, in spite of the opposition of Senator Giulio.

The Marquis Pallavicini. " The next petition, which belongs to the Rev. John Bosco, a distinguished and zealous priest of this city, is similar in the object it has in view to the one already referred to, although it differs somewhat as to the means to be adopted. Likewise desirous of improving the condition of so many poor, unfortunate lads, and at the same time, of society at large, Don Bosco, with the approbation of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, has for some years past devoted himself to the work of assembling on feast-days all the poor lads he possibly can, from twelve to twenty years of age, and at the present moment as many as five hundred frequent his Oratory in Valdocco. As this Oratory soon became too small to contain the ever-

increasing number of boys, another was opened near Porta Nuova, and recently, a third in the Vanchiglia quarter. In these three institutions, whilst the boys are provided with honest amusements, they are also taught to love virtue, respect law and authority, and lead a life in accordance with the principles of our holy Religion. Besides, there are also night schools in connection with these places where different subjects are taught; and for some time past a Home has been opened which contains some twenty or thirty lads who were without lodgings. This good work has been supported by the alms of some zealous Catholics of this city, for Turin is not backward in its generosity towards the poor and unfortunate. But expenses naturally increased every year, and Don Bosco is at present burdened with the rent of these places, which amounts to 1,200 lire annually; he also has to bear the expense of maintaining the house and chapel, to which may be added a considerable outlay every day to provide food for a large number of boys who would otherwise be without it. But now he finds himself in great difficulties, seeing that the support of public charity is insufficient, and therefore begs the Senate to take into consideration a work of such utility, and make a deliberation in its favour. The Commission did not simply content itself with the statement made by the petitioner, but, although already acquainted with the good done by this institution, it thoroughly investigated the matter. As a result, the Commission ascertained that not only were religious exercises performed on Sundays and Festivals, and the elementary education imparted, but other subjects were also included in the programme drawn up by the Founder. These were drawing, history, bible history, music, besides entertaining pastimes, gymnastics, etc., etc. To excite emulation among the lads, the Founder had also contemplated holding exhibitions of the work executed by them, giving entertainments and distributing prizes; the scarcity of pecuniary aid and the critical state of the work have alone prevented him from so doing. From what I have said, you will easily see that such an

institution is eminently religious, philanthropic and advantageous. It would consequently be a very great loss to the whole town if this work, instead of prospering and attaining the development desired, were to come to a standstill or cease altogether, simply because sufficient aid was wanting. The members of the Commission unhesitatingly declare that they would be doing a wrong to themselves, to the Senate who had done them the honour of hearing this application, and to society, if they did not propose that the petition in question should be forwarded to the Minister for the Home Department, so that he may take steps to aid such a useful and advantageous work."

Senator Giulio. "It is with profound regret that I am a second time obliged to fulfil a painful duty, namely, to warn you not to enter on a course of action prompted by mere sentiment. The question of State charities is an intricate and painful one, and I hope the Senate will not go any further in the matter simply on the grounds of the petition. I therefore again propose the order of the day against this petition."

Count Sclopis. "The considerations again expressed by the honourable member, have reference to one of the most difficult questions now agitating European society. This is neither the place, nor is it opportune, to discuss it now; but I am convinced that were the Government to withhold its support on the present occasion, it would certainly discourage those institutes which, founded by private benevolence, have as their object the remedying of a crying evil in modern society. I think, too, that the question of State charities need not be considered in connection with the present case, since the aid asked for is merely accessory. When the question of Government grants was dealt with in other countries, even those who were determined to abolish them, admitted nevertheless that, if private charity were insufficient for the support of such institutions, the Government ought to allow a grant, even though it were a temporary one. There is, moreover, a pressing need of providing for those boys, who on leaving school are almost abandoned

to themselves at a period of their lives at which they stand most in need of help; and I consider it of great importance that the Government should lend its aid to institutions of this kind, which are in need of help, without necessarily contracting a permanent obligation. In the present instance, then, I would invite the Government to act accordingly, and adopt those measures which it may deem necessary to meet this urgent case. Moreover, I wish it to be known that I have no intention of entering into a discussion of State charities, but simply of asking for aid from the Government, and I therefore insist on this appeal being forwarded to the Minister."

Senator Giulio. "I will reply to Senator Sclopis as briefly as possible. It is the duty of the Government to dispense justice and not alms to the citizens: for since it does not regulate its own property, but that of the State, it cannot use it except for motives of justice. These considerations appear to me sufficient to show that a Government is not obliged to assist with funds, that are not its own, in maintaining charitable institutions, however highly commended by sentiments of humanity and religion. In a word, Governments have no other charity to dispense but justice, and that to all equally."

Count Sclopis. "I admit that a Government must be just before everything else, but that does not hinder it from being provident. It need not pledge itself to perpetual grants, but lend assistance in cases of emergency. An absolute course need not be entered upon. However, by holding itself aloof, especially in the actual pressing needs, the Government might discourage the promoters of those institutions and make them despair of accomplishing what has been recommended to us not only through motives of charity, but also of policy."

Senator Sauli. "I beg to add that these establishments are not almshouses, but institutes of moral and religious education, in which the Government, I believe, is obliged to take an interest."

Senator Pallavicini-Mossi. " Allow me to make an observation. Not very long ago, the Senate deemed it advisable to consider the question of compulsory education for boys leading an idle or wandering life, and it gave its vote in favour of such a project presented by the Ministry to this Chamber. Now what is the aim of Don Bosco, whose application has been read? To impart education differing very little from that alluded to. Consequently, if the Government is disposed to uphold this system of education, it can very well meet the necessary expenses in the present case, without touching on the theory of State grants."

The President. " There are two proposals: that of the Commission, which recommends to the Government the petition for a subsidy; and that of Senator Giulio, who desires the Senate to pass to the order of the day. Let the vote be taken on the question."

The result was the rejection of the order of the day.

The President. " Now let the motion of the Commission be put to the vote."

The vote was taken and the recommendations of the Committee were adopted. Don Bosco's petition was accordingly forwarded to the Home Secretary.

This act of the Senate was of great consequence to Don Bosco; for from that day the Government took considerable interest in his work and showed its satisfaction in various ways: sometimes by praising its results, sometimes by giving subsidies, and also by recommending boys to Don Bosco, convinced that under his care they would turn out to be honest citizens and useful members of society.

CHAPTER XXVII.

*Work in the Oratories. — Return of Pius IX
from exile. — The Pope's gift. — An appreciation. —
A precious document.*

HAVING spoken in the previous chapters of the three Festive Oratories opened by Don Bosco, it seems opportune to add a few words about a very useful work which was carried on in them from the very beginning, and with excellent results. I allude to the weekday catechism classes which were held during Lent in preparation for Easter, and were attended by about a thousand boys. Many of the boys of the town could not be present at the classes in their parish churches, for they were either at school or at work when the class was given. Don Bosco therefore decided to open a class between mid-day and two o'clock. He arranged the matter in such a way that the boys, and especially those at work, would have time for their meals, to attend the class, and then be in time for school or for work, so that there should be no cause of complaint. The method of gathering the boys together was somewhat amusing. About mid-day, a boy went through the principal streets in the neighbourhood of the Oratories, ringing a bell, the sound of which reminded parents and children of their duty; it being a stimulus for the parents to send their children and for the latter to answer promptly to the call. It was a pleasing sight to see the boys flock out from all sides and join the little bell-ringer. In half-an-hour or so, he returned to the Oratory accompanied by this small army, which was soon arranged in classes according to the age and capacity of the boys. For more than thirty years Don Bosco presided in person at the classes in the Valdocco Oratory, entrusting to other priests —

in the beginning to secular, and afterwards to Salesian priests — the care of the other Oratories. On the first three days of Holy Week, at the same hour, either Don Bosco or Don Borel, instead of holding the catechism class, preached a short sermon in order to prepare the boys for their Easter confession and communion. For the greater convenience of hearing the confessions of all, it was arranged that some of the boys should make their Easter communion on the Tuesday, and the remainder on the Wednesday in Holy Week. Each class was accompanied by its catechist, who set a good example by making his Easter communion with the rest. To their praise it must be said, these good catechists did not lose an opportunity or spare any effort to help those under their charge to fulfil their sacred duty with the proper dispositions. As the greater number of the teachers belonged to the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, dinner-time was generally anticipated during Lent, the meal was hastily finished and recreation sacrificed in order that they might be ready for their classes. They were to be admired for the great zeal that animated them, particularly those whom duty called to the Oratories of St. Aloysius and of the Guardian Angels. This meant a journey of three or four miles on foot, frequently in wintry weather, and always after a frugal and hasty meal. It is to be noted, too, that some of the catechists were also teachers in the day schools; so that besides this work of charity, they had their ordinary classes to attend to. This life of abnegation was entered upon and continued most willingly and cheerfully, and we may regard that period as the heroic age of the Oratory, an age which has not yet passed away, but continues in many of the Salesian Houses and Missions.

An event happened in April, 1850, which filled the Catholic world with joy — the return of Pius IX to Rome after his exile. On July 2nd of the previous year, the French had taken the city from the followers of Mazzini, and General Oudinot, who commanded the victorious army, immediately sent the keys of the city

to the Sovereign Pontiff. An interval was allowed to elapse for the re-establishment of order and tranquillity, and then the Pontiff decided to return to his people, who impatiently awaited his arrival. He left Gaëta and proceeded to Portici and Naples, and thence he set out for Rome on April 4th. After a journey of eight days, which was one long succession of triumphs, the Holy Father at last reached the Eternal City on April 12th, and was accorded a most enthusiastic reception. Not only Rome, but the whole Catholic world celebrated the event, and there was great rejoicing among the boys at the Oratory when Don Bosco made the announcement to them. Moreover, they had an extra reason for so doing. The reader will doubtless remember that when the Pope received the offering of thirty-three lire from the boys, he put it away, as he said, for some special purpose. During his stay at Gaëta the Holy Father had often mentioned the offering, and showed it to several who went to pay him homage. One day he called Cardinal Antonelli, and handing him the offering and a sum of money with it, said: "Send for as many rosaries as this money will buy." His order was carried out, and sixty dozen rosaries were brought to him. The Holy Father blessed them, and consigning them to the Cardinal, said: "Have these rosaries sent to the boys of Don Bosco's Oratory. I wish to give them a token of my affection." In compliance with these wishes, His Eminence forwarded the present to the Apostolic Nuncio at Turin, accompanied by the following letter:

"VERY REVEREND FATHER,

I have not forgotten the promise made in my communication of May 14th last, and I now send you, through the Papal Consul at Genoa, two packets containing rosaries blessed by His Holiness, to be distributed to Don Bosco's boys.

Be so kind as to see that the gift reaches its destination.

With sentiments of profound esteem,

CARD. ANTONELLI."

If we consider the dignity of the donor, and the multitude of important affairs which just then occupied the time of Pius IX, we shall the better realise the value of this gracious act towards the Oratory. Therefore, when Don Bosco told them that the Holy Father had not only remembered them, but before leaving his exile had sent each one of them a present, their joy knew no bounds, and the short time that elapsed before receiving the gift seemed like years. As the condescension of the Holy Father was an act of unique importance in the annals of the Oratory, Don Bosco determined to celebrate it with becoming solemnity.

Accordingly, on the afternoon of Sunday, July 21st, the boys of the three Oratories assembled at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. The chapel was crowded to its utmost and a large number had to remain outside. Don Barrera, of the Congregation of Christian Doctrine, an orator of great repute, delivered a very appropriate discourse. His delivery, and the tender expressions which he used in mentioning the Holy Father, held the attention of the boys and moved them deeply. Among other things, he said: "Do you know why Pius IX has sent you this present? The answer is not far to seek. Pius IX is all tenderness for the young; before he became Pope he was engaged in many ways with the instruction and education of the young, and he delighted to be in their midst whenever he had an opportunity. He has sent you each a rosary, because long ago, even from his early years, he was always distinguished for his devotion to Our Lady. I myself have seen him on many occasions, both in public and private, manifest this singular devotion towards the Mother of God."

The sermon was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and afterwards, the boys passed one by one before the altar, and each received a rosary from the hands of Canon Ortalda, who made the distribution, assisted by Don Simonino and Don Barrera. With the boys were several priests and the catechists attached to the three Oratories, and all

esteemed themselves fortunate in possessing a present sent to them by the Holy Father.

This occurrence becoming widely known, it awakened no ordinary interest among the people of the town. It was soon on the lips of everyone. They praised the goodness of Pius IX, and the Oratories began to claim greater attention and esteem, because they were favoured and blessed by the Holy Father. The press took up the matter, and one of the most influential papers, the *Armonia*, published a particularly good article, which, as dealing directly with this history, should be quoted here. It runs as follows :

"The Holy Father's gift to the boys of the three Oratories of this town reveals to the world that the charity of Christ's Vicar, which has been so highly praised, is as bountiful as ever. We are sure that a brief account of this act of condescension by the Holy Father will be read with interest. It is well known now that certain priests are renewing in our midst the deeds of a St. Vincent de Paul, and of a St. Jerome Æmilian. Those poor boys who, when left to themselves, spend the Sunday lounging about the town, are the object of their special attention. Full of zeal for the salvation of souls, these priests are striving to rescue such from the dangers of the streets. They assemble the boys in a suitable place in order to instruct them in their duties as Christians and citizens, and entertain them with various amusements. This work, which began in a humble manner, has been abundantly blessed by God and has assumed large proportions. It has not as yet been ten years in existence, and more than a thousand boys are already benefiting by it. As one site was inadequate for the reunion of all the boys, others were acquired in various parts of the town. The Senate unanimously urged the Government to help an institution so well deserving of Religion and of the State. Even the Holy Father, Pius IX, has recognised the valuable services rendered by this institution, and has condescended to bless it and to show his appreciation of it in the following manner. When the Successor of

St. Peter was in exile at Gaeta, the faithful, in imitation of the early Christians, vied with one another in furnishing him with the material means which would lessen the hardships of his banishment. The boys attending the three Oratories of Turin were among the first to offer their assistance. Placing their mite in the hands of Don Bosco, who so zealously directs this institution, they begged him to forward it to the Holy Father. In that small but generous donation, Pius IX saw the widow's mite, and said: 'This gift is too precious to go with the ordinary funds; I shall keep it by me to put it to better use later on'; and writing on the packet the source whence it had come, he put it carefully away. Later on, when a happier day had dawned, he ordered two large packets of rosaries to be bought, and having blessed them, he forwarded them to Don Bosco for distribution among the boys of the Oratories. The distribution took place on Sunday last, in the principal Oratory, which is situated in the Valdocco quarter.

When all the boys were gathered together in the chapel, Don Barrera, in his eloquent and fervent language, addressed them on the subject of the Pope's gift. He began by relating the biblical story of Daniel and his companions, who, in spite of the allurements of the king of Babylon, remained faithful to the religion and laws of their forefathers, and were therefore rewarded by God. 'In the same way, you, dear children,' he continued, 'by remaining faithful to the religion of Jesus Christ and devoted to His Vicar on earth, not only in times of prosperity but also in times of adversity, and by turning a deaf ear to the suggestions of wicked men who sought to counsel you otherwise, have deserved this token sent by our Lord through His vicegerent.' Then, speaking of the gift, he touched upon the custom of the ancient Romans of crowning with laurel those who had signalled themselves by some heroic act, and he showed how Pius IX, in presenting the boys of the Oratory with rosaries, intended to crown their fortitude. He exhorted them to prize the precious

gifts most highly, and hoped that from the frequent use of them they would gather the strength and courage so necessary in the combat against the forces of evil.

"It would be impossible for us, within the limits of one article, to give an idea of the many touching references and illustrations made use of by the preacher, especially when he entered on his favourite theme, devotion to our Blessed Lady. It was a touching sight to see so many boys listening to the preacher with rapt attention, especially when he referred to the manner in which they should correspond to the Holy Father's condescension. 'Think of the great affection Pius IX bears you,' he said. 'When you consider that amidst the millions of his children you have been singled out, and each of you presented with a token of his benevolence, you will easily realise this. You have, therefore, a duty of gratitude. Remember that whoever is with the Pope is with Christ. Promise, therefore, to be faithful to him unto death.'

"At the conclusion of the discourse, prayers were said for the Holy Father, for the King and the Royal Family, and for the Nation. Benediction followed, and then the boys received the rosaries sent by Pius IX.

"As soon as the service was ended and all had quitted the church, a body of the troops, which had come as a guard of honour, performed some drill exercises in the square. A choir of boys sang a grand chorus of thanksgiving, composed for the occasion in honour of Pius IX, and loud cheers were heard on all sides.

"Thus ended this feast-day to commemorate the bounty of the Father of the Faithful. The large gathering of witnesses, both ecclesiastical and lay, were very much impressed by the scene, and expressed the highest hopes of the work of the Oratory. We who were also present, seemed to behold the fulfilment of what the Psalmist says: 'Out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise, because of thy enemies, that thou mayest destroy the enemy and the avenger.' (Ps. viii, 3)."

Shortly after this occurrence, Don Bosco sent, through Cardinal Antonelli, the expression of his own thanks and those of his boys to the Holy Father for his great condescension, and at the same time he forwarded a printed account of the commemoration held at the Oratory. A few days later, Don Bosco received the following letter from his Eminence :

“ VERY REVEREND FATHER,

I communicated to his Holiness the contents of your letter of the 28th ult., in which you gave expression to the sentiments of gratitude that animated you and your boys. Your letter gave him real satisfaction, and he hopes that the boys under your care will continue to make progress in the path of virtue . . .

I received also the copies of the publication you sent me, containing a fine account of the feast held by you. Let us hope that Almighty God, moved by the prayers that are being offered up continually in your three Oratories, may vouchsafe to grant happier days to His Church.

CARDINAL ANTONELLI.

Rome, September 13th, 1850.”

These are evidences of the Holy Father's goodwill towards the work of Don Bosco, and thus Church and State showed their appreciation of a work which gave signs of being then very advantageous to the Catholic Religion and to civil society.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

*The imprisonment and exile of Archbishop Fransoni.
— Seeds of discord. — A disagreeable incident. —
Military manœuvres and Mother Margaret's garden.*

ABOUT the same time as the occurrence of the above events, other incidents were taking place in Turin which caused much sorrow to Don Bosco and those connected with him. I allude to the imprisonment and exile of His Grace Aloysius Fransoni, Archbishop of Turin. The reason, or rather, pretext, of the violence offered to the intrepid successor of St. Maximus, was that he had reminded the members of Parliament of the ban of excommunication they incurred by voting for and approving of the proposals of Count Siccardi, Minister of Justice. Count Siccardi, trampling under foot the rights of the Church and the Concordat, and treating with contempt the protests of the Apostolic See, had abolished, among other privileges, ecclesiastical courts, and placed bishops and priests entirely under civil law. At the same time the Archbishop ordained that any of his clergy who might be summoned to the tribunal, should not appear without the permission of his ecclesiastical superior. For this, he himself was cited, but he sent back the reply that he would first ask permission from the Pope; if it were granted, he would appear. This was considered equivalent to contempt of court, and he was condemned, in his absence, to a month's imprisonment; and on the 4th of May, he was forcibly taken to the Turin prison to undergo the penalty. The news especially affected Don Bosco's boys, for the venerable Archbishop had been a kind protector and father.

But this was only the beginning of a long series of

similar outrages. One of the members who had voted for the Siccardi law, was Cavaliere Derossi di Santarosa, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce. He belonged to the parish of San Carlo, directed by the Servites; the parish priest being Don Pittavino, a religious of great goodness of heart and unswerving fidelity to his sacred duty, who was at the time Superior and Provincial. Towards the end of July, Santarosa fell dangerously ill, and asked for the last Sacraments. He made his confession, but in order to receive the Holy Viaticum, he was requested by his parish priest to make a withdrawal of his participation in the Siccardi law, and thus repair in some way the scandal to which his conduct had given rise. Santarosa at first refused, but finally acquiesced. On the 5th of August, however, he 'died before' the Holy Viaticum could be taken to him. Parents, friends, ministers, senators, deputies (among whom was Count Camillo Cavour), journalists; and others, raised a great outcry against the intolerance of the clergy in general, and against Don Pittavino and the Archbishop in particular. A mob, composed of the scum of the population, assembled in the immense Piazza San Carlo, howling and shouting outside the Servite monastery, and finally broke into it. They threatened the life of the good priest; but somehow they did not carry out their threat. On August 7th, Don Pittavino and his brethren were ignominiously driven out of the city.

When these violent measures had been adopted against the Servite Fathers, Archbishop Franson's turn came. On the morrow of Santarosa's death, Count Ponza of San Martino and Cavaliere Alfonso La Marmora, Minister of War, went to Pianezza, where the Archbishop of Turin was staying to recruit his health after his enforced confinement, and being shown into his presence, called upon him to renounce the Archbishopric. His Grace resolutely refused, and added: "I should be a coward were I to resign my diocese at such a critical period for the Church." On the following day he was again placed under arrest,

and conducted by the carabinieri to the fortress at Fenestrelle.

He was kept a close prisoner until September 28th, when he was taken out of his confinement, only to be escorted to the frontier by a company of soldiers, for he had been condemned to perpetual banishment.

Having protested against this outrage, Archbishop Fransoni chose the city of Lyons as the place of his exile. The kindness of the civil and military authorities and of the clergy and laity of that town, did much to render his banishment less hard to bear.

From Lyons, he continued to govern his Archdiocese as well as he could under the circumstances, until his death, which took place in 1862. The enemies of this great ecclesiastic invented a host of lies to blacken his character, — even representing him as a conspirator against the Government and King; but all their efforts have been futile. History has proclaimed his innocence before the world; and while he has now a glorious page to his memory, there remains only indelible infamy for his persecutors."

On the 14th of the same month, soon after Santarosa's death, the Institute of St. Francis of Sales just escaped becoming the scene of a savage demonstration. In the evening of that day a horde of ruffians, after howling and hissing outside the House of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, attached to the Sanctuary of the "Consolata" (because, as it was claimed, they were accomplices of Archbishop Fransoni, and, therefore, dangerous to the Government), made up their minds to go to the Salesian Oratory under the same pretext, and create an uproar. The mob was already on the move in that direction, when one of the multitude, who knew Don Bosco and had on several occasions received tokens of his benevolence, raised his voice, and said: "Friends, just a word. It seems you are intent on going to Valdocco to shout against Don Bosco. Take my advice and don't go. Being a week-day you will only find there Don Bosco, his aged mother, and some poor boys he has sheltered. Instead of shouting,

'Down with Don Bosco,' we ought to shout, 'Long live Don Bosco,' because he loves and assists the children of the people. Let us leave him alone, then, and go elsewhere." These words had the effect of making the mob of roughs change their intentions, and, as they had not yet given vent to their feelings, they created a disturbance outside the Houses of the Dominicans and Barnabites.

The Oratory was exposed to another severe trial in those days. The enemy of the human race is aware that when discord reigns in a society, that society cannot endure. Having endeavoured in vain to destroy Don Bosco's work from its very commencement by the malevolence of prejudiced people, with calumnies and even threats, the evil one finally resorted to the means of disunion: Seeds of discord had been sown, with but little result, in previous years, but at the present time they developed in a most provoking manner among several of Don Bosco's assistants, who used to come from the town to teach the catechism classes, help in the schools and take part in the boys' recreation. Some of these, members of the clergy and laity, declared that the boys should take part in the public spectacles and festivities of those times, which, to say the least, were of a political nature and tended to excite the populace. Others sought to inflame the imagination of the boys, by expounding dangerous new theories and by advocating, in their presence, advanced opinions regarding religion and politics.' But Don Bosco, who saw things otherwise and took no part in politics, did not cease to impress upon these people that the politics of the Oratory consisted in keeping the poor children away from dangerous occasions and making good Christians of them, so that they might one day become useful members of society. Hence he never allowed them to take part in certain unbecoming demonstrations, and he strongly urged upon his colleagues never to instil into the boys' minds revolutionary opinions, which could only distract them from their duties.

In this connection the following incidents occurred.

One day the Marquis Roberto D'Azeglio came to see Don Bosco, and insisted that he should take part, at the head of his boys, in a public demonstration to be held in the principal square of the town.

"This Institution," replied Don Bosco, "is nothing but a poor family which lives on the charity of the people; and we should make ourselves ridiculous if we did such a thing as that which you propose."

"I wish you to take part in this festival," said the noble Marquis, "to show that your work is not opposed to modern institutions. Only good can come from your participation: donations will increase in number, and the Municipality and I will make a grant in favour of your work."

"I thank you for your kind offer, but it is my firm purpose to act solely in accordance with what I have in view, namely, the rescue and education of poor boys, without filling their heads with ideas which will do them more harm than good. By gathering together neglected boys, whom I desire to bring up good Christians and useful members of society, I clearly show that my work, far from being contrary to modern institutions, harmonises with them."

"But you are making a great mistake," rejoined D'Azeglio, "if you persist in your refusal. Your work will lose the favour of the people and will certainly fail. You must follow the times, my dear Don Bosco; and you must know that Institutes of yesterday and to-day should be adapted to the requirements of our own times."

"I am grateful to you for your advice," Don Bosco continued, "and I hope I shall profit by it. But I repeat that I cannot accept your invitation. Were it, however, an invitation of such a kind in which a priest could exercise his ministry, you would find me ready to sacrifice my life itself for that purpose; but I cannot possibly allow my children to take part in these political demonstrations, which, owing to the present unsettled times, generally end in wild disorders and only serve to excite the passions of the multitude."

Finding Don Bosco resolute, the nobleman left him, and from that day troubled him no more. But the proposal met with better success from other ecclesiastics, many of whom, unfortunately, allowed themselves to be drawn into the snare.

One day a gentleman invited Don Bosco to adopt a more modern secular dress for his walking-out attire, in place of the soutane, which, he alleged, was only suitable for indoor use. At this proposal Don Bosco smiled and said: "Try to induce Canon Anglesio, Don Cafasso and Don Borel to embrace this new fashion. When I see these three model priests attired in such apparel, perhaps I may then wish to imitate their example."

On a Sunday afternoon, about two o'clock, one of the boys was standing in a corner of the playground, reading the *Armonia* (a newspaper which at that time defended the cause of Religion and morals with praiseworthy zeal), when there entered the Oratory several persons, one of whom, a priest, carried a tri-coloured flag. He accosted the boy who was reading, and exclaiming, "This will never do, such papers ought to be abolished," snatched the paper out of the boy's hand and tore it to pieces. Having thus given vent to his feelings, he approached Don Bosco, and, producing a paper called the *Opinione*, said: "This is the paper to read, and this alone should be in the hands of all good citizens." Don Bosco was astounded at these proceedings, and as he did not wish for any further scandal in the presence of his boys, he entreated the excited visitor to reserve the matter for private consideration. "Private consideration, indeed!" replied the other, "it is time that these things should no longer be kept private and secret. Everything should be made as clear as the noonday sun." At this point, the bell called the boys to church, and Don Bosco hoped that, at the foot of the altar, the ardour of the innovator would calm down; but unfortunately such was not the case. This priest was the preacher for that afternoon, and when he ascended the pulpit he expatiated upon the

newfangled ideas of the day. For nearly half-an-hour the church echoed and re-echoed with such words as "Emancipation," "Independence," "Liberty." (It should be borne in mind that these were common expressions in the early days of the Piedmontese revolution which ended so disastrously for the Church). Some of the boys were shocked, whilst others, who knew no better, thought it a very laughable matter.

Don Bosco was very much grieved, and in the secret of his heart, said: "I did not expect this; the devil has been hard at work against me. My God! frustrate his evil designs and vouchsafe that my children be not scandalised." After the service Don Bosco intended to send for the priest and gently remonstrate with him; but before he could do so, the preacher had left the church, inviting colleagues and boys to follow him, and was on his way to the town at the head of a numerous following, waving his banner on high. He led them to the Monte dei Cappuccini, about two miles distant, and there held a meeting. A proposal was made and agreed to, not to enter the Oratory again unless invited and received as supporters of the new political movement. Although Don Bosco was deeply affected by this desertion, he did not lose heart; and, far from yielding to their pretensions, he informed the leaders that henceforth he would do without them, and forbade them to set foot within the Oratory again. To the boys, on the other hand, he said that if they desired to return again they must first come to an understanding with him. This measure succeeded beyond expectation. The prime movers of the disturbance took good care to keep away from the Oratory; but with few exceptions, the boys whom they had led away, asked to be received again, promising obedience and good conduct.

Some time after, Archbishop Fransoni, having been informed of these disturbances, wrote in words of encouragement to Don Bosco; and, wishing to prevent further disorder, at length by special decree gave him supreme authority over the three Oratories. This decree, dated March 21st, 1852, runs as follows: "Whilst we

congratulate you for having, by your industrious charity, established the excellent institution of St. Francis of Sales in Valdocco for poor boys, we wish to testify our goodwill to you by confirming you in the office of Superior of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. We desire, moreover, that the Oratories of St. Aloysius and of the Guardian Angels be affiliated to, and dependent on the same, in order that the work so happily begun may continue to prosper and increase to the greater honour of God and the salvation of souls. To this end we confer upon you all necessary faculties."

Owing to the desertion mentioned above, Don Bosco again found himself almost alone under the burden of the Oratory. On Sundays at a very early hour, he entered the confessional; about nine o'clock he celebrated Mass, during which he preached; he then conducted classes till noon. At one o'clock recreation began, at which his presence was necessary. Then followed catechism, vespers, benediction, recreation, and evening classes. In these various occupations Don Bosco had to rely solely on his own resources, except occasionally when one or two priests, in spare time, could come to his help. During this trying period, one of the few who remained faithful to Don Bosco and who continued to be his right hand was Don Borel. Although he was chaplain to the Refuge and served the State prisons, as well as having many other occupations in the town, this kindly and zealous priest found also time to visit the Oratory and assist Don Bosco. Not infrequently he denied himself needful rest in order to take his friend's place in the confessional and in the pulpit.

It was about this time that Don Bosco received a visit from two distinguished priests. Whilst staying in Turin, they had heard of the Oratory, and, wishing to make Don Bosco's acquaintance and to learn something of the origin and object of his work, they called upon him, arriving about two o'clock. The boys were being formed into classes for catechism, and Don Bosco, seeing that some of the teachers were absent, was thinking of a way out of the difficulty when the two

ecclesiastics entered the church. Without asking who they were, Don Bosco went up to them and said: "God has sent you here. Kindly assist me by superintending a class; afterwards we shall be able to confer together." Both willingly consented. Don Bosco, seeing that the two strangers entered with such readiness on the duties assigned them, took courage and asked the one to preach a short sermon, and the other to give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament,—to which request they acceded with great pleasure. When the service was over, Don Bosco was anxious to make the acquaintance of the two strangers. He was very much surprised to learn that one of them was the celebrated Don Anthony Rosmini Serbati, Founder of the Fathers of Charity, and the other, Canon Degaudenzi, widely known for his great zeal and charity, who was afterwards Bishop of Vigevano. They discoursed at length with Don Bosco, and from that time became two of his best friends.

But if the devil succeeded in sowing discord in the Oratory, and depriving Don Bosco of nearly all his first fellow-labourers, the good priest's work nevertheless continued to prosper and to be a great advantage to the children of the poor. Almighty God made use of him about this time to remove the cause of a grave disorder, and meanwhile supplied him with fresh reinforcements. By reason of the War of Independence, the Seminary of Turin had been closed some months back, and was now occupied by the soldiers. In consequence, the clerical students were obliged to return home or take up their abode in private families, not without danger of losing their vocations. To remedy this state of things, Don Bosco, relying on Divine Providence, came to the determination to set apart a portion of the Oratory for the reception of the ecclesiastical students of the Archdiocese. And at the cost of a great sacrifice he rented for that purpose the remaining apartments of Pinardi's house (more than half of which he already occupied), together with its outbuildings. This fresh acquisition brought with it an important

moral advantage, as Don Bosco was at length able to get rid of the lodgers, who were for the most part people of bad life, and who had not infrequently interfered with his work, giving him considerable trouble.

The new quarters were very soon occupied by a number of the clerical students; and Don Bosco arranged things in such a manner that their mode of life differed in no way from that of the Seminary. They lived and studied at the Oratory, and betook themselves morning and evening to lectures, which were held either at the homes of the professors, or in a room adjoining the Seminary, which was occupied by the soldiers as late as 1863. Canon Aloysius Anglesio, Superior of the *Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza*, and successor of the saintly Cottolengo, took part in the same work of charity. In this way the Cottolengo Institute and the Salesian Oratory took the place of the Seminary during a period so disastrous to the Church in Turin, and rendered a signal service to the Archdiocese. It must be mentioned that several of these young aspirants to the priesthood were powerful aids to Don Bosco in assisting and catechising the boys of the Oratory; and by their good example they contributed in no small way to animate some of them with the desire of entering the ecclesiastical state. During that period of severe trial, another great advantage accrued to the Oratory. After the war of 1848 one of our old pupils — then the father of a family and much attached to Don Bosco — returned to the Oratory. He had temporarily served in the regiment of the *Bersaglieri*, and naturally we named him "the Bersagliere." With Don Bosco's approval he formed a sort of battalion among the boys, and for the drill exercises two hundred of them were supplied with disused rifles, obtained from the Government, while the rest of the boys had to be content with sticks. The Bersagliere brought his bugle, and, after a short time, the Oratory had at its command a brigade whose military instruction would have fitted it for manœuvres with the National Guard. The boys threw themselves with enthusiasm

into these exercises, and would not attend to anything else. The militia thus formed was instrumental in maintaining order in all solemnities, even in the chapel, and attracted again many former pupils who had been in the war.

Mother Margaret (as Don Bosco's mother was called), with her usual thrift, reserved a plot of ground at the end of the enclosure as her kitchen-garden, where she cultivated parsley, leeks, carrots, sage and mint. On a certain feast-day, the Bersagliere mustered his little army, divided it into two regiments, and held a sham fight, giving orders, and deciding which side was to win and which to lose. Positions were taken up in front of the fence. He gave the order: "Forward, Charge!" Both regiments advanced shouting, fell back, charged, marched and counter-marched, feigning to use their weapons. Absence of powder and sound of firing were made up for by the joyous applause of the spectators, which was so noisy that it served also as a substitute for the cries of the wounded and the roll of artillery. The battle became so hot that those who were to have surrendered, forgetting the watchword, chased those who should have been the victors, and drove them into Mother Margaret's little garden. The fence was broken down and trampled on; the leeks and carrots became the dead and wounded. The general shouted and blew his horn, but the spectators' roars of laughter and clapping of hands prevented the boys from hearing, so that, when peace was at length restored, hardly any of the tiny garden remained except the site. Margaret, far from applauding, on seeing the devastation, turned to Don Bosco: "Look! look John, see what the Bersagliere has done: he has ruined my garden." Don Bosco replied, smiling: "Mother, what can you expect from boys?" The general, mortified at the want of discipline and disregard of authority, was overwhelmed with confusion, but a few words from Don Bosco reassured him; then drawing from his pocket a bag of sweets, Don Bosco gave them to him, telling him to distribute them to the combatants, conquered and conquerors.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Society of Mutual Succour. — The spiritual retreat at Giaveno. — The merchant and the monkey. — At the "Sagra di San Michele."

VERY soon after King Charles Albert had granted and added to the Statute Book the reforms of which mention was made in a previous chapter, several associations came into existence in Turin, apparently having some philanthropic purpose in view; but under the mantle of charity they aimed at perverting the ideas of the people in matters of religion and politics. One of these associations, known as the Workers' Union, revealed its anti-Christian character from its very beginning. Many good people, who joined it, realising very soon that a snare was laid to entrap them, promptly withdrew, but not a few, unfortunately, remained, and before long were as bad as their leaders.

In order to counteract the machinations of these ungodly associations, and hinder many of the boys and young men frequenting the Sunday Oratory and night schools from giving their names to dangerous societies, Don Bosco conceived the happy idea of founding an association among them for the material as well as the spiritual advantage of its members. He spoke to the older lads on the subject; he explained to them the aim, conditions, and advantages; and his idea was most favourably received. The association, under the title of the Society of Mutual Succour, was inaugurated on the 1st of July, 1850, and admirably realized the hopes of its founder. Thus Don Bosco became the originator of the innumerable Societies or Unions of Catholic workmen, which are to be found to-day in nearly all the towns of Italy.

In September of that same year, Don Bosco took his boys to Giaveno, a small town about twenty miles to the west of Turin, for a week's spiritual retreat in the Ecclesiastical College, which had been placed at his disposal for that purpose, the students of the college being then at home for vacation. All Don Bosco's boarders and a large number of those attending the three Oratories, who succeeded in obtaining permission from their parents or employers, took part in the retreat. With Don Murialdo at their head, they made the journey on foot, singing hymns and songs on their way. Arriving at Avigliana, they made a halt for dinner on the border of one of the beautiful lakes. It was on this occasion that the boys made the acquaintance of Don Alasonatti, a pious and benevolent priest, who, from that day conceived such an affection for Don Bosco and his Oratory, that not long afterwards he joined him in his noble work, and became a second father to the boys of the Oratory. The preachers of the retreat were Canon Arduino, Rector of the College of Giaveno, and Don Bosco. As there was room enough in the College for a large number of boys besides those of the Oratories, some of the boys of the town were also induced to take part in the pious exercises. This retreat, it is needless to say, was of great spiritual benefit to the lads.

During it Don Bosco frequently spent the time of recreation in the company of the boys, questioning them on the subject of the sermons and as to what struck them most. One morning he preached on Scandal. When the boys crowded round him during recreation in the afternoon, he began to ask them what he had been preaching about. The first that he questioned remained silent, unable to give an answer; the second did the same; so did the third, the fourth, the fifth, and so on. "Oh! dear me," exclaimed Don Bosco, seeing that no one appeared to have the least idea of what the sermon was about. "I must have been speaking in Greek, or else you were dreaming!" At length a little fellow was heard to say: "I remember

something." — "Well?" — "The story of the monkeys."

The anecdote in question, which Don Bosco had related by way of example, was as follows :

Once upon a time, a pedlar was overtaken by night in a wood far from any town or village. It was an evening in summer, the moon shone in the heavens and the stars twinkled, and the poor pedlar, weary and worn out after a hard day's tramping from one place to another, chose a sheltered spot near a huge tree, where he decided to pass the night. In order to shield his head from the falling dew, he opened his chest of wares and extracted one of the night-caps, of which he had a large stock, and putting it on his head, he lay down and was soon fast asleep. Now the branches of the tree under which the pedlar was taking his rest, were alive with monkeys — in fact, he was in monkey-land. The little creatures had watched the man below in attentive silence, and no sooner had he dropped off to sleep than one of their number quietly descended from his perch to the chest. Thrusting his paw inside, he drew out a night-cap, and without more ado, gravely donned his trophy and then returned to take up his position as formerly. One after another his brethren proceeded to do likewise, until there was not a night-cap left. The pedlar slept soundly on, and, for the first time in their lives, the inhabitants of monkey-land slept with night-caps on. Meantime the shades of night began to disperse, as the first signs of dawn, the arbingers of approaching day, made their appearance in the east. The sun had hardly risen above the horizon, when our friend the pedlar roused himself. Great indeed was his surprise and his annoyance on finding that all the night-caps had disappeared from his box. "Thieves have been here," he cried, "and ruined me!"

On a closer examination, however, he became doubtful as to his first conclusion, reflecting that had thieves been there they would have carried off everything. The poor man was sorely perplexed. At this point he heard a slight noise above, and on looking up he was dumb-

founded to see all the monkeys in night-caps. " Ah ! there are the villains," he cried ; and he at once began to try to frighten them by shouting at them and pelting them with stones, in order to make them give up the stolen goods ; but the monkeys ran from branch to branch, and seemed disinclined to gratify him. Time passed rapidly ; the poor pedlar had shouted himself hoarse and tired himself with his unusual exertions, yet all to no purpose. Mad with rage, and hardly knowing what he was doing, he seized his night-cap, which he had worn until then, and flung it on the ground in despair. At this sight, the monkeys felt themselves irresistibly impelled to do likewise, and a shower of night-caps descended to cheer the heart of the disconsolate pedlar. " Children act," Don Bosco had said in conclusion, " more or less in the same fashion as monkeys. When they see others doing what is right, they feel drawn to imitate them ; when what is evil, the attraction to do likewise is still greater."

Seeing that the boys found great difficulty in retaining the subject-matter of the sermons, Don Bosco took pains to have plenty of examples and anecdotes to serve as illustrations of what he wished to inculcate, hoping thereby to make an impression on the boys' imagination, and in this manner to pave the way to enlightening their minds and touching their hearts. And he succeeded beyond his expectations.

As a reward for their good behaviour, Don Bosco took his boys for a walk on the day after the close of the retreat, to the Sacra di San Michele, a famous abbey situated on one of the mountains surrounding Giaveno. The brass band of the town joined the party to enliven it with its music. The walk up the mountain was a pleasure of a most enjoyable kind. Don Bosco was mounted on a donkey, and surrounding him were the boys, who formed a kind of *cortège* to their leader ; they journeyed along in this fashion, singing and chatting gaily. Now and then they came to a halt ; the band struck up some lively music which echoed and re-echoed among the mountains, producing a most striking

effect. The birds, frightened at the unusual noise, flew wildly from tree to tree; the people in the fields below stopped at their work to listen, and the donkey, with ears erect, brayed long and loudly, as though to show that his musical ability was not inferior to that of the young musicians. In this way, the time slipped by unnoticed, and the holiday-makers arrived at length at the Sagra, and were most kindly received by the Fathers of Charity, who had charge of the celebrated Sanctuary. Then they visited the venerable pile of buildings, and heard from Don Bosco's lips, who acted as their *cicerone*, a sketch of its history and treasures.

At mid-day, Don Bosco and his flock were entertained to dinner by the Fathers of Charity, after which a concert, embracing a select programme of vocal and instrumental music, was improvised by the boys in honour of their benevolent hosts. The rest of the afternoon the good Fathers spent in the boys' company, taking them round the extensive and picturesque grounds, and showing them the wild beauty of the romantic spot, which was such as to excite wonder and admiration.

When evening set in they all assembled in the church for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. On leaving the church, the little party crowded round the Fathers of Charity to thank them once again for their kind hospitality and bid them *adieu*, and then took the road home in excellent spirits. There was no monotony about the homeward journey; sometimes they marched to the stirring music of the band, and at other times they sang; at times they prayed, or listened to Don Bosco relating some delightful stories, of which he seemed to have an inexhaustible supply.

The object of the writer in giving a somewhat detailed account of the above events, which left such a lasting impression on the minds of those lads who had the good fortune to take part in them, is to give some idea of how Don Bosco strove to render the practice of our holy religion agreeable to his children, having ever before his mind those words of the prophet David: "Serve ye the Lord with gladness."

CHAPTER XXX.

Acquisition of Pinardi's house. — A visible intervention of Divine Providence. — Master of the situation.

DON BOSCO, as we have stated already, rented the whole of Pinardi's dwelling, and although it entailed heavy expense, the outcome of such a course was of incalculable moral benefit to the Oratory. Still something more was required to establish the Oratory on a firm basis. Some of the old tenants, who had been obliged to remove so as to give place to Don Bosco, importuned Pinardi to let them return, offering him double the rent Don Bosco was paying; but the honest landlord could not be induced to consent.

He was pleased that his house was being used for such beneficent work as the Oratory, and on more than one occasion he had showed himself disposed to sell the place. Whether he believed that Don Bosco possessed a veritable treasure, or whether Pinardi stood in need of money, is not revealed; the fact is, however, that he asked nothing less than 80,000 lire, whereas the building could hardly have been worth more than 28,000. Don Bosco invariably replied that he could not think of paying such an exorbitant sum; he did not even venture to come to terms, as he thought this impossible under the circumstances. However, early in the year 1851, God clearly showed that it was His holy Will that Pinardi's house and grounds should serve as a permanent site for the Oratory, and this is how it came about.

One Sunday afternoon in February, 1851, as Don Bosco was standing at the chapel door, he was accosted by Pinardi.

" Well! Don Bosco, when do you intend to purchase my house?" abruptly asked the landlord, in a jocular tone of voice.

" Why, as soon as ever Signor Pinardi is willing to sell it to me for what it is worth," replied Don Bosco.

" That I am quite ready to do."

" What is your price, then?"

" Eighty thousand lire."

" We had better drop the matter at once, as that is impossible."

" Well, what will you offer?"

" I do not feel inclined to make any offer."

" Why not?"

" Because what you ask is an exorbitant sum; and my offer may give offence."

" No, no! I assure you it will not; so make your offer."

" Very well. The other day I had the place estimated by a builder — a friend of yours and mine — who declared that the property, in its present condition, is worth between 26,000 and 28,000 lire. I am willing to offer you 30,000 lire."

Although Don Bosco named his price, he felt that, with the difference of 50,000 lire, it was contrary to all reasonable expectation to hope to come to an agreement. His astonishment may, therefore, be imagined on his receiving the following reply from Pinardi:

" Will you add 500 lire as a present for my wife, and pay cash?"

" Yes," immediately replied Don Bosco.

" And when would you be willing to settle this account?"

" Whenever you please."

" Then let us choose to-morrow fortnight. Whoever retracts pays 100,000 lire forfeit."

Don Bosco agreed, and thus the bargain was closed.

But a difficulty—a very serious difficulty—remained: How was he to get together 30,000 lire in such a short space of time? He and his mother had long ago disposed of what little property they possessed at Becchi on be-

half of the children under their care, and now they had nothing to fall back on; they found it an up-hill struggle to keep the Oratory going as it was. But God, who had blessed Don Bosco's work from its very beginning, showed, by a visible intervention of His Divine Providence on this occasion, that it was pleasing in His sight.

Pinardi had hardly gone, when Don Cafasso, one of Don Bosco's best friends and a generous benefactor of his work, entered the house. It was quite unusual for him to come to the Oratory on Sundays; the duties attached to the rectorship of St. Francis of Assisi's Church, which office he filled, keeping him fully occupied on those days. On this particular occasion he went at once in search of Don Bosco, and having found him, said, "I am here to give you news which, I am sure, will please you. A benevolent lady (Countess Ricardi) has entrusted me with 10,000 lire, which I am to hand over to you to be used as you think best, for the greater glory of God."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Don Bosco, "this is certainly providential," and then he related to his visitor how, only a few minutes ago, he had consented to purchase Pinardi's house, and how he had already begun to rack his brains as to where he should find the large sum required for that purpose. The two priests could not fail to see the hand of God in the affair, and they were very hopeful in consequence.

The following day a Rosminian Father arrived in Turin with the object of investing a trust-fund of 20,000 lire. Being well acquainted with Don Bosco, he thought of going to consult him about the matter, and to Don Bosco he accordingly went. "God has certainly sent you to me," declared Don Bosco, on learning the object of his friend's visit; and having informed him of the agreement made on the previous day, he proposed to the visitor to entrust the sum of money to him, promising in return a fair yearly interest. The Rosminian Father, who had been commissioned to invest this money in charity, as well as to get a fair

interest, acquiesced. Thus in less than twenty-four hours after the contract had been made, Don Bosco was in possession of 30,000 lire. Only 500 lire more, with costs, were required, and this expense was undertaken by Signor Joseph Cotta, in whose bank the transfer of Pinardi's property to Don Bosco was made on the 19th of February, 1851.

This fresh proof of God's loving care for Don Bosco's work, made the future founder of the Salesian Society confident that it was pleasing to God, and convinced him that its prosperity was assured with so almighty and bountiful a Protector. And there is no doubt that in this unlimited confidence, in this rooted conviction which held possession of Don Bosco, and which, as time went on, only became more deeply rooted, is to be found one of the chief causes of his indefatigable activity. Many there are who have often been tempted to accuse him of rashness, but the success which has invariably attended his undertakings has compelled them instead to call him a *providential man*. And with reason.

Another acquisition of great moral importance was made a short time after. This was the purchase of the "Gardener's Tavern," which stood close to the Oratory and was separated from it by only a low wall. This place was the resort of all the bad characters of the neighbourhood, and such was the uproar they created, that the sacred functions in the chapel had sometimes to be suspended. In order to efface the bad impression the disturbance at the public-house might have on his boys, Don Bosco would often remind them of the words of the Gospel: "The world shall rejoice: and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

It being absolutely necessary for the peace and tranquillity of the Oratory to do away with the disreputable inn, Don Bosco set himself to discover the best means of doing this, as soon as he had settled matters with Pinardi. He offered to buy the place, but his offer was refused by the landlady, who told him

she had no intention whatever of parting with her property. He next proposed to rent the whole building, but here again the landlady declined, because the publican, who had fitted out the inn at his own expense, declared that he would claim heavy damages from her, on the plea that the furniture, on which he had spent a large sum, would be useless to him if he were obliged to remove it. Nothing daunted, Don Bosco followed the only course open to him, that of inducing the inn-keeper to let him buy up the furniture and fittings of the public-house. This he succeeded in doing; but he had to pay preposterous prices for every article of furniture he purchased. He then had no difficulty in getting a lease of the place for a certain period, and as soon as it came into his hands, he let it to respectable people.

In this way a second stronghold of the devil was destroyed, and the Oratory more firmly established. To-day, in those very places where Almighty God was so often insulted, there stand two churches, one dedicated to St. Francis of Sales, and the other to Our Lady, Help of Christians, wherein humble worshippers praise and glorify their Creator.

CHAPTER XXXI.

*The Church of St. Francis of Sales.—A prophecy?
—King Victor Emmanuel's gift.—The first Decade.*

WHEN the purchase of Pinardi's house put an end to the former inconvenience, and when the inn adjoining had been done away with, the time had come to think of building a new church which should be less unworthy as a place of worship, and better suited to the growing needs of the congregation. The old chapel had been somewhat enlarged by opening into it some small rooms; nevertheless it remained cramped and unsuitable. At its entrance were two steps to descend, and this difference in the level allowed the overflow of rain to come in, a serious drawback in the winter and rainy season. Owing to the low ceiling and to insufficient ventilation, it was suffocating in summer, and it was no wonder that many stayed away. There were few feast-days upon which one at least of the boys was not seized with faintness. Thus, it was not only useful but necessary to build a large church which would be more healthy and more suitable for its purpose.

Only a few days after Don Bosco had purchased Pinardi's house, he said to his mother: "I have a great desire to raise up a fine church in honour of St. Francis of Sales."

"But where will you find the money?" asked Mother Margaret. "Nothing remains of our own, as you know very well. All went long ago in feeding and clothing these little ones. Therefore, think twice before you embark on so costly an undertaking, John, and come to a clear understanding with Almighty God."

"Yes, that is what we shall do. And you, mother, if you had the money, would you give it for this purpose?"

"Surely you know how gladly I should!" replied Margaret.

"God, who is much more kind and generous than yourself," continued Don Bosco, "has stores of wealth sufficient for the whole world, and we may hope that, when something so greatly redounding to His glory is in question, He will send money in due season."

Filled with this confidence, Don Bosco one day sent for the architect, Cavaliere Blachier, and, showing him the ground intended for the site of the church, begged him to draw the plans for it. About the same time, on meeting a contractor named Bocca, he asked him whether he could undertake the work.

"Willingly," answered Bocca.

"But," added Don Bosco, "I warn you I may not be always punctual with the payments."

"In that case, we should proceed more slowly with the work."

"Oh, no; I want the church to be built as fast as possible, so that it may be completed within a year."

"Well, we might also hurry on the work," said the contractor.

"Then, let us begin," Don Bosco finally said. "I have something in hand. Divine Providence will send the rest in good time."

In the spring of 1851, the ground was cleared; and in the early summer the foundations were being laid.

An incident related by several of the early Oratory boys may here be recorded, without attempting to give an opinion as to its nature.

In 1846, when Pinardi's coach-house was transformed into a chapel, it was necessary to lower the level of the floor more than three feet, in order that no one should strike his head against the ceiling. The excavated earth was heaped up at the north-west side of the house. The boys liked the mound for a place to jump upon. When they played at soldiers, they carried the heights, or

descended them, according as they were victors or vanquished, in their mimic war.

On one of the feasts during the summer of that year, Don Bosco himself climbed up the mound, and, surrounded by many of the children, he made them sing a hymn. Suddenly, he called for silence, and said to them: "My dear children, I must tell you what has just occurred to me. *Sooner or later, in this very place where we are now, the altar of a church will stand, and you will approach it and receive Holy Communion. Near this altar you will sing the praises of our Lord.*" Five years afterwards the church was begun, and the high altar was placed at the very spot indicated by Don Bosco.

The work advanced apace, and in a few months (on the 21st of July) the solemn blessing and laying of the corner-stone took place. Over six hundred of the Oratory boys, and as many from outside, had carried the news everywhere through the city, with the result that such a crowd collected on the spot as had never before been seen in that neighbourhood.

The stone would certainly have been blessed by the Archbishop of Turin, who held Don Bosco in the greatest esteem and affection, had it not been for the troubled times. As I have already recorded, the intrepid Prelate had been obliged to go into exile, in August, 1850, and was now living in Lyons. So Canon Moreno, Diocesan Administrator, came to perform the blessing ceremony, and the actual laying of the stone was done by Mr. Joseph Cotta, the banker, a great benefactor of Don Bosco's undertakings and a friend of the poor. A complete record of the proceedings, with some money, medals, and other memorials, were placed in the stone itself.

The celebrated Don Barrera, moved by the sight of the vast crowds, and edified by the great number of priests present, as well as by the assembly of so many of the ladies and gentlemen of Turin, took a position upon some rising ground, and although without any preparation, spoke with extraordinary eloquence. To-

wards the end of his discourse, he said: "Brethren, there is a double significance in the stone that has just been laid and blessed. As the grain of mustard seed, it will grow into a mystic tree, and many children, like the birds of the air in the Gospel, will settle therein. The stone stands also for the general work of the Oratories, which is founded on Faith and in the Charity of Christ. This work will form a solid mass against which the foes of Religion and the spirits of darkness will strive in vain." He then compared the present time to a hurricane which threatens alike cities and hamlets with destruction. Every living creature, in fear and trepidation, seeks shelter and safety. "Our days are evil days, and especially for the young. But here is a church, like a sheltering tree, which will strike deep root, and the tempest shall not have power to uproot it. In the shade of this tree, and within the walls of this church, thousands of young souls will find shelter and protection against the errors that are scattered broadcast to-day, by impious men and sordid writers, to the destruction of the young. I already seem to see, flocking to this spot, like startled birds, a host of children seeking safety. Here they will find not only shelter and defenders, but also food for their souls and food for their bodies. Let it be your task, my brethren, so to act that this tree shall soon grow to giant proportions, spreading its branches over the whole city, to be the happy refuge of thousands of poor, who, but for its friendly shelter, would be left to wander about our streets and squares, exposed to the darkest influences, and in imminent danger of becoming their own mortal enemies, the disgrace of their families, and the scourges of society. What grander work could you engage in for Church or State? On the good or evil training of youth depends the life or death of the family, the welfare of the realm and of the world." In conclusion, the preacher uttered this touching prayer: "And Thou, O God," he pleaded, "God and Saviour, symbolized by the corner-stone, protect with the strength of Thine arm the work of these Oratories. Is it

reviled by the impious? Thou shalt bless it. Hated? But Thou shalt hold it dear as the pupil of Thine eye. Has it not every claim to Thy love? It gathers together, teaches, educates the little children, who, in Thy mortal life were the delight of Thy Heart. They are, and they will ever be, the objects of Thy tender Love, lambs of Thy flock, choicest flowers of the garden of Thy Church. Under Thy protection will its seed, borne by the winds of Thy grace, spread everywhere; and though the pillars which sustain the firmament should fall, yet this great work will not cease and disappear from the face of the earth."

These words had a wonderful effect. The preacher appears, indeed, to have been illuminated by a heavenly light, a gift of prophecy. His predictions have been fulfilled already; and continue to experience a wonderful realisation.

The church, however, had risen but a few feet above the ground when Don Bosco's funds became exhausted. With the help of several well-wishers, he had collected thirty-five thousand lire, but this sum had melted like ice before the sun. It now became necessary to appeal to the public. Peter Losanna, Bishop of Biella, invited the parish priests of his diocese to further the work of the Oratory. His pastoral letter ran :

"The distinguished and devout priest, Don Bosco, animated by a truly evangelical charity, has been in the habit of collecting together on Sundays and holidays all the homeless boys he met with, in the large and populous district between Borgo Dora and Martinetto. Sometimes he has fed them; sometimes he has given them secular as well as religious instruction.

"His zeal has been such that the original chapel has become too small to contain more than a third of the six hundred who flock there. He has embarked upon the arduous undertaking of building a church of a size adapted to his pious plans. But for this, he is obliged to have recourse to the charity of the Faithful. With special confidence, he pleaded for my help; for, out of

the six hundred boys attending the Oratory, more than two hundred are from the diocese of Biella; and many of these are lodged and fed in his own house, and clothed at his expense. There also they learn a trade. Thus, not only as a matter of charity, but also of justice, I beg your Reverence to make known to your good parishioners the merit of this work; to bring its needs before the notice of those with means, and to set apart a Sunday or Holyday upon which a collection may be made . . .

“ In the earnest hope that the first collection will be one to bring consolation and assistance to this worthy priest, while at the same time it will give a proof of the appreciation of the people of this diocese for a most pious, useful, and even necessary undertaking, I desire to renew the expression of my deepest esteem and affection . . .

“ ✠ PETER, *Bishop of Biella.*

“ Biella, September 13th, 1851.”

This appeal brought in a sum of one thousand lire, but that was only a few drops of water in a parched land. Some other method of raising funds had to be found. It was then that Don Bosco thought of his first lottery. A committee for its promotion, composed of a number of benevolent ladies and gentlemen, was elected. Its members sought for gifts on all sides. His Holiness Pius IX, King Victor Emmanuel, the Queen-Mother, Queen Adelaide, the Duke and Duchess of Genoa, the Court and the nobility of Turin, made rich presents. The Government granted free postage for circulars, letters and parcels for the lottery. Three thousand two-hundred and fifty-one prizes were thus collected. The Municipality of Turin lent a large hall in which these gifts were exhibited. In consequence of their great value, leave was given to offer for sale a hundred thousand tickets at fifty centesimi each. These tickets were sent to all parts of Italy, and the clergy and laity showed great zeal in distributing them and forwarding the money to Don Bosco. Many tickets were, however,

lost; and money was received for only forty-four thousand of them — a considerable sum; however, Don Bosco in his generosity, decided to divide it with the Cottolengo Institute, then under the management of Canon Anglesio.

Providence rewarded Don Bosco very soon for this fraternal charity, in the following manner. A month before the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone, he had presented a petition to the King, in which he returned thanks for the royal favour shown towards the boys of the Oratory, gave an account of the church then building, asked his Majesty to lay the foundation-stone, and, reminding the King of his past support, and of the charities of his royal ancestors, besought him to continue his favours towards the Salesian Institute. In a short time Don Bosco received a most important letter from the Secretary of State, and before the church was finished, the gift of ten thousand lire, with other valuable offerings. Part of the letter ran thus:

“ His Majesty learns with real satisfaction that your Reverence and other pious persons receive boys into the Oratory, and there give them a moral and religious training.

Unable, on account of the multiplicity of his engagements, to be present on the occasion of the laying of the foundation-stone, the King is nevertheless anxious to aid in the matter of the new church, whenever need may be.

It is a pleasure to me to let your Reverence know how very favourably his Majesty regards your Institutes; and I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without expressing my own admiration for the zeal and good management with which they are carried on.

I am, with deep respect,

Your Reverence's devoted servant,

DE ANDREIS.”

On the eight of December of this same year, occurred the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Oratory. On the previous Sunday, Don Bosco recalled that fact in affectionate terms to the boys. He would have liked to keep the anniversary with great solemnity, but the church was not yet finished. He therefore confined himself to recommending his pupils to offer thanks to Our Lady with great fervour for her maternal protection. He recalled the chief of the signal favours of which they had been the recipients during the past ten years; and he recommended all, as a sign of their filial gratitude, to approach the Holy Sacraments in honour of the Blessed Virgin, on her feast. This advice was followed.

Under the *ægis* of the Queen of Heaven, the tenth year was closed, and a new decade begun. The first may be called a period of birth and infancy; the second, a period of youth and development.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The second Decade.—The explosion of the powder magazine. — The heroism of Sergeant Sacchi. — Various occurrences. — Gabriel Fassio. — Reflections.

THE first decade of this history is now closed. It comprised the origin and the happy, earliest undertakings of the Oratory. We now enter the second decade, which saw the consolidation of the work. If the events until this period were of singular importance, those about to be recounted will not prove of less moment. The writer therefore hopes, in the following chapters, to entertain his readers, as heretofore, with what is both agreeable and edifying, thereby promoting the glory of God.

In 1852, a terrible calamity, like a "bolt from the blue," befell the city of Turin. It needed only a little more and Turin would have been but a heap of ruins and the tomb of its inhabitants. In the centre of the Dora suburb, near the cemetery of St. Peter in Chains, were the powder-mills and three powder magazines. At the time, more than two thousand pounds of blasting and ordinary powder were stored there. Thus, this suburb held within its bosom an enemy more formidable than a horde of barbarians intent on pillage and destruction.

It was a quarter to twelve on the 26th of April, when, owing to a flaw in one of the machines, a spark was thrown into a laboratory.

In less time than it takes to recount it, the buildings were in flames, which soon spread to a small reservoir where powder was kept. This exploded and spread the

sparks to the second magazine, which also exploded with a tremendous report, shaking the whole town. Doors flew open and window-panes were smashed. The factory was blown into the air, the surrounding houses became a heap of ruins; two rows of long-standing mulberry trees were curiously snapped off half way down their trunks; and stones, nails, scraps of iron flew in all directions. Burning timbers flew through the air and fell upon roofs, into the streets and squares, like the projectiles of some immense gun, threatening life and limb. At over four hundred yards' distance, fell blocks of stone, weighing many hundredweights each. Thirty men employed in the powder factories and stores were either blown to pieces, burnt to death, or buried beneath the ruins. In the meantime, a dense cloud of smoke, like a funeral pall, spread over Turin, shutting out the light of the sun, and terrifying everybody. It seemed as if the end of the world had come. People were filled with panic, and fled without caring whither they went. Little by little, the nature of the disaster became known; and many from the centre of the city turned their steps towards the powder-factory; but when they approached they were driven back by the steam from the lime, or restrained by the fear of further and more serious disasters. A certain number of the bravest pushed their way to the scene of devastation, in company with the soldiers, the city authorities, and King Victor Emmanuel himself. Among this company was Don Bosco.

At the moment of the first explosion, he happened to be in the hall where the prizes for the lottery (of which I have spoken) were being exhibited. When the crash came which shook all the buildings, Don Bosco went out into the street, in order to ascertain what had happened. Just then the second explosion occurred, and a moment later a sack of corn fell only a foot or two away. It was a narrow escape. The idea struck him immediately that perhaps the powder-factory (which was not much more than five hundred yards away from the Oratory), had caught fire. He went

home at once, fearing for his boys; but he found the house empty, all the inmates having fled into the neighbouring fields and meadows. Then, without loss of time, or thought of peril, he flew to the ill-fated spot, hoping to render priestly assistance to some unfortunate victim. On the way, he met his mother, who endeavoured to dissuade him, but in vain. Reaching the place, he could hardly get across the vast ruins. What a heartrending sight! Fragments of bodies, legs and arms lay scattered about. Pitiful cries still rose from the smoking masses of masonry, and, most fearful of all, there was the danger of a third explosion, which must have made a charnel of the whole district, and even beyond it. The two powder magazines that had scattered so much ruin and death, had contained but a few hundreds pounds of explosives. At a distance of some yards only, stood another store in which there were over a hundred and forty thousand pounds of powder. If this awful volcano blew up, not only the Dora suburb, but a great part of Turin must crumble to dust; and the danger was close at hand. Now, who was there to save the city? The Blessed Virgin saved it, through one of her servants whose name it is but just that the writer should hand down to posterity.

Sergeant Paul Sacchi, of Voghera, a foreman in the works, escaped as if by miracle from the general destruction. Twice the violence of the explosions flung him off his feet, and he fell as if dead; he managed, however, to get up again, and with his head, face and hands all scorched, and blood flowing freely from his ears, which were deafened by the noise, in the midst of indescribable confusion, the sobs and cries of desperation, he gave proof of such courage and forethought as is above all praise. When he had recovered from the shock of the explosions, he perceived that a third magazine had still to be saved, and that the fire had caught some canvas lying near. He did not fly from the danger of immediate death, but rather rushed to meet it. He pulled away the canvas, and stood his

ground intrepidly, calling out for helpers. His heroism inspired some of the townspeople to join him. Some soldiers and firemen then followed, and soon settled down to their perilous task. Some extinguished the flames that broke out here and there; others carried the eight hundred barrels of powder then in the magazine, into a place of safety. All this, in the existing state of panic, lasted until four in the afternoon. The work, however, was carried through successfully. Thus was Turin saved in that day of anguish, by the heroism of one man, who, in the terrible confusion, turned for help to the heavenly Patroness of the city. Every Saturday afterwards, as long as he lived, he would be seen on his knees before the altar of the "Mother of Consolation," accomplishing his vow of thanksgiving not only for his having escaped with his life, but also for his having been the means of saving his fellows. This simple and honest man was first honoured and praised by all ranks in Turinese society; but before long he had to drink of the bitter cup of ingratitude. According to some, he was guilty of the crime of attributing his own heroism to the Blessed Virgin. Sarcasm, derision, and calumny were launched against him by those to whom the name of God and of His holy Mother are unwelcome. The Government, however, awarded him the gold medal; the National Guard presented him with a commemorative wreath, and the Municipal Council conferred the Freedom of the City upon him; it also gave his name to one of the streets of the town, and granted him a life-annuity of twelve hundred lire. It is to be hoped that some day a monument will be raised to Sacchi in Turin, which shall be worthy of his courage and piety.

As for Don Bosco, he had the consolation of giving the last absolution to a poor workman who was disinterred from among the ruins with a broken thigh and with many other injuries all over his body. If he was not allowed to help in the manual work himself, yet Don Bosco's hat was able to render important service. In the extreme moment of danger, there was urgent

need of water to stop the spread of the fire among the cloths which lay upon the powder barrels. But there was no vessel in which to carry water, and Sacchi therefore asked for Don Bosco's hat for the purpose. It answered very well until the arrival of the firemen and their buckets. The valiant sergeant often used to recall this episode, much to his own amusement and that of his hearers.

It has been generally considered that the safety of Turin from further disasters was due to the special protection of Heaven. The House of Divine Providence (otherwise called the Cottolengo Institute), was one of those signally favoured. One part of this House was situated not more than a hundred yards from the powder-magazine. Consequently, the terrible explosion destroyed roofs, walls and ceilings. Furniture, wardrobes and boxes were turned upside down. Tools and implements of every sort were flung here and there with fearful uproar. Doors and gateways were forced open. On all sides, posts, beams, broken iron, stones, bricks, and fragments of all sorts fell like rain. Nevertheless, with all this destruction, with all these murderous missiles, in spite of so many dangers to human life, not one was hurt out of the thousand and three hundred persons belonging to the Institute. There were sick, blind, cripples, lunatics and infants; and not one among them all had even a scratch or a bruise. Many seemed to see death passing under their very eyes, but none were struck down. Over the bed of a sick man the ceiling gave way, but fell at his feet. In another place the wall was shaken, but it remained leaning, as if suspended in mid-air, and gave time for the bed, with its occupant, to be moved away. The roof of the children's nursery was destroyed and many tiles fell in, but not one upon cot or cradle. In the infirmary of the female lunatics there were more than twenty beds, and, for about three years, it had never once been without invalids, especially at mid-day. That morning, however, as if in anticipation of what was about to happen, everyone was up, and in the next room. Presently the explosion occurred,

and a long, thick beam was flung through the roof into the middle of the infirmary. It dragged down with it the greater part of the ceiling, flattening everything, even the iron bedsteads. But for once the beds were empty!

The most comforting, yet inexplicable facts, and those that prove most clearly the undoubted protection of Our Blessed Lady, are those that regard her pictures. In every room, cupboards, wardrobes, even wainscoting, were torn from the walls and flung into a heap by the violence of the shock; but the pictures of the Blessed Virgin still hung in their places. In the Infirmary known as "St. Teresa's," a statue of Our Lady, under a glass cover, was fixed some feet from the ground. Both fell to the pavement, yet statue and cover remained absolutely intact. In the orphan's long dormitory, the windows looking towards the powder-factory had been bricked up. When the calamity occurred, every window was broken in, except two where pictures of the Blessed Virgin were hanging. In a subterranean passage joining two parts of the building, a statue of Our Lady stood in a niche about nine feet from the ground. At the instant of the explosion, when the whole of the neighbouring wall was thrown to the ground, the statue appeared as if it had slowly descended from its place instead of being flung down. In the private Oratory, known as the "Sanctuary," — a spot formerly very dear to the saintly Cottolengo, — there were hung against the wall three hundred framed pictures of different sizes. They represented the world's most celebrated sanctuaries of the Mother of Jesus. The Oratory with this collection stood facing the powder-mills, and therefore exposed to all the force of the shock, from which it had, moreover, no shelter. When the tremendous explosion took place, a large, heavy press was thrown down in the room behind the sanctuary (which was protected by its wall); the ceiling was partly destroyed and the door shattered, the iron bar which closed it being twisted like cord. But the pictures in the sanctuary remained in their places with their glasses

perfectly whole. In the Chapel of the Holy Rosary (in the Community church), there was a statue of Our Lady in its niche. Six yards away, the great arch supporting the cupola of the church was split. The organ, which stood at the back of a tribune, was thrown down and fell a few paces from the statue. The crystal-studded frame which closed the niche was burst open, but the statue remained firm, and only one ornamental pendant fell.

But a still more striking incident must be related.

In the entrance-hall of the Cottolengo Institute, near the two doors that open on to the road, there stood, as there stands to-day, attached to a thin wooden board, a most artistic picture of Our Lady of Consolation. Then, as now, the picture was protected by a sheet of glass and encircled by a wreath of flowers, silver hearts, and other ornaments. It was usual for all who passed by the image to say an *Ave Maria*. This hall, on the inner side leading to the courtyard below, faced the powder-mill; and between the two, nothing intervened to break the shock. Consequently, the explosion of the two magazines violently burst open even locked doors in the Institute; it scattered in fragments more than ten thousand of the window-panes, and flung them in a heap along with the blinds and curtains. In the whole of the Via Doragrossa and in other streets nearly half a mile away, not a pane remained whole in any window. A sort of whirlwind of projectiles of all kinds had swept round the hall in question. High, heavy cupboards which had stood near the picture were broken up. The strong walnut door leading into the lane was split up the middle and its iron chain snapped. Part of the wall close to where the picture hung was shattered, but, wonderful to relate, this picture alone remained in place, with all its ornaments and glass untouched. The beautiful picture of the heavenly Queen seemed to say to all her terrified children: "I am here, I, your Mother. Fear not! I will be your shield and your defence."

Speaking candidly, this network of facts, however carefully studied, cannot be accounted for by natural

laws. The hand of God was certainly here, and the protection of Our Lady, who was pleased thus to show that she watches over those who seek her aid. Further proof may be had from the narrative of Canon Aloysius Anglesio, who at that time had been ten years Superior of the Cottolengo Institute. Here it is, in his own words:

“Among all the buildings which flanked both sides of the powder-mills, the nearest of all to the explosion was “Nazareth House.” It consisted of a ground-floor and one storey above, and stood hardly eighty yards away. On the ground floor there was accommodation for twenty lunatics, while on the upper floor there were thirty chronic cases, and some invalid children. All the timbers of the roof rested on one support which rose in the middle of the room. Above this support and passing through the roof, was another pillar, on which stood the statue of Our Lady.

The statue was over three feet high, hollow inside and composed of plaster of Paris; round the head there was a wide crown of twelve stars. It seemed as though it stood as a sentinel over the Institute, if not to force nature to obedience, at least to regulate the direction and the limits of the disaster. The explosion occurred so close to it that a continuous rain of missiles of every sort and of every weight, poured upon and around the house. The column bears the marks of the missiles, but the Blessed Virgin's statue moved only an inch upon its pedestal, while remaining erect and uninjured, with the crown safe upon its head! How is it possible, then, to fail to recognise, and give thanks to our faithful guardian and loving defender, the Blessed Virgin? The roof was battered in and partly destroyed. The weight of the *débris* broke the beams, which, along with the roofing tiles, fell into the room where all the infants were gathered together. Some were in their little beds or cots, others were sitting down or moving about. One would have thought that none, or very few, would escape from the ruins. This was the impression of all those who had felt the shock and seen its results. They

rushed to the help of the Sister infirmarian, hoping to aid in the rescue of some of the little creatures. But, thanks to the watchful Mother, who looked down upon them from above, not one was forgotten in Her loving care. The more active of the little boys, at the first shock, rushed out of doors; those who remained behind or who were in bed, by some means or another were protected. They were all found uninjured, safe and sound. One of them had been thrown on the floor with his cot above him; but this somersault provided him with a defence against the falling tiles and the rubbish which would have buried him. It was most touching, in the midst of the cries and groans, to hear these little creatures calling out for protection to their heavenly Mother!" With these words ends the description given by Canon Anglesio.

Now these signal wonders, and, above all, that of the statue standing alone, appeared so strange and beyond the order of nature, that even Jews, whose curiosity drew them to the spot, declared that it was clearly a case of the miraculous. The day following the catastrophe, a man walked round the ruins, and gave much scandal in blaspheming God, on account of the disaster. But when he came in front of this fragile statue and saw it standing calmly above, the light crown around the head, he held his peace. For some time he stared at it, saying at last, "There must have been some devil at work here. That could not have remained in place by natural means!" We do not agree with the view of this poor wretch, but would rather say that, if he could, the devil would destroy not only the images of the Blessed Virgin, but also Her throne in Heaven. Therefore, it is beyond a doubt that this fragile statue, in such a spot, and surrounded by ruins, was a visible sign of the invisible presence of Our Lady, lovingly watching over her children, and over Turin also — saving the city from total destruction.

Nor did the Blessed Virgin show her watchful care of Turin only by the facts recounted. In other pious places exposed to the same imminent peril, she gave

proof of her maternal solicitude. In the Magdalen Convent, about four hundred yards from the powder-mills; in the Hospital of St. Philomena, and in the *Conservatorio* (all three Institutes founded by the Marchioness Barolo), in which were fully five hundred inmates, counting nuns, girls and sick people, no one was injured, although considerable damage was done to the building by the flying missiles. In the Magdalen Convent, amongst other things, a block of masonry fell, weighing several hundredweight.

To this day a great chest is shown there, containing stones, pieces of iron and other things, which fell like hail upon the building, and reached even the rooms and passages. There were more than a hundred persons in the Convent, yet not one of them was touched. And in the infirmary there were two invalid Sisters who, for a length of time, had never left their beds. But that morning they asked leave to get up and go out to the garden for a little air. The Superioress, contrary to her custom, granted the permission. Hardly had they gone out, when an enormous beam struck the roof of the infirmary and broke through it with such force that it completely flattened the beds of the two Sisters, on which it fell. Then, when some of the inmates, to their deep regret, thought they would be compelled to break their cloister rule and go out in search of a safer dwelling, they saw a white dove fly towards the summit of the roof of their convent, and alight there. They looked upon this as a happy omen, and said: "If the dove flies away, we shall go too; but if it stays, we shall remain." The bird stayed there persistently till four o'clock in the afternoon, when a Government messenger came to announce that all danger of further explosions was past.

At the Oratory, a burning timber fell a few steps from Don Bosco's little home, which, as it was badly built, would have been rapidly consumed, had not the hand of God prevented the brand from falling on it. The new church was scarcely dry, and the scaffolding had only just been removed. It might easily have crumbled

or have been cracked. But by the Providence of God, although nearly ready to be consecrated, the church had, as yet, neither doors nor windows. Thus, being open on all sides, it was not so severely shaken, and escaped altogether without damage. The dwellings suffered a good deal. They were badly cracked. Needless to say, not a pane of glass remained. Many of the window-frames fell to pieces on being violently burst open and beaten against the walls. The northern entrance-door to the chapel, perhaps because the wood had swollen with the winter's damp, or perhaps because of the rusty iron work, had remained closed for several months; but the shock not only opened the door, but tore it from its hinges and flung it into the middle of the chapel. The same thing happened in the case of a ground-floor room called "the wine cellar." Here also, the door was torn from the wall, and for some days the boys might have gone in freely to drink Mother Margaret's wine — if only there had been any!

Another matter which had something special and supernatural about it, was this: One of the boarders, Gabriel Fassio, about thirteen years of age, a boy of admirable behaviour and edifying piety, had just begun his apprenticeship. Don Bosco had a great regard for him and often pointed him out as a model for the others. The year before the terrible explosion, the boy fell ill and was soon at death's door. After he had received the last Sacraments, as if inspired, he cried out repeatedly: "Woe to Turin." Some of his companions who were with him, asked, "For what reason?" "Because a great disaster threatens." "What disaster?" "A fearful earthquake." "When will it come?" "In a year. Oh, woe to Turin on the twenty-sixth of April!" "What ought we to do?" "Pray to St. Aloysius Gonzaga to protect the Oratory and those that live in it."

Soon after, he died an edifying death in the Cottolengo Hospital. Considering his rare holiness, and the accent, which seemed inspired, with which he pronounced the words, the boys of the House were

profoundly impressed, and they followed his advice. It was then, at their request, that the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father in honour of St. Aloysius, and the invocation: "From all evil, deliver us, O Lord," were added to the usual morning and evening prayers. They are still said to this day.

The loss of property caused by the explosion was enormous. Many factories round about were so much injured that it was necessary to pull them down before any reconstruction could be done. The Government appointed a Commission to examine the houses that had suffered the most, and to make over a sum when necessary to carry out the restorations. To the Oratory, after visiting it, the Commission granted three hundred lire — a proof of the small damage sustained.

It is desirable to make one observation before closing this chapter. After the two explosions, and the announcement that a third still more terrible explosion might be expected, many of the inhabitants of the houses round about decided to come into the Oratory field, opposite the church which was being built. Some of these were sick people who, with great difficulty, managed to stand on their feet. When in the field, they presented a remarkable scene. Some begged pardon for their sins; others promised an amendment of life; and some recommended themselves to the keeping of the Saints in Heaven. All professed confidence in the protection of the Blessed Virgin, and some recalled her former protection of the city, while others prayed for her aid under the terrible circumstances of the moment, or recited the Rosary, or made the air ring with Her praises. That field was destined to be the site of the Sanctuary of Our Lady, Help of Christians. Here still come, — and return again and again, — the afflicted and the sorrowful of the whole world, asking for comfort and consolation: and their prayers are heard.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The opening of the Church of St. Francis of Sales.

THE alms of the charitable, the gifts of the Royal Family, an allowance from the Chancellor's office, and the money resulting from the lottery, sufficed to pay the heavy expenses, and the Church of St. Francis was finished in the month of June, 1852. Dr. Vallauri, his wife, and their son, provided the High Altar. Commendatore Joseph Dupré undertook the decoration of St. Aloysius' Chapel, on the left, near the entrance, and gave a marble altar for it. The Marquis and Marchioness Fassati made themselves responsible for the cost of the second side altar, in Our Lady's honour. They added to it a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin and a set of bronze chandeliers. Signor Scanagatti presented other chandeliers. Don G. Cafasso paid for the pulpit. Other benefactors erected the organ-loft, where a small organ was placed later on. In a word, if Don Bosco displayed an extraordinary zeal and activity at this juncture, the piety of his fellow-citizens, inspired by Divine Providence, was his constant support. Thus the building was finished and all essential things provided, and the 20th of June was fixed for the inaugural service in the church. The 20th fell upon the third Sunday after Pentecost, which, in Turin, is a solemn feast of the Blessed Virgin, under her title of the Comforter of the Afflicted. It would take too long to describe all the separate incidents of that memorable day, which, as regards the Oratory, was altogether unique. A grand triumphal arch with a suitable inscription was erected above the entrance to the courtyard.

The Archbishop's delegate at the consecration of the church was the distinguished theologian, Don Augustine Cattino, who afterwards celebrated the first Mass there and gave the sermon for the occasion.

An important part of the festival was reserved for the evening. Although so large, the new church was full to overflowing. Don Bosco preached, and the writer remembers that, among other things, he pointed out the changes that had occurred on the spot; From a playground it had become a place of prayer; from having been the home of a swarm of unruly human beings, it rose to be a temple of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Where noise and even sin had flourished (for it was not long since the old tavern had been abolished), there now reigned the love of God and a holy joy. He next exhorted the young generation to be zealous in their attendance at the sacred functions, and zealous, too, in frequenting the holy Sacraments. He asked them to remember that their souls, in some respects, were like churches and were called "the Temples of the Holy Ghost." He exhorted them to keep their souls spotless—that is to say, without sin,—fit dwellings for Our Lord, who would gladly enter them in this life, and thus, they would be worthy to enter, after death, into the great temple of His blessed eternity.

A company of the National Guard was present, partly to preserve order, partly to honour the great occasion and to fire a salute at the moment of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. This salute produced a wondrous impression on the juvenile Guards of the Oratory, who could not refrain from attempting to rival it with their old-fashioned muskets. These, and many other events gave to the festival so singular a character, that pious souls felt greatly comforted by it, and even worldly, careless men were filled with admiration.

The same evening, those who had taken a leading part in the arrangements of the lottery, as well as a number of the clergy and nobility of Turin, and many other persons who had been active helpers during the

building of the church, assembled at the Oratory. After the service and sermon, Don Bosco gathered them all in the old chapel, which had been arranged for their reception, and expressed his most hearty thanks. He spoke of all that had been done, and of the anxious care that many had displayed, the charity of others, and the happy outcome of the pious undertaking. He then went on to show how their labours had been crowned by the consecration of the church that morning; he said that he had longed to recompense each helper for his trouble and sacrifice; but, being unable to do this, of himself, he had prayed and recommended the children of the Oratory to pray, that God would take these debts upon Himself, and repay them abundantly in this life, while reserving for them an eternal reward in the life to come.

After Don Bosco's speech, a very fine motet, by the celebrated composer, G. Bianchi, was sung by the Oratory choir boys. A lad of fifteen, named Secondo Pettiva, who sang the solo part, had a voice of such exquisite quality that it vibrated in every heart and drew forth unbounded applause.

Don Bosco invited the Mayor of Turin to this festival, but he was unavoidably prevented from attending. His letter of regret is a proof of the religious feeling of the chief magistrate of Turin, while it is a testimony to the esteem in which Don Bosco's work was already held. Here are his words, under the date June 16th :

"The Mayor has received with deep satisfaction the invitation sent by your Reverence; but owing to the Feast at the Church of Our Lady of Consolation, at which he and all the Municipal Councillors are bound to be present, it will be impossible for him to attend the morning function at the Oratory. In the afternoon, there is the meeting of the Congregation of Charity, at Reagle, at which he is obliged to assist. He is thus debarred from the gratification of his earnest desire, but he is happy to witness the establishment of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, through your Reverence's zeal and solicitude. The Institute will be

of advantage to the youth of our working population, who, through it, will be educated in religion and in civic virtue." The Mayor ended his letter with expressions of warm esteem and admiration.

This function aroused widespread interest, not only on account of the solemnity and perfect order of its proceedings, but mainly because of the vast importance of the event itself, which the public could not fail to perceive. Even a political newspaper, *La Patria*, had an article on the subject which is worth inserting, partly to complete the description, and partly to show in what light politicians viewed the influence of the Oratory with regard to the well-being of society in general.

The *Patria* said: "Our best literary efforts must be exerted when we attempt to speak of one of those good works which has for its object the solution of a difficult social problem. It is often our task to call attention to the shortcomings of our social life; and, from time to time, to criticise severely. We are now so fortunate as to be able to abandon political strife in order to dilate upon a subject which is ever welcome to the Piedmontese public.

"We cannot but extend our sympathetic encouragement to the generous philanthropist, so seldom met with, who adds to his zeal the perseverance of an apostle, and gives up the best years of his life to surmount obstacle after obstacle, by the sole force of his unswerving constancy. When such a one at length reaches the goal of his desires after many years of severe trial, we offer him our praise and admiration as one of that noble band of founders of charitable institutions, such as Epée Assarotti and Cottolengo. Now, if we but call to mind the secondary forces at work in the undertakings of those eminent men, we shall discover how like Don Bosco is to them, and how, in the immense scope of his benevolence, he becomes worthy of a place beside the famous men we have cited. But when we have pointed out the difficulties he encountered, we are in duty bound to mention the assistance which

flowed in upon the strenuous labourer in God's vineyard from every side, notwithstanding these calamitous times of political unrest, that are a drain upon the purses of the rich and a heavy burden to all. We say nothing of those men who share Don Bosco's work and second his efforts with great zeal; but it is a pleasure to recall the thousand different forms assumed by the charity of our fellow-citizens, who helped forward the holy work. People of every age, station of life, rich and poor, great and small, have contributed their quota. Such an immense, practical socialism is the only right form of socialism, because it has its rise in a pious and admirable rivalry, causing each to contribute according to his means: the painter gives his picture; the tradesman, some of his wares; and the women especially, who are ever foremost and ever noble in matters of charity, display an admirable ingenuity in discovering ways and means of assisting."

The writer then went on to point out that his readers might see, at the exhibition of the prizes for the lottery which was to give timely and substantial assistance to the Oratory, "that all classes, in their kindness, had manifested a true spirit of sacrifice in order that those who have been called 'the disinherited,' might have that help which money alone can give." He deplored the spectacle of the working population of Turin spending Sundays and holidays in games and drinking, "squandering the slender earnings of the week." He would have liked a Sunday meeting-room for workmen, in which all might be put in the way of fulfilling their religious duties, and, at the same time, should find some sort of guidance towards an honest and Christian life.

"Such is the work of Don Bosco, as described by himself in the simplest manner, yesterday, when the Oratory Church of St. Francis of Sales was consecrated. The Oratory is plain and unpretentious, as is fitting, where all is due to the generosity of the public; but the aisles were filled with the faithful; and, after all, faith is the most beautiful ornament of the House of God.

"The ceremony was carried out with the solemnity suited to the occasion. One, whose eminent virtues and erudition are the glory of the clergy of Turin, the pastor of the flock of Borgo Dora, read an admirable address, which dwelt upon the characteristics of the Church as the House of God and the House of Prayer. Hearing him speak of the holiness of our Faith and its infinite superiority over other religions, it was easy to imagine oneself listening to a preacher addressing the multitudes from one of those ancient temples, round which the congregation gathered, with the sky for a roof; or one might be transported, by an effort of the mind, to the bowels of the earth and the Church of the Catacombs, there to hear the message of one speaking in the name of that God who died to save us."

The writer pleaded that, although the Oratory had come into existence, and Don Bosco's dream was so far realized, there would still be great need of help to carry on the work. The city of Turin expected good results from the Institute, which afforded "a fine example, which other cities should copy."

Some days after the ceremony, Don Bosco sent an account of it to Archbishop Fransoni, who was still in exile. The account was like a ray of sunshine to the Prelate, and the following letter proves his continual benevolent regard for the Oratory:

Lyons, July 29th, 1852.

DEAR DON BOSCO,

"I am quite prepared to believe that the church is bare and simple, but that it was built and formally opened for service in the short space of eleven months seems a marvel to me. The Lord will bless and reward you for it, — you, whom He inspired to begin the work, and to whom He gave the grace to carry it through, for the benefit of thousands of young people, who are eagerly and gladly gathering about you.

I am sorry that you could not sell all the hundred thousand tickets; and the price of the forty-four thousand, from which sum you must deduct the

expenses of the lottery, fall far short of thirty-two thousand required for your church; especially as you have generously given up half the money to the Cottolengo Institute.

I do not yet know if my hundred tickets have won anything valuable I will present it to your church. any prize that could be sent on to me. If I have won

Hoping that all your Oratories will continue to prosper, and confiding in God's mercy, I sign myself,

Your devoted and affectionate servant,

✠ ALOYSIUS, Archbishop of Turin."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The new House. — A catastrophe. — The protection of Heaven. — Works recommenced and finished. — The Count and the baker. — The Forty Hours' Adoration.

IN the new Church of St. Francis of Sales we had a sacred edifice large enough for all the young people who flocked in, on Sundays and holidays, from different parts of the city; and the former chapel now made a convenient room for evening and day schools, which were attended by more than a hundred boys of various ages and conditions. But a shelter for poor, homeless children was still urgently needed.

Every day Don Bosco met with such cases, and the few small rooms that there were (one of which was nearly destroyed by the explosion of the powder magazine), did not suffice. Having thought the matter over, he came to this conclusion: "We have built a House for the Lord. Now, we must build one for His children. Let us put our shoulders to the wheel."

After the approval of plans, the works were begun in the early summer, and they made such good progress that before winter the roof was covered in. Those who did not know the ways of Divine Providence towards Don Bosco, seeing so many workmen and so much building material, would say: "Where does he get the money to pay all these labourers and to build such a big house?" Similar questions were invariably asked whenever the man of God began his different undertakings.

But an unlooked-for and very great trial awaited him and his charitable supporters. The beams were already

in their places, the laths nailed up and the tiles ready to be laid, when a period of heavy rains set in, and the works had to be stopped. That was not all. The rain fell night and day, pouring down the beams and walls, washing away the mortar, so that the bricks had nothing to hold them together. A catastrophe followed.

It was about midnight on the 2nd of December; all were fast asleep, when a crashing noise brought a rude awakening. Mother Margaret was one of the first up, and all the boys were soon out in the courtyard, with blankets and sheets round them. They fled to the neighbouring trees and into the church, not knowing yet what was the cause of all the noise. People from houses round about also began to gather. It was found that several walls had collapsed, and the beams and tiles and other materials were scattered all around. The disaster was a serious one, but in the escape from danger the protection of Heaven was manifest, and there was more than one instance of it. The new building was close to the part of the old house in which Don Bosco and thirty boys slept. Some heavy masonry rose several feet above this, and in the general collapse it was loosened from its base and remained in an inclined and very threatening position. Next day a Commission, appointed by the Municipality, arrived to report on the occurrence, and on seeing this piece of stone-work in its inclined position over the old roof, one of the architects turned to Don Bosco and asked: "Who slept in those rooms last night?" "I did," he answered, "and thirty of the boys." "Then," said the other, "you had better go with your boys and thank God, for, by all natural laws, that stone-work should have fallen and crushed you all in your beds."

The order was given to take it down. But it was very difficult to do this without exposing the lives of the workmen; however, it was moved in pieces, and the old house was saved.

While walking round the ruins, Don Bosco and several boys approached one of the walls which was still standing. Just then a boy cried out to them to keep

at a safe distance, and the warning came only just in time, for the wall fell immediately afterwards, hurling bricks and mortar as far as the group who watched it from the middle of the playground. The boys at the Oratory were naturally much upset by this calamity, and for months afterwards the noise of a passing cart, or the unloading of bricks or stones, would make them start and even turn pale. It is also worth recording that every evening about a hundred boys attended the night-schools, which did not close till ten o'clock, and even after the end of the classes many remained playing or walking near the new buildings. Had the catastrophe occurred a couple of hours earlier, there must have been many victims.

The episode was not without its amusing side. As there were many boys who had to go to work at an early hour, it was the custom to distribute the bread for their breakfast overnight. One of the lads, a tailor, was slightly crippled, and in the excitement of the first alarm he hurried out and forgot all about his roll of bread. But when out in the courtyard he remembered it, and no remonstrances could prevent him from returning to get it. He went back, and was soon seen hobbling out, holding up his breakfast, and shouting out: "It's safe! It's safe!" He was greeted with a cheer, and was often reminded afterwards of his act of bravery to save his breakfast.

The one, however, who really gave proof of courage, was Don Bosco's mother. She sent everybody out of harm's way; she sat up all night with the boys, passing from room to room; and she stood her ground in the post of danger like a brave general on the field of battle. True mother as she was, she lost all thought of herself in the care for her children. And Don Bosco was a worthy son under these circumstances. In his efforts to ensure the safety of the boys, he risked his own. At length his mother forced him to go away and take some rest.

The fall of the house brought other troubles. It was too late in the year to begin building over again. But

then, how was the overcrowding to be dealt with? Don Bosco's charity was of the active kind. By propping up the walls of the former chapel, it was possible to turn it into a dormitory. Day school and night school could be held in the church, with the due precautions and regard for the sacredness of the place. In this way the church, on weekdays, became a school and literary arena; while on Sundays, it was a place of worship.

As soon as spring set in in 1853, the rebuilding of the ruin was taken in hand. Those charitable souls that Divine Providence had inspired to help Don Bosco to begin the work, now came forward with help to continue and complete it. The Duchess of Montmorency and Marquis Fassati and his noble consort, were among those whose assistance was specially notable. With such aid the works advanced rapidly, and, by October, the house was finished. Hardly was it habitable when the schools, refectory and dormitories were transferred to it. The number of boarders was now about sixty-five, of whom several had, later, distinguished and successful careers. In this part Don Bosco chose the room that he kept for the rest of his life, never changing it till he went to the mansions of Heaven.

Towards the end of the same year, the belfry of the Church of St. Francis of Sales was erected. A member of the Turin nobility, who was one of the regular catechists, on the occasion of his election for the second time to the presidency of the Sodality of St. Aloysius, gave a material proof of his charity in the form of a fine-sounding bell, which still continues to summon the youth of the city to the Oratory on Sundays and Holydays. The day of the blessing and installation of this bell was one of great solemnity, and a large number of people were invited. After the functions, a theatrical performance was given by the boys.

The same excellent President gave another proof of his charity during the same year. For some time it had been Don Bosco's habit to buy bread wholesale, and distribute it, as in other educational institutes. But now, amongst his debts, there stood against him the

baker's claim for twelve thousand lire; and the baker threatened to starve both the Founder and his boys if he were not paid at once. It was the President who cancelled this debt — Count Charles Cays, member of the Sub-Alpine Parliament, and afterwards a humble and hard-working Salesian priest.

Among his other gifts were the high altar canopy hangings and carpets. He lent eight splendid chandeliers, which had been the adornments of the hall of Queen Mary Adelaide on the occasion of her marriage. The church was now furnished with all that was necessary for divine worship, and it was therefore possible to hold the Forty Hours' Adoration there. The Devotion was carried on during three consecutive days, and crowds of young people, as well as the faithful in general, attended. In view of the great concourse on that occasion, an octave of devotions followed, consisting of a sermon and benediction in the evening; and as a result there was an incalculable number of confessions and communions, — just as if it had been a course of spiritual exercises or a Mission. This unusual fervour was the reason why the devotion was held, in the years following, with a course of sermons and pious practices, such as are continued to this day in the Sanctuary of Our Lady, Help of Christians.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Protestant "Propaganda." — The friend of youth.—Catholic polemics.—Difficulty in obtaining the "Imprimatur."—The wrath of the Protestants. — Mischievous books. — Bribes and threats. — A letter from Cardinal Antonelli.

THIS history would be incomplete were the author to pass over in silence an important undertaking which began during the Oratory's second decade, and was productive of much good among Catholics, especially among the young; namely, the publication of the *Catholic Readings*.

King Charles Albert had given freedom of religion to Protestants and Jews. It appears that in this act he merely wished to give them freedom in their religious observances, without any detriment to the Catholic Church. But the members of the sects did not see the matter in this light; and, as soon as they were emancipated and the Press was free, they set to work in every possible manner to spread their errors among the Catholic population, particularly by pestilent tracts and books. A flood of pamphlets, biblical and non-biblical, began to deluge the villages, penetrating into the family circle, with the danger of perverting minds and corrupting hearts by the poison of their erroneous teaching.

The *Opinione* helped forward the heretical propaganda. The apostate Bianchi Giovini was one of three writers on that paper—all enemies of the Church. He had already written a lurid and calumnious *History of the Popes* and other infamous books. This pro-

paganda, launched after long preparation by the sectarians, took Catholics completely by surprise. They had no defence ready; they could not prevent the onset, and they could not even diminish the evil consequences. They trusted to the Civil Code, which, until then, had protected the Catholic religion from heretical assaults. Above all, they trusted to the First Article of the Statutes, which ran: "The Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Religion is the sole Religion of this State." Catholics were like soldiers surprised by the trumpet-call and hurrying to the field of battle, without the weapons that might have enabled them to combat enemies armed at all points. Catholics really needed cheap and simple books which could be widely distributed. Nothing of the sort was available, the only works procurable being learned and voluminous treatises. The people were thus in danger of losing their Faith; not merely the young, but the whole of the uneducated classes, for whom, above all, the enemies of the Church spread their nets.

Don Bosco's heart burned within him at this state of affairs; and, with the object of preserving his own young charges from insidious errors, he provided, besides, a means of instruction to many others. Associated with him in his labours were two theologians, Don Carpano and Don Chiaves; and they began by publishing a little periodical called: *The Friend of Youth*. From the outset it did much good; for, not only did it furnish valuable arguments and information, but it also prevented young people from drinking at the poisoned springs of wicked publications. Don Bosco also wrote and published moral and religious leaflets suited for the moment. These were distributed gratuitously by the thousand among young and old — particularly on the occasion of retreats, missions, novenas, triduums and holydays.

Don Bosco's busy charity did not stop at leaflets. Just at this time he brought out a book of pious practices, which had an immense circulation; but it was not altogether what was required at the moment for young people. Therefore, recognising the want, and

perceiving the strides made by the Waldensian heresy, Don Bosco thought of compiling another, which would contain, besides the usual prayers, psalms and hymns, solid instruction upon the fundamental principles of the Catholic Faith, the errors of Protestantism, and the marks by which we may know the true Church. He set to work with much ardour, and produced a manual of prayers and Catholic doctrine called the *Giovane Provveduto*,* which was, later, translated into different languages, and it was not long before it was to be found in almost every educational institute, industrial school, and Christian family throughout Italy. It did much to preserve the faith and to increase piety among the people.

Nor did he think he had yet done enough. Seeing that the heretics scattered evil by means of their anti-Catholic Press, he felt sure that the principles of the Faith ought likewise to be presented to the people by means of the Press. He wrote a little book called *Counsels to Catholics*. The aim of the book was, while instructing the reader in the most important articles of Faith, to put them on their guard also against the snares of heresy.

In it Don Bosco wrote :

" Catholics, be on the alert. Many snares are laid for you. The object is to draw you away from the one, true, holy religion, which you can find only in the Church of Christ.

" The danger has already been pointed out by our lawful pastors, the Bishops, placed by God to defend us from error and teach us the truth.

The infallible voice of Christ's Vicar has told us of the net spread for Catholics. He has made it clear that many evil-intentioned men desire to root out of your hearts the religion of Our Lord. They deceive others; they deceive themselves also. Do not believe them.

* The *Giovane Provveduto* is a manual of prayers and Catholic Doctrine. Of the Italian edition more than two million copies have been already printed.

"Close round your pastors with one heart and one soul. They will always teach you the truth.

"Christ said to Peter: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against It! For I will be with her Pastors even to the consummation of the world';

"This He said to Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiffs, and to none other.

"Some may advise you differently. Do not believe them. They deceive you.

"Hold fast by this great truth: where the Successor of St. Peter is, there is the Church of Christ. No one who is not in the true Church can be a Catholic. No Catholic dispenses with the Pope.

"Our clergy, and particularly our Bishops, unite us with the Pope, and the Pope with God.

"Read now with attention the following counsels. If they are implanted in your mind, they will preserve you from error.

"What is here briefly set forth, you will soon have in book-form, and at greater length.

"May the God of Mercy infuse so much courage and constancy into Catholic hearts, that all may remain faithful observers of the religion in which they have been born and brought up.

"Courage and constancy! These will make us ready to bear any evil, — even death itself — rather than say or do anything contrary to the Catholic Religion, the one, true religion of Christ, — outside of which there is no salvation."

The sale of the book was extraordinary. In only two years, over two hundred thousand copies were circulated. Pious persons were delighted with it; but it infuriated the sects and spurred them on to action. Just when they had thought, in their own interests, to over-run the Lord's vineyard, after the manner of the Philistines of old, there had risen against them a new Samson, who, in defence of God's people, had confounded their strategy, broken through their lines and routed their serried ranks.

Don Bosco did not lose courage when they showed their anger, for it proved the utility of his work; and it determined him not only to continue, but to give to it a much wider field. This object was attained by the monthly publication of the *Catholic Readings* series, which began in 1853, and soon had a wide circulation, not only in Piedmont, but in the whole of Italy and the adjacent islands.

It may be well to point out here some of the difficulties Don Bosco met with in his undertaking. Ever devoted to his Archbishop, Don Bosco, in drawing up a list of associates, placed at its head the name of that distinguished Prelate, who was still in exile in Lyons. Archbishop Fransoni not only approved of the *Catholic Readings*; he warmly praised the timely project. Nevertheless, having written some pamphlets, before circulating them, Don Bosco sent them to the Archbishop's House in Turin for the necessary approval. But strange to say, no one would undertake to examine them or give the signature which was the sign of ecclesiastical approval. It was adduced as a reason for delay, that those were days when it was dangerous to attack heretics or freemasons, who would use any and every weapon against their adversaries. In proof they brought forward Count Pellegrino Rossi's recent assassination, the murder of Monsignor Palma and of Don Ximenez, and the assaults upon other champions of the Truth. Certainly, grounds for fear were not wanting. This was amply proved by the attack upon the Reverend editor of the *Armonia*, shortly afterwards, in Turin. On the night of the 28th of January, 1856, about half-past nine o'clock, this priest was going home, as usual, to Via Zecca. Turning the corner of Via Vanchiglia and Via Zecca, near the *Progresso* café, he was struck suddenly on the head with a heavy stick and fell senseless. He lay on his face until a man happened to pass by, who, seeing a priest stretched upon the ground, ran to his help and lifted him up. The victim recovered his senses and enquired where he was. The good Samaritan told him he was at the corner of Casa Birago

(the priest's own dwelling), and accompanied him to his door. Here he was soon attended to. The doctors discovered that there was no serious injury; the blow had been aimed at the left temple, but the hat-brim had diverted it to the region of the ear, of which the outer part was cut from top to bottom. The would-be assassin had made off, probably believing his victim dead, leaving the stick with which he had dealt the blow. At the sight of this weapon it was difficult to believe that the Editor should have got off with such slight wounds. Happily, the courageous writer was soon well again, and busy with his pen in the interests of the Church and of humanity, to both of which he continued his invaluable literary services till his death on the 6th of May, 1886.

The delay at the Archbishop's Palace seemed at last about to end. After some pleading and argument, Don Bosco induced Canon Zappata to undertake to revise the manuscripts; but he had not read half of the first pamphlet, when he put aside the manuscript, saying: "Give him back his work. He openly confronts and challenges the enemy. For my part, I have no wish to enter the lists and risk my life by giving my signature to these publications. The fate of Monsignor Palma and Don Ximenes is too fresh in my memory!"

What was Don Bosco to do? With the approval of the Vicar-General, he laid the case before the Archbishop, who, from his place of exile never ceased to give his aid in all possible ways. He now sent Don Bosco a letter for the Bishop of Ivrea, in which he asked his suffragan to give Don Bosco his help and influence. This his Lordship did most willingly, and "lawful authority" was thus obtained. The Bishop delegated his authority in the matter to his reviewer, and gave leave that there should be no superscription. Don Bosco, thus supported, extended his operations and enrolled several associates in his work. He published, in the following March, the first part of his *Educated Catholic*, which was a powerful weapon

against the sects. There was a fresh edition of this book in 1882, under the title of *The Catholic in our Century*.

As soon as the public became acquainted with the *Catholic Readings*, all tastes seemed to be suited; and as fast as the numbers appeared, they were devoured by the subscribers. Thus was the wrath of the sects raised to burning heat. They tried to rival the Salesian publications with their own newspapers and pamphlets; but truth is stronger than error; and Don Bosco's simple style was clearness itself. The enemy lost by the contrast, and thought to better their position by organizing debates, hoping in this way to check Don Bosco's propaganda. They were sure that, face to face in argument, he would have to acknowledge himself beaten. They would come to the Oratory, sometimes a number of them, to open religious discussions. Generally, their tactics were to shout loudly and pass from question to question, never following up an argument to its logical conclusion. Don Bosco would not allow it to be supposed that he was tired of them, but each time received them most courteously, listened with the utmost patience, explained their difficulties and pointed out their fallacies; finally answering them with arguments so clear and appropriate that the disputants had to acknowledge themselves beaten. It was his chief endeavour to prevent their wandering from one argument to another, obliging them to keep to one question until it was thoroughly threshed out, so as to make clear to all which was truth or error. Some of them, who were sincere, finally retracted. Others, not knowing what to reply, and unwilling to admit themselves vanquished, broke out into abusive language, whereupon Don Bosco would say: "My dear friends, scoffing and insults are not arguments"; and thus he left them in confusion.

In one of these contests, a certain disputant wound up with: "We do not know what to answer, because we have not the learning for it. But if we only had our minister here! He is an ark of wisdom. With two

words he could silence all the priests." Don Bosco answered: "Will you be so kind as to bring him with you next time? Tell him that I am longing to see him." The message was given, and on the next occasion came Pastors De Sanctis and Meille, with two more of the leading Waldensians, resident in Turin. After the usual greetings, the argument began. It lasted from eleven in the morning till six in the afternoon. To report the whole discussion would be impossible; but one point must be mentioned. After the debate had turned upon the authenticity of Holy Scripture, the primacy of St. Peter and his successors, confession and tradition, it came finally to the doctrine of purgatory, which Don Bosco supported from reason, history, the Old and the New Testament, using the Latin text and its Italian version. Here, however, one of the opponents objected: "The Latin and Italian texts are not enough. It is necessary to go back to the source. We must consult the Greek version." Immediately, Don Bosco sent for a Greek Bible, and said: "Here, gentlemen, here is the Greek text. Consult it, please, and you will find it in perfect agreement with the Latin and Italian translations." The poor man, who knew less Greek than Chinese, took the Bible with great gravity, and began to turn the leaves from end to end, unwilling to confess his ignorance, and pretending to seek for the passages that had been under discussion. But he had taken the book upside down. Don Bosco perceived this, and allowed the minister to turn page after page for some time. He then drew near, and said: "Excuse me, my friend, you will hardly find the texts, because you are holding the book the wrong way round. Let us turn it *this* way." The Biblical "scholar" reddened and was utterly confounded; he flung the book on the table, and thus ended the discussion.

From this and similar occurrences, the Protestant leaders drew the conclusion that they would never succeed in making Don Bosco give up his anti-sectarian propaganda by argument. They sought other

means, first by attempting bribery, and then by threatening him.

One Sunday, about eleven o'clock, in the month of August 1853, two gentlemen came to the Oratory, asking to see Don Bosco. Although fatigued after the morning services, he had them at once taken to his room, and placed himself at their disposal. Partly on account of the hour, and partly from an instinctive dislike to the appearance of the unknown callers, several of the boys — amongst them Joseph Buzzetti, and John Cagliero, the future Cardinal — felt impelled to mount guard at Don Bosco's door, whence they could catch the thread of the following dialogue. After the first conventional greetings, one of the gentlemen (believed to be a Waldensian minister), began :

" You, Reverend Sir, are gifted by nature. You can command the attention of the people. They understand you. Now, we are here to ask you to turn this precious talent to account in the cause of science, art, commerce."

Don Bosco. " Well, to the extent of my poor powers, I have already done something in the directions that you kindly suggest. I have published a compendium of Bible History, a Church History, a short work on the Decimal System, and other little books, which, if I may judge by their favourable reception, were not without their use. Now, however, my thoughts are set upon *Catholic Readings*, to which I mean to devote all my attention, because I think them highly valuable for young and old."

Minister. " It would be much better if you would take up something in the line of school books, for example, an ancient history, a geographical treatise, physical science, geometry, and not bother about *Catholic Readings*."

Don Bosco. " But why not ? "

Minister. " Because their subject matter has been treated again and again, and by many authors."

Don Bosco. " That is true; the matter has been handled by many, but in heavy and learned volumes."

Those suit the well-educated, but not the common people, who are pleased by the short, simple booklet issued under the title of *Catholic Readings*."

Minister. "But you gain nothing by this work. If, however, you consent to take up the subjects we suggest, we can guarantee that they will bring in a considerable amount to the institute over which Providence has placed you. Here you will find an offering (there were four notes of a thousand lire each), and it will not be the last. This we promise you: you shall receive other and greater contributions."

Don Bosco. "But why all this money?"

Minister. "It is to induce you to take up the subjects we spoke of, and to help your Institute."

Don Bosco. "But, pardon me, gentlemen, if I return this money. For the moment I cannot attend to scientific work. I am altogether taken up with *Catholic Readings*."

Minister. "But if that be a useless task?"

Don Bosco. "Well, if it be useless, that should not matter to you, gentlemen! If useless, why give such a large sum to stop it?"

Minister. "Your Reverence takes no heed of the harm your refusal does to your Institute; and you thereby incur certain consequences — certain personal dangers . . ."

Don Bosco. "Gentlemen, I understand what these words mean; but I tell you plainly, I have no fear. When I entered the Priesthood, I consecrated myself to the good of the Church, the salvation of souls, and particularly to the care of youth. For the same purpose I began, and mean to continue, the *Catholic Readings* series. I shall devote all my strength to it."

"You make a mistake," said the double-faced enemy, rising to his feet, "a grave mistake, and we are not satisfied. Who knows what may happen to you? If you leave your house, can you be sure of coming safe home again?"

Both the wicked men pronounced these words in a tone so threatening, that the boys who stood on guard

feared that they would harm Don Bosco, and they showed themselves at the door, so that it could be understood that there were people near, ready on the first sign to enter the room.

Don Bosco, nothing daunted, answered his visitors: "I can well see that these gentlemen do not know the Catholic priest, or they would not stoop to these threats. Know then, gentlemen, that as long as life lasts, a Catholic priest works for God willingly. If it should happen that, in the performance of his duty, he should succumb, he would look upon death as the height of good fortune and the greatest glory. Your threats could only cause me to smile."

Don Bosco's brave words so enraged the two heretics that they advanced and seemed about to seize him. Whereupon, he prudently armed himself with a chair, saying: "If you have recourse to force, I shall be obliged to prove to you how dearly an intruder may have to pay for his footing in the house of a free citizen. But no; a priest's strength lies in patience and forgiveness. Now let there be an end of this." He opened the door, and, seeing Joseph Buzzetti, said: "Take these two gentlemen to the gates. They would hardly know their way on our staircase."

Thereupon, the visitors looked at each other, and, saying to Don Bosco: "We shall meet again under more propitious circumstances," passed out with angry countenances.

No less angry, and with better reason, were the Oratory boys who had drawn near at the insults of these men and had heard the threat against Don Bosco. If the visitors had dared to attempt violence, the boys would have shown, and rightly, their love for their common Father.

At the end of the first half of this year, Don Bosco had the first six numbers of *Catholic Readings* bound together, and forwarded them, through His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State to the Holy Father, Pius IX. The Pontiff most graciously accepted

the small gift, and charged the Cardinal to write the following letter :

“ REVEREND FATHER,

I gladly hastened to submit to the Holy Father, in your Reverence's name, the little volume containing the first six months' numbers of your^d periodical, *Catholic Readings*, designed to meet the needs of the less educated classes, and to arm them against the tempting baits cast for them by the enemies of the Faith and the Truth. His Holiness rejoiced with me over your zealous industry, which provides these timely remedies, corresponding so well with the wants of our day. It is a still greater cause for joy that your work has been as welcome as your designs are salutary.

The Holy Father, responding willingly to your pious wish, sends your Reverence, and all who help you with the *Catholic Readings*, the Apostolic Benediction.

Thanking you for that part of your enclosure which was destined for myself, I beg to remind you of my very sincere regard.

Truly yours in Christ,

CARDINAL ANTONELLI.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Poisoned chestnuts and poisoned wine. — Unfair proceedings on the part of the police. — A friend's good offices. — A shower of blows.

THE unwelcome visitors, whom we dismissed in the last Chapter, quitted Don Bosco's room with an angry: "You'll hear from us again!" These words, together with the scarcely concealed threats, were the clue to a long series of attempts against Don Bosco's life. These attempts were so many, so violent and so cunningly prepared, that it could only be by the help of Providence—indeed it was nothing short of miraculous—that Don Bosco on each occasion escaped. These matters, touching so closely the founder of the Oratory, are intimately linked with this history. So there will be set down here some of the principal incidents, which rest on the testimony of several of the boarders who saw them, or who received faithful accounts from others who were eye-witnesses.

One evening after supper, when Don Bosco was as usual teaching in the night-school, two rather suspicious looking men came to ask him to hear the confession of a man who lay dying in a place not far away. He handed his class over to someone else, and, ever eager for the welfare of souls, prepared to set out. As he was leaving, however, seeing that the hour was late, he thought he would take with him some of the bigger boys; and he called a few of them.

"There is no need to bring anyone with you," said the two strangers; "we shall accompany you there and back. Besides, the sick man might not like them to be there."

"Don't worry," said Don Bosco, "my boys will like the walk, and they will remain outside the sick-room."

The two men were silent, though evidently displeased, but they made no further objection."

When they reached their destination, the men said: "Stay in this room a moment, we will tell the sick man that you are here."

The boys remained outside. Don Bosco entered a ground-floor room, where half-a-dozen merry-makers, amid the remains of a splendid supper, were eating, or pretending to eat, chestnuts. These men addressed Don Bosco seemingly with the greatest respect, and praised him for his good work.

"Be so kind, your Reverence, to take some of our chestnuts," said one of them, offering him the dish.

"I don't feel inclined to eat anything just now," said Don Bosco, "it is not long since I had my supper."

"Well, at all events, you will have a glass of wine. It is good, as you will see. It comes from near Asti."

"No, thank you. I am not in the habit of drinking wine, except at meals; if I took it, it would upset me."

"Oh no! A small glass of genuine wine could never hurt your Reverence; it would surely do you good. In any case, take it, just to please us!"

So saying, the man poured out the wine from a bottle that was on the table, and he was careful to place a glass for each of the company. For Don Bosco, however, he went away for another glass and a separate bottle. No doubt these men had planned to make him drink poison. Without giving any sign of suspicion, Don Bosco took in his hand the foaming glass, and wished the wretched fellows "Good health." Instead, however, of carrying the sparkling Asti to his lips, he replaced the glass on the table, saying that he would not drink just then.

"You must not vex us in this way!" said one.

"We won't be insulted thus!" cried another.

"The wine is excellent, you shall drink our health in it," they all shouted.

"Just now I have no intention of drinking. Let me add that I neither can, nor will take it," Don Bosco answered.

"Nevertheless, you must drink it, whatever happens!" roared the knaves, with one voice.

Then, suiting the action to the word, one of them caught the poor priest by the left shoulder, and another by the right, saying? "We can't stand this insult! If you won't drink it in friendliness, we'll make you swallow it by force."

Don Bosco was, as it were, between two fires. The position was certainly critical. To show his strength against them would have been neither easy nor prudent, and he resolved to try what cunning might do for him. "If you are set upon my drinking that wine," he said, "give me my freedom; for if you hold my shoulders and arms, my hand will shake, and I shall spill the wine."

"He's right," cried one, and they let go. Don Bosco, seeing his chance, took a step backwards and so got near the door, which, fortunately, was not locked. He opened it and called to the youths who had come with him, to enter. They stepped across the threshold, and the sight of these four or five young fellows set a curb upon the men's violence. Their chief said, rather lamely: "Very well, if you don't want to drink it, wait a while; let it alone and never mind!"

"But where is the dying man?" asked Don Bosco, "I ought at least to see him."

To hide the wicked attempt on his life, one of the ruffians led the priest to a room in the second storey. There, instead of a sick man, Don Bosco found, huddled in a bed, one of the messengers who had fetched him from the Oratory. Don Bosco put some questions to him, and this utter impostor burst out laughing, when he said, "To-morrow I will go to confession." Thereupon Don Bosco went away, thanking God in his heart for having, by means of his scholars, saved him from the hands of the villains.

Having found out, in one way or another, what had

passed, some of the boys made enquiries about the occurrence, and discovered that a person had given a supper to the vile confederates, on condition that they would make Don Bosco drink some wine specially prepared for him. These men were, therefore, hired assassins.

The holy man never forgot that place; and even in the last months of his life, if when out for a walk he chanced to pass the spot, he would say to those accompanying him: "This is the room where the wine and chestnuts were served!"

One August evening, about six o'clock, when Don Bosco was talking quietly with some of his boys near the wooden gate of the Oratory courtyard, a cry arose: "Murder! Murder!"

There appeared upon the scene, at the moment, a man named Andreis, in shirt-sleeves, armed with a butcher's knife, rushing towards Don Bosco, and calling out: "Let me get at Don Bosco!"

At first, fear seized the boys, who fled in every direction, some to the open field close by, some into the courtyard of the house. Among them was the clerical student, Felix Reviglio.

Through him, Don Bosco was saved, for the murderer mistook Felix for our Founder, and set off in pursuit. When Andreis saw his mistake, he turned back to the gate. In the short interval, Don Bosco had time to reach his room, locking the small iron gate at the foot of the stairs. Hardly was that done, when the assassin arrived. Finding it locked, he struck it, shook it, and threw himself against it, in an effort to force it open, but in vain. He stood guard there for over three hours, like a tiger waiting for its prey. He behaved like a madman; but he had reasons for feigning insanity.

Meanwhile, the boys shook off the first terror which had caused them to scatter, and met together again. At the sight of the man who threatened the life of their father and benefactor, they felt the blood boil in their veins. Moved by their feelings and abandoning them-

selves to their youthful ardour, they caught up all sorts of weapons: sticks, stones or straps, intending to attack the wretch. Don Bosco, however, feared that some of them might be hurt, and he forbade them to touch Andréis. The whole house was in an uproar, Above all, Mother Margaret was terrified on her son's account and on that of the boys. What was to be done? The police were immediately sent for; but, sad to say, though word was sent to the police station repeatedly, neither a constable nor a carabineer put in an appearance before half-past nine. Then, and then only, came two policemen, who handcuffed the malefactor and took him to the lock-up, liberating Don Bosco from a danger which did no credit to those then responsible for the safety of the public. As if such delays in the defence of a free citizen were not enough to provoke any thoughtful person, the very next day the police committed a still more glaring imprudence. A constable was sent to Don Bosco to ask whether he forgave Andréis' outrageous conduct. He replied that, as a Christian and a priest, he forgave that and other insults, but as a citizen and the head of an Institute, he claimed that the authorities should take a little more care of his person and his house. It is almost incredible, but that same day the police released the culprit, who, in the evening, again stood about near the Oratory, awaiting the moment when Don Bosco might leave the house, in order to carry out his murderous design.

But who prompted this man to such villainy? A friend of Don Bosco, and a signal benefactor of the Institute, Commendatore Dupré, supplies the answer to this question.

Seeing that the police afforded no real protection, he took it upon himself to speak with this unfortunate man, who, day and night, kept the Institute in a state of acute terror.

"I am paid for this work," said the fellow, "and if anyone will give me as much to stay away, I'll go."

On this understanding he received eighty lire, a sum equal to that which had been promised him.

Thus ended a comedy which might have had a fatal and tragic end. Another attack on Don Bosco's life remains to be chronicled, from which he did not escape quite scatheless.

Not long after the incident just narrated, late one Sunday evening, Don Bosco was sent for to hear the confession of a person lying sick in Casa Sardi, close to the Refuge. His recent adventure suggested the idea of an escort of two strong young fellows. "Never mind about those boys," said the messenger. "Do not fear, I'll go with you myself."

These words had an effect contrary to that intended, and they increased Don Bosco's suspicion. So he took with him four, instead of two strong and muscular youths that, in case of need, they could be safely relied upon. When they reached the house, he left two at the foot of the stairs and took the other two with him to the top of the landing, near the door of the room. Inside, a woman lay in bed, almost breathless. She was such a consummate actress that she seemed, indeed, on the point of expiring. Seeing her state, Don Bosco begged the four persons surrounding her bed to withdraw, so that he might speak the more freely with her, and give her spiritual help. "Before I go to confession," said the wretched creature, in a powerful voice, "I wish that the ruffian over there should retract the calumnies that he has spread against me."

"No," cried one.

"Silence!" said another.

"Yes."

"Never!"

"Hold your tongue, wretch, or I will strangle you!"

These, and other not very creditable remarks, mingled with oaths, rose like sounds of Babel in this fiendish place.

In the midst of all this, the light went out. The voices ceased, and blows came heavily in Don Bosco's direction. He guessed at once the game which was being played. These people intended harm! In the tumult, he seized a chair and placed it over his head.

Under this shield he tried to gain the door. In the meantime, the villains were dealing blows right and left, which, instead of falling on poor Don Bosco's head, struck the chair. The uproar attracted the attention of the two sentinels, who burst open the door with their shoulders, and Don Bosco flung himself between them, happy to have brought his head and shoulders safe out of the fray. His left thumb only was injured. During the tumult he had held the back of the chair, and a blow fell on his hand. The knock, though light in itself, carried away the nail and half of the fleshy part of the joint. More than thirty years later, Don Bosco bore the scar. The suspicion is not without foundation that these and other attempts were organised by the malice, and carried out by the money, of those who disliked *Catholic Readings*, and who wished to terrify, or to make an end of the author. After all, the Turin heretics were but followers of their forefathers, who, not to mention many other murders, on the 9th of April, 1374, at Bricherasio, killed the Dominican, the Blessed Pavoniada Savighano, under a barbarous shower of blows, because he preached against their false doctrine, and because he had received a great number of Waldenses into the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A dog intervenes. — Don Bosco's letter to the Waldensian Pastor, De Sanctis. — The Pastor's answer.

WE read in the holy Bible, and in Ecclesiastical history, the extraordinary manner in which God makes use of animals for the benefit and protection of His servants. When His prophet was mocked by a troop of boys, two bears came out of the neighbouring forest to punish them. For sixty years a raven fed the first hermit, St. Paul, in the desert. When he died, St. Anthony wished to bury him, but had nothing wherewith to dig the grave. Thereupon two lions ran on before him, and, with their paws, tore up the earth until there was a trench of the proper size. Then, blessed by the Saint, they went their way like lambs.

Likewise, in Don Bosco's hour of need, Divine Providence was pleased to provide him with a most singular guardian, namely, a fine, large, grey dog, which was then the theme of much talk and speculation. Many of the boys saw, touched, and caressed this dog, and knew much about him that is worth remembering.

The following account was given by several, among whom was Joseph Buzzetti, one of the earliest pupils of the Institute. Don Bosco himself was questioned on several points, and he confirmed the account.

In size and shape, the dog was not unlike a sheep-dog or a mastiff of the kind used as a yard-dog. First of all, it should be noted, that no one, not even Don Bosco, ever knew whence he came, nor to whom he belonged. But, however mysterious was his origin, he was a good

servant, *lent* for some years to Don Bosco, and of incalculable value to the Oratory.

Well knowing that there were dangerous characters lurking about, Don Bosco was careful never to be out late at night if he could help it; but sometimes he was detained in the town, perhaps by a visit to a sick person; or perhaps by a discussion in a family caught in the toils of heresy, but affording a hope of a return to a better frame of mind under wiser counsels. In such cases he never thought of self, but having done his duty, set forth at any hour to return to Valdocco.

At the time, this suburb was thinly populated. The mad-house was the last building in the direction of the Oratory. The rest of the way, now covered with factories and laid out in roads, was then waste land, uneven, dark, and overgrown with thorny acacias or other shrubs. It afforded, therefore, a good shelter for rogues and vagabonds. The place was dangerous for all, but especially for Don Bosco, who was the target for the malice of the enemies of religion.

Late one evening he was coming home alone, not without fear of some unpleasant incident, when he perceived, to his surprise, that a great dog was walking beside him. At first he was afraid of this companion. Seeing, however, nothing threatening about the dog, but on the contrary, that he had a patronising air about him, Don Bosco soon proffered friendship. The faithful animal came with him to the Oratory and then left him. Nor was this the only time that they walked home together. Every evening that he was kept out late and returned alone, as soon as he had passed the last houses, he would see *Grigio* ("The Grey") spring out from one side or other of his path.

At that time, if Mother Margaret knew that her son was kept out late, she was anxious about him and would send some of the boys to meet him. Some of them still remember to have found him several times with his four-footed friend.

Three times at least *Grigio* saved Don Bosco's life. One dark and foggy night he was returning from the

city. In order not to stray too far from human dwellings, he came down past the Church of "La Consolata," towards the Cottolengo Institute. Don Bosco became aware that a couple of men walked a little way in front of him, going faster or slower, according to his own pace. When he tried to avoid them by crossing the road, they crossed, too. No doubt could remain as to their evil intent; therefore he sought to go back the way he had come and to take refuge in some neighbouring house. But it was too late. The men also turned when he turned, and in perfect silence overtook him and threw a cloak over his face. Don Bosco struggled to get free, and tried to cry for help; but one of his assailants pushed a handkerchief into his mouth. Just when death seemed inevitable, the good *Grigio* appeared upon the scene, barking, not like a dog nor even a wolf, but howling, rather like a raging bear. The sound was both terrifying and deafening. Nor was this all. The dog tore one of the wretches with his claws and forced him, in order to save himself, to let go the cloak which was over Don Bosco's head; *Grigio* then sprang upon the other, and in less time that it takes to tell it, he had bitten the man and flung him on the ground. The first, seeing how things were going, sought to fly, but *Grigio* had other views! He sprang on the man's shoulders and threw him down also in the mud. He then planted himself there and stood motionless, guarding his prisoners, all the while growling, as if to say: "Woe to the one that sirs."

At this unexpected turn of affairs, the two rascals cried out: "Call off the dog!"

"I'll call him off," answered Don Bosco, "but if I do, you must let me go about my business."

"Yes! Yes!" cried the two at once, "but call him off quickly!"

"Come along, *Grigio*," said Don Bosco. And the dog obediently came up, leaving the criminals free to rush off as fast as their legs could carry them.

Notwithstanding this timely help, Don Bosco, for the moment, did not feel equal to a long walk home; he

therefore turned into a place close by the Cottolengo Institute. Here his shaken nerves somewhat recovered and he set out again with his escort, for the Oratory.

Another night he was on his way home, by the Corso San Massimo,—called now the Corso Regina Margherita—when a man, who was watching the passers-by from behind an elm-tree, fired twice at Don Bosco, at so short a distance that his coat might well have been scorched. Both shots missed, and the assassin flung himself upon Don Bosco, determined, evidently, by some means or other, to make an end of him. But at this juncture, *Grigio* made his appearance, and, springing furiously at the man, immediately put him to flight. The dog then walked quietly home with Don Bosco.

On another occasion, *Grigio* saved Don Bosco, not from one or two enemies, but from a number. Late one evening, Don Bosco was again coming home, when he heard the steps of some one running after him. Turning, he saw, close to him, a man with an uplifted cudgel; he therefore began to run, in the hope of reaching the Oratory before his assailant. He had come to the sloping path, which to-day is overlooked by the Casa Delfino, when there rose up, in front of him, several other men, who were bent upon obstructing his way. When he saw his danger, he thought his best plan would be to get rid of the man in the rear. He stopped short, and dealt a blow with such dexterity and force in the stomach of his follower, that the wretch was sent sprawling on the ground, crying out, as he fell: "I am done for!" This little feat had so far succeeded that Don Bosco was safe from one enemy; but the rest, armed with sticks, were already moving up to surround him. Just then, providentially, out of nowhere, sprang the grey dog to Don Bosco's side. He howled and barked and dashed here and there with such fury, that these brutal men, in fear of being torn to pieces, cried to Don Bosco to call off the dog and to hold him, while they slunk away, one after another, leaving the priest to pursue his way. The dog stayed with Don Bosco until he was safely inside the Oratory.

Another time, instead of seeing him home, *Grigio* prevented him from going out. Having forgotten something during the day, he wished to leave home at a late hour. Mother Margaret tried to dissuade him, but, taking down his coat, he exhorted her not be anxious; he called some of the boys to walk with him, and went to the front door. *Grigio* lay right across the threshold. "Oh, here is *Grigio!*" he exclaimed. "So much the better! Our party will be stronger. Get up, then, *Grigio,*" he added, to the dog, "and come along!" But the dog, instead of obeying, emitted a sort of grunt and stuck to his post. One of the boys touched him with his boot to make *Grigio* move, but the dog replied with a terrible roar, whereupon Mother Margaret said: "If you won't listen to me, listen to the dog, and don't go out." Don Bosco saw that his mother's heart was set upon his remaining, and he turned back. A quarter of an hour had gone by, when a neighbour came in to warn him that there were three or four men prowling about Valdocco, waiting to kill him.

One evening, *Grigio* was as good as a play for the boys of the Oratory. Don Bosco was at supper when the dog came into the courtyard. Some of the boys had never seen the dog, and were afraid of him. They wished to drive him away with sticks and stones. But Buzzetti knew him, and cried out: "That is Don Bosco's dog; don't hurt him."

At this, all gathered around him, caressing him. They held him by the ears, and said all manner of kind things to him, taking him at last into the refectory. The unexpected visitor frightened some of the guests, but Don Bosco said: "Let *Grigio* come in, and don't be afraid of him!"

The dog first looked at every one who was at table, walked round the room, and then went up to Don Bosco, who petted him and wished to give him some food. He offered him bread, meat, soup, and water; but *Grigio* would touch nothing, would not even sniff at any eatable, so disinterested was his service. "Well, then! what do you want, *Grigio?*" asked Don Bosco;

and the dog dropped his ears in the usual canine manner, and wagged his tail. "If you will neither eat nor drink, farewell, and go your own way."

The dog, looking quite content, placed his head on the table, and glanced at Don Bosco as if he would say "Good-night." After that he turned on his heel and went off, escorted by the boys as far as the entrance. Buzzetti told the writer that evening, that Marquis Fassati had brought Don Bosco back to the Oratory in his carriage. The boy thought that *Grigio* had looked for Don Bosco on the road, and, not finding him, had come in to show that he was as vigilant as ever.

The last time Don Bosco saw his *Grigio* was in the autumn of 1866. He was in Castelnuovo, his native district. One evening he went from Murialdo to Moncucco to see his friend Aloysius Moglia. Many acquaintances kept him talking by the way, and the night fell sooner than he expected. Darkness was unwelcome, for he had to pass by some places which he knew to be unsafe, and near farms and vineyards which were guarded by savage dogs.

"If only I had *Grigio* here," he exclaimed, "what a good thing that would be for me."

The mysterious *Grigio* immediately appeared, greeting Don Bosco most affectionately. The dog walked all the rest of the way, which was about two miles, beside his *protégé*. And lucky it was that Don Bosco had such an escort, for, as he passed by a farmyard, two fierce dogs rushed at him. *Grigio*, however, sprang upon them and soon sent them flying, with such howls, that their owners came out to see what had happened to the poor animals.

When he reached the house of his friends, all were astonished to see the magnificent dog, asking him where he had picked him up; was he from Turin or from his own home, or from some farm-house? and so on. When all sat down to supper they left the dog lying down, but at the end of the meal, Moglia said: "The grey dog must also have his food," and he went out to look for him. They searched high and low and called him in

every direction, but fruitlessly. *Grigio* had gone off, no one knew whither; and, from that time forth, nothing was ever heard of him.

Dr. Charles d'Espiney, in his little book entitled *Don Bosco*, speaks of this dog, concluding in these words: "None ever knew whence the dog came, nor whither he went when his mission was accomplished. He was a complete stranger in the places where he made his appearance."

This story may seem fabulous to some. To one having faith in God's providence, it is perfectly reasonable, and in conformity with the truth, to believe that God, in His fatherly goodness, chose to make use of the beast, which is the symbol of faithfulness, to comfort and protect His servant who heeded not the wrath of his enemies, and who exposed himself to the greatest dangers, in order to serve the cause of God and the Church.

An evil spirit seemed to be about in Turin. Fortunately it was divided against itself, although mainly intent on the one object, to make an end of Don Bosco, whose way of dealing with these adversaries was entirely different from their methods.

In November, 1854, the Waldensian Pastor, De Sanctis, who had had some difference with his colleagues, was deprived of his office by the so-called Venerable Tavola, then chief-magistrate of the Waldensian Church. The organ of the Evangelicals, styled *The Light of the Gospel*, mentioned in its issue of the 4th of November, that Pastor De Sanctis, Minister of the Holy Gospel, who, for two years had done the work of an Evangelist in Turin to the general satisfaction, had been dismissed at a moment's notice from his office by the Venerable Tavola. This proceeding had scandalized the Church and might be prejudicial to De Sanctis' reputation. The editor invited those Church members who had sufficient independence of mind, to say if they could in conscience approve of the Venerable Tavola's decision.

This blow to the wretched apostate was as the voice of the Lord, calling him back to the right path and into the bosom of the Catholic Church, which he had shamelessly abandoned.

Amongst some papers was found a copy of a letter written by Don Bosco to De Sanctis, and the original of the answer to it. It may be well to reproduce both. Don Bosco's letter ran :

“ Valdocco, Turin, 17th November, 1854.

REVEREND SIR,

For some time past I have thought of writing to you, to see if an opportunity could be found for a meeting between us, so that I might assure you of my sincere friendship. This resolution of mine was the result of an attentive perusal of your books, in which I seemed to discover the restlessness of your heart and mind.

Now I gather from what has recently appeared in the press that you are no longer in agreement with the Waldensians. May I venture to offer you hospitality at my house, where you will be made welcome.

You will perhaps ask: “ For what reason should I go there? ” I answer, “ To carry out whatever Almighty God may inspire you to do. ” A room will be at your disposal, and our poor fare; you will be put to no expense.

You have, moreover, in this offer a proof of my real sentiments towards you. If you knew my sincerity, you would accept my proposal, or if you cannot do so, you will excuse the step I have taken. May God further my desires, and make us of one heart and mind in His service. Let us remember that He gives a just reward to those who serve Him in this life.

I am,

Your devoted friend in Christ,

JOHN BOSCO, *Priest.*

This letter of Don Bosco's deeply touched the unhappy De Sanctis, who answered immediately, in the following words :

" San Salvario, Turin.

REVEREND FATHER,

You cannot imagine the effect that your kind letter of yesterday produced upon me. I never thought to find such generosity and kindness in a man who is my adversary. You are in conflict with my belief as I am with yours, but while you combat, you show your sincerity, and you hold out a benevolent hand to me in a moment of affliction. In this you give an example of that Christian charity about which many *theorise* so eloquently. Would to God my other opponents would imitate your Christian charity ! They, alas, know not how to speak without insulting. They treat of the most serious topics only to throw ridicule or contempt upon them.

In answer to your letter, I beg to say that I accept as a valued gift the offer of your friendship, and I heartily wish that I may be able soon, with a clear conscience, to prove that my regard is not merely a matter of words.

For very many reasons, I cannot now accept your offer ; but it will be hard to efface the profound impression it has made upon me.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

ALOYSIUS DE SANCTIS."

How happy would it have been for De Sanctis, had he broken through the shameful snares that bound him ! But the unfortunate man closed his ears to the voice of Heaven, satisfying himself with thanking Don Bosco, and with having the following words inserted in the *Light of the Gospel*: " While the Waldensians are treating Pastor De Sanctis in the manner known to all, a priest Don John Bosco, has written to him in the

kindest and most charitable terms, asking him to share his food and his dwelling. *Honorem cui honor.*"

A few years afterwards, the unhappy apostate died suddenly, as the result of an accident, crying out to the companion of his evil life: "I am dying! I am dying!" God grant that, in that last moment, he may have been able to make an act of sincere contrition.

Don Bosco's conduct in this matter appears to have calmed the fury of his enemies. Thenceforth, the heretics ceased to molest him, except by the more harmless weapons of controversy.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Asiatic cholera breaks out in Turin. — Worthy sons. — Good work done. — Public praise.

IN 1854, many Italian provinces, cities and small towns were overwhelmed by a great misfortune. A deadly malady, the cholera, was brought from the East and various parts of Europe, until it reached Italy, and in Liguria and Piedmont it was especially virulent. In Genoa alone, within two months, it claimed about three thousand victims.

The symptoms, as well as the results of this disease, were so terrible that they struck dismay even in the stoutest hearts. The cholera generally began with some intestinal disturbance, and brought on violent vomiting and ceaseless diarrhoea. There was a feeling as of a great weight upon the stomach, and the limbs were cramped and drawn up. The eyes were sunken, while a lead-coloured circle surrounded them and they were soon dull and lifeless. The nose grew pinched, and the whole face so thin and altered, that the sick person became speedily unrecognizable. The tongue was white and cold, the voice muffled, and speech barely intelligible. The whole body grew livid, or, in bad cases, blue, and scarcely less cold than a corpse. Some, when they were attacked, fell upon the ground, as if struck down by apoplexy. The victims often lived but a few hours; and the illness rarely lasted for twenty-four, without death ensuing. In the beginning, all those attacked died. At the height of the epidemic, sixty per cent. of the sick succumbed; consequently, with the exception of the plague, no malady was ever known that claimed so great a mortality. If, however, the

plague killed a greater number in proportion to those attacked by it, it did not cause so many deaths in a given time. From all this, it will be easy to imagine the terror that the cholera inspired.

Fear was increased by the knowledge that no antidote to the deadly poison had been found, and that the disease was not only epidemic, but also contagious. Moreover, many took up the notion that the doctors were giving a poison to the sick with a view to killing them the quicker, thereby stamping out the disease, and procuring the safety of the medical profession and that of the community in general.

Proofs of the consternation inspired are to be found in the facts that business was at a standstill and shops were closed, as well as in the speedy flight of multitudes from the infected districts. Occasionally, when some person was seized with cholera, all his neighbours fled, even his nearest relations, and he was left without any care or company, unless some brave and charitable soul could be found to nurse him. Such ministering angels were not always at hand. It became the rule, for the time being, that undertakers should enter the windows, or break in the doors, in order to carry off decomposing bodies which were poisoning the air all around. In different districts the same terrible drama was enacted, and the scenes which took place on the occasion of similar diseases in former times were reproduced.

But the extent of the cholera was in no way limited by the precautions and panic flight of the people. Like an enemy emboldened by the rout of the adversary, the disease spread from place to place and carried off numberless victims on its march. Not even the healthy localities—the hills and the mountains,—were safe from the cholera's inroads. By the 30th of July, the disease had crossed the Apennines and was already in Turinese territory. In the beginning of August, some people in the suburbs had already succumbed.

No sooner was the terrible danger apparent, than the Municipality gave to the whole population a notable example of piety. Having taken the required sanitary

measures and made useful provision for the needs of the population, the Mayor, Signor Notta, proposed to have recourse to the Queen of Heaven, whose protection had been shown on occasions of similar visitations. He arranged for a solemn function at the Church of Our Lady of Consolation and on the 3rd of August, with a specially appointed section of the Municipal Council, and an immense concourse of the faithful, assisted at it. The Mayor wrote to the ecclesiastical authorities in the following terms :

“ The Council of Delegates, according to the wish of the people of this capital, now that the appearance of Asiatic cholera is feared amongst us, attended this morning at Mass, followed by solemn Benediction, in the Church of Our Lady of Consolation, for the purpose of begging her protection.”

And the Mother of God did not disdain these prayers. The dreadful malady, contrary to every expectation, did less harm in Turin than in many other towns and cities.

Nevertheless, the cases mounted up from one per day to ten; then to twenty, and even to sixty. From August 1st to November 1st, there were about two thousand five hundred cases in the city and suburbs. Fourteen hundred of these cases proved fatal. Near our Oratory there were families, not merely decimated, but absolutely exterminated. In three tenement houses within a few yards of the Oratory, several families vanished within a very short time. In many other localities, the cholera wrought havoc with complete households.

What course of action was to be taken at the Oratory, considering they were at such close quarters to the dire malady, at a time when panic had seized most of their neighbours? When first the news came that the evil was spreading in the city, Don Bosco showed himself a true father to his sons. So as not to incur the guilt of tempting providence, he used every possible precaution that prudence and knowledge could suggest. He was most careful about cleanliness; he hired some extra rooms, he lessened the number of beds in some

of the dormitories, and fed the boys better : all of which measures involved considerable additional expense.

But he did not rely only on material means. He applied himself most earnestly to those far more efficacious measures, which are spiritual. There is trustworthy evidence that, in the earliest days of the danger, Don Bosco, prostrate before the altar, prayed in these words : " My God, strike the shepherd, but spare the tender flock " ; and turning to the Blessed Virgin, he would say : " O Heavenly Mother, loving and powerful, preserve my children, and if God demands a victim from amongst us, I am here, ready to die, when, and as He pleases."

He was, indeed, the good shepherd who offered his life for his sheep.

On the 5th of August, the feast of Our Lady of the Snow, he gathered all the inmates of the Institute about him and delivered a little discourse, which, with the aid of one person and another, it has been possible to reconstruct almost in its entirety.

" You have heard," he said, " that the cholera has made its appearance, and there have been some deaths already. Many in this city are thrown into consternation by it, and even we ourselves are now in considerable anxiety. I should like to suggest some precautions to you. If you follow them, I hope that you will all escape the terrible disease.

" First of all, let me tell you that this pestilence is nothing new. Holy Scripture speaks of it. Ecclesiasticus says, ' In many meats there will be sickness, and greediness will turn to cholera.' But God, who here points to the root of this evil, suggests also a preservative. ' Take sparingly,' He seems to say, ' of the viands that are placed before you.' A little wine is enough for those who have been well bred. But God gives the remedy that is best of all, when, in another place, He says : ' Put sin far from you. Set a watch upon your actions. Cleanse your heart from all stain.'

" These, then, my dear children, are the means

I would prescribe to enable you to pass untouched through the epidemic. They are almost the same as those prescribed by the doctors: *sobriety, moderation, calmness, and courage.* But who can be calm and courageous, when he is in mortal sin? He lives under God's ban. He knows that if he dies he will go to hell. How can he be at peace?

"I recommend you, besides, to place yourselves, body and soul, in the hands of the Blessed Virgin. Is cholera produced by infectious air, or by contagion, or similar natural causes? If so, we have need of a good medicine as a preservative. And what preservative can be better than the protection of the Queen of Heaven,—called by the Church the 'Health of the Sick'? Or is this deadly disease rather a scourge in the Hands of God, made angry by the sins of the world? In that case, we need an eloquent advocate and a loving Mother, whose powerful prayer and maternal tenderness will appease His wrath, take the scourge out of His Hand, and obtain for us mercy and pardon. Just such an intercessor is Our Lady, Our Advocate, Mother of Mercy, Our Life, Our Sweetness, and Our Hope.

"In 1835, the same malady visited Turin; but the Holy Virgin drove it away very soon. In memory of this favour, the city erected a fine granite column with a statue of the Blessed Virgin in white marble. You may see it in the Square before the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Consolation. Who can tell that Mary will not again defend us this year, keeping far from us this cruel sickness, or, at any rate, preventing its taking a firm hold upon Turin?

"To-day is the feast of Our Lady of the Snow, and to-morrow begins the novena for the beautiful festival by which the Church honours her peaceful and holy death, and recalls her triumph, her glory and power in Heaven. I advise each of you to make a good confession to-morrow, and a fervent communion, so that I may offer you, one and all, to Our Blessed Lady, begging her to look down upon, and protect you as her children. Will you do this?"

They all agreed. At this point Don Bosco stopped for a moment, and then began again, in a tone of particular earnestness: "If you all place yourselves in a state of grace," he said, "and if you avoid mortal sin, I will promise that none of you will be touched by the cholera. But, if any one of you remains at enmity with God, or, still worse, dares gravely to offend Him anew, I can no longer guarantee the safety either of the offender or of anybody else in the house."

No pen can describe the effect that these solemn words had upon the boys. Some of them went to confession that night and some the following morning.

From that day forth the conduct of Don Bosco's boys was as edifying as it could possibly be. Prayer, the frequenting of the Sacraments, industry, obedience, charity, and the fear of God, were practised to the highest degree of perfection. Above all, they had the greatest dread of sin. If any one feared that by word or action he had offended God, however slightly, he ran off at once to confide the matter to Don Bosco, and to ask him what he ought to do, or what penance he should perform. In the evening, especially after prayers, they would all gather round him, to lay their difficulties before him or to tell him their little faults of the day; and sometimes the patient priest would stand there for an hour or more, hearing what this one and that one had to say, giving courage, comfort and consolation, and sending them off to rest in peace and contentment. This evening scene was a sight that greatly moved those present. It gave a touching proof of the freedom from sin that all the boys desired to maintain in God's sight.

The boys, also, who attended the Festive Oratory began to lead most edifying lives. On Sundays they came punctually to Mass, approached the Sacraments often, and, during the week, gave the best possible example to all who saw them or were at work with them.

Meanwhile, as the cholera cases in Turin and its suburbs became more and more frequent, special hospitals were organised; in them, the patients who

could not provide for themselves and had no facilities for home-care, were received and treated.

Two of these improvised hospitals were established within a short distance of the Oratory. But while the Municipality of Turin easily established these cholera hospitals, it was with the greatest difficulty that paid attendants could be provided for them, or for the sick in private houses. The bravest were appalled by the disease and refused to risk their lives for money. It was at this time that a noble and generous resolution flashed into Don Bosco's mind.

Having been for many days and nights in attendance upon the cholera patients, in company with several of the priests who used to come to the Oratory, and having seen with his own eyes the dire necessity in which many of the sick were, Don Bosco called his boys together. He described to them the miserable state of the cholera patients, many of whom succumbed for want of prompt succour. He pointed out that to dedicate oneself to their service would be a true act of charity, and that Christ promised; in the Gospel, to look upon acts done to the sick as done to Himself. In all epidemics, he said, there had always been generous Christian souls who had faced death by the side of the plague-stricken, ministering to them, body and soul. He told them that the Mayor had asked for infirmarians and helpers; that he, Don Bosco, and several others, had already responded to the appeal; and he wished that some of the boys would join him in this work of mercy. These words were not in vain, but stirred in the hearts of the Oratory boys a desire to prove themselves worthy sons of such a father. Fourteen at once offered themselves for the work and gave in their names to be handed on to the sanitary commission; and, a few days later, thirty more followed their example.

Now it must be remembered that the terror of the cholera had seized upon all, and even doctors fled the city. Youth is naturally timid in such a crisis. Under these circumstances, it is impossible not to admire the enthusiasm with which Don Bosco's boys threw them-

selves into the work. Not only did they take it up cheerfully, some of them even went to it as a most enjoyable occupation.

To prepare them for their work, Don Bosco gave them certain rules, so that their labours might be of corporal and spiritual advantage to the cholera patients. The dread malady had generally two phases, or periods: the seizure, which, in the absence of immediate treatment, was generally fatal; and the reaction; during which the returning circulation of the blood often brought about death. Whoever took charge of a cholera case had first to aim at mitigating the violence of the seizure, and then at hastening and regulating the reaction of the blood. These results could best be obtained by means of gentle friction, and hot fomentations with flannel bandages on the extremities, when cramp and cold were present. Don Bosco taught the young infirmarians so well, that they went out qualified to help like so many improvised doctors. He added some wise counsels as to the affairs of the soul, so that, as far as the matter rested with them, none of the sick should die without the consolations of religion.

When they were sufficiently prepared, a time-table was drawn up, and the infirmarians were dispatched in all directions, some to the cholera hospitals, others to private houses. A few were ordered to go about exploring, to see if there were any cases as yet unreported; others held themselves in readiness at home, to go out in response to the first summons. However, as soon as it was known that the Oratory boys were prepared to nurse cholera patients, calls upon them became so many, that all thought of a time-table had to be abandoned. Relations, neighbours, acquaintances, and the Municipality, all hastened to Don Bosco for help, so that the boys were for ever on some errand of mercy. There were days when they had hardly time to snatch a meal, and this, very often, had to be done in the infected house itself. At night, too, there was a perpetual coming and going, and some sleepless nights were passed by the infirmarians through having

to remain in readiness at home, or through being in attendance by some sick-bed. But under all circumstances the boys were cheerful and happy.

At first, before undertaking a case, each one was careful to gargle with vinegar, camphor, or other disinfectant; and, when he came home, he washed and changed so as to remove any danger from his presence; but these operations were needed so often that they soon had to be given up from sheer want of time; and it came about, at last, that no one thought of any but the sick, and care of self was left to Providence.

Nor was it only personal service that the Oratory gave in those terrible times. Although so poor, the Institute had to supply material help to many of the sick who were destitute. An infirmarian often found himself in attendance upon a sick man who had no sheets, no blanket, no shirt! The boy, seeing the dearth of all necessaries, would come home, tell everything to Mother Margaret, and she, with motherly compassion, would go to her cupboards and find something or other for the boy to take back with him. To one, she would give a sheet; to another, a towel or a shirt or a quilt, and so on. After a few days, no one at the Oratory had more than the clothes he wore and a change of bed-linen.

One young infirmarian came to her saying that his patient, who had just been struck down with the deadly seizure, lay in a wretched place, without bedding, and asking her for something to cover him with. The charitable soul went in search at once, but could find only a table-cloth. "Take it," said the kind mother, "this is the only piece of linen I have left. Go and do the best you can with it for the poor sick man."

The Oratory boys did such good work in nursing cholera patients, that the best of the newspapers of the time, calling attention to the self-sacrifice and devotion of the Catholic clergy during the epidemic, made special mention of the Oratory infirmarians. Here is an extract, taken from the *Armonia* of the 16th of September, 1854.

" In publishing our chronicle of the zeal and devotion of the clergy during the cholera, we have hardly done more than give a list of those who dedicated themselves entirely to this work; and, amongst these, we may mention the Dominican Fathers and the Oblates of Our Lady of Consolation. But, if the mild form of the disease did not give the Turinese clergy the fullest opportunity of displaying their heroism, yet the way in which they fulfilled their mission was sufficient proof of the zeal that would have been forthcoming, had Providence tried us more severely.

" We can recount how the clergy used their influence to dispel the prejudices of the ignorant against doctors and medicines. The priests must have been touched to find that the poorest classes, when a prey to the terrible malady, would shut the door in the doctor's face, yet would welcome, with outstretched arms, the priest who came to them with spiritual and corporal comfort. And a word from him was enough to make them admit the doctor and swallow his medicines, though they loathed the drugs more than the disease itself.

" . . . We wish to make particular mention of the work done by Don Galvagno at the San Donato Cholera Hospital, and by Don Bosco, Founder and Rector of the Oratory. For several weeks these two priests never lay down in bed, except with their clothes on; and then their rest, such as it was, would be interrupted by three or four sick calls. Don Bosco was able to present a list of fourteen of his boys to the sanitary commission. They volunteered for the service of cholera cases in hospitals and in private homes. These boys were well prepared for their duties, ready to suggest pious sentiments to the patients, prompt with words of comfort, and were expert infirmarians. Animated with the spirit of Don Bosco, who is more a father to them than a superior, they approached the cholera patients so bravely, that they inspired the sick with confidence and courage. With comforting words they set to work, handling their patients without any sign of fear or disgust. Thus, as soon as they entered an infected

house, they turned to those inmates who showed terror, advising them to go away if they were afraid, and undertaking to do all that the patient required, unless the sick person happened to belong to the female sex, in which case they would ask some of the relations to remain, if not near the sick-bed, at least not very far off. When death supervened, if the patient was not a woman, the young infirmarian would perform all the last offices.

“ Besides the first fourteen, thirty other boys from the Oratory sent in their names, and were similarly instructed with regard to corporal and spiritual services. They were ready, too, to go to the help of their companions, if need arose.

“ We have deemed fit to dwell especially on the services of this valuable Institute, because these services were, in a sense, a debt paid back by the inmates of the Institute to their pious benefactors, whose alms have been its sustenance. We are certain that the charitable public will rejoice to know how well placed those alms have been; and our words ought to stimulate the benevolent to further generosity.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Attack on the Lazaretto. — One of the first cholera stricken. — Strange discovery of a sick person. — Only one case of cholera. — Thanksgiving. — The orphans of the victims. — Letter from the Mayor.

IT is not out of place here to single out some other facts, worthy of mention, that happened during this epidemic. First of all, it must not be imagined that the young infirmarians needed but little effort to master their fear and overcome their natural repugnance. One of the fourteen who first gave in their names and courageously visited the victims of the cholera, in describing their work, many years later, gave an account which of itself would suffice to make one understand the self-sacrifice necessary, in order to apply themselves to this work and to persevere in it. The first time he set foot in the hospital, seeing the ravages left by the disease, the livid and death-like faces, the sunken eyes and, above all, the victims gasping for breath, he was seized with such fear, that he turned pãle, his eyes seemed to swim, his strength failed and he fainted away. Fortunately, Don Bosco was with him and prevented him from falling, for, had he been alone, the hospital authorities would probably have taken him for another case of the cholera; as it was, some fresh air soon restored him.

Truly, one stood in need of great courage to remain constant at this work among the haunts of suffering and death. Besides the terrible pains to which so many victims were a prey, it was heartrending to see these poor people, almost the very moment they breathed their last, hurried to a neighbouring mortuary, and

immediately afterwards carried to the cemetery and buried. Sometimes it was doubtful whether they were actually dead when they were placed in the cart. In one hospital where the boys from the Oratory were serving, the following incident occurred. A body had just been brought to an adjoining mortuary, when a nurse from the infirmary said to the doctor: "I believe that man still breathes; he should be taken back again." "Leave him there," replied the doctor, carelessly, "only mind he does not escape." It may be imagined what mental courage was needed to assist at such scenes.

During the first days, one had to overcome not only the fear of disease and death, but also the threats of certain people. It should be remarked that the hospitals, although they were introduced into the suburbs and were a wise provision, were nevertheless regarded with prejudice and even abhorred by the sick and those who lived near. Some believed that the sick in these places died sooner than they otherwise would, or that death was caused by the doctors. Those who lived near feared, and not without reason, that the hospital would infect the surrounding air and place their lives in peril. Having been unable to prevent their opening, they resolved to have them closed or to render them useless, by means alike foul and unlawful. Accordingly, in the suburb of San Donato as also elsewhere, bands of rascals from the neighbourhood determined to frighten away all those who offered themselves for the service of the sick, so that, when there was no one to care for them, no more sick people would be brought. Acting on this plan, these ruffians began with threats, then proceeded to use force, so that to go or return to the hospital, especially at night time, it was necessary to be escorted by a public guard. On one of the first evenings, two of Don Bosco's young clerics, one of whom was Don Rua, fell in for rather a rough time. Returning from the hospital, on their way to the Oratory, they entered a dark passage, when immediately they heard shouts and hisses. Ruffians then attempted to attack

them with stones, and but for their swiftness and their fortunate meeting with two policemen, they might have been caught and maltreated.

In spite of this violence, they continued to frequent the hospital as long as there was need for it. After a while the alarm of the neighbours diminished, and there remained alone the admiration of the whole city.

The assistance rendered to one of the early victims seems deserving of special mention. On the morning of the 16th of August, the feast of St. Roch, one of the patron saints of Turin, a person came to the Oratory with the news that there was a poor man in great pain in a field close by, asking for help. Don Bosco at once called young Charles Tomatis, and they both went to the spot. Here they found a workman, who had been struck only a little time before by this dread disease; he had apparently been eating a melon, half of which was still near him. Some persons had gathered round him and were observing him with looks of fear, but no one dared to help him, such was the horror with which they were filled. Don Bosco comforted him with encouraging words, and, aided by the above-mentioned boy, set him on his legs. The poor man walked feebly for a few yards, but being seized with very violent pains, had to stop. They lifted him up and carried him to the hospital, where, having restored him somewhat, Don Bosco administered the last sacraments. The disease, however, had obtained too strong a hold, and by noon the man was dead.

About the same time, a poor and pious woman was employed at a house in Via Cottolengo, where a top attic was allowed her for her meals, as she went to her home every evening. On the 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of Our Blessed Lady, a boy from the Oratory came to this house and inquired of the tenant: "Have you anyone sick here with the cholera?" "No, thank God!" replied he, "there is no one here." "Yet I feel sure there is someone ill here," said the boy. "You must have mistaken the house, young man," concluded the other, "for, on my word, we are

all in good health here, and out of bed." At this announcement the boy stepped out for a moment, glanced at the house, and then returning, said: "Do me the favour of looking carefully through the house, for there must be a sick woman here."

The tenant then went from room to room with the boy, till they came at last to the garret. There, to his horror and astonishment, he found the poor woman huddled up in the corner, and almost dead from the terrible disease. A priest was called at once. He heard her confession and administered Extreme Unction, and had the consolation of seeing her die a holy death.

Those living in the house thought that she had gone home on the preceding evening, as was her wont. She had, instead, gone upstairs and had been seized with cholera, unknown to everyone.

At this time the boys, with Don Bosco and his mother, numbered about a hundred. Now, although placed in a position where the cholera was raging so fiercely, that on all sides every house had to mourn for one or more victims, yet after four months, when the scourge had passed away, the boys were counted, and not one out of the whole number was missing! The disease had surrounded them, had advanced to the very doors of the Oratory, had even penetrated into Don Bosco's room, but it seems that an invisible hand had commanded it to retire, and it obeyed, respecting the lives of all. The robust appearance of the boys who at this time had devoted themselves untiringly to the service of the cholera-stricken, caused great surprise. They looked so vigorous and healthy that they seemed to have passed a season, not amidst the poisonous exhalations of hospitals and infected houses, but in some health resort or country spot, enjoying holidays and repose. All those who knew this were filled with wonder, and it was impossible not to see in this fact the merciful and protecting hand of God.

Don Bosco himself was attacked by this disease. His mother related that one evening, having gone to bed after a very hard day's work, he felt seized with a

sudden weakness, then with cold and cramp in his feet and legs—in fine, with all the symptoms of the dreaded disease. Fearing that he might alarm the boys, he said nothing about it, but gave himself the usual treatment for those suffering from cholera. Accordingly, by folding the blankets and sheets tightly round him, he began to rub his body, arms, feet and legs with such violence, that after a quarter of an hour, tired and worn out by the fatigue consequent on the severe exertion, his whole body was bathed in perspiration. In that state he fell asleep, and in the morning was perfectly well. His was the only case of cholera that occurred in the house.

When the disease had disappeared from the city, Don Bosco wished the boys to make a solemn thanksgiving to our Lord, who had so lovingly preserved them. For this purpose he fixed the 8th of December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the very day on which the immortal Pontiff, Pius IX, surrounded by two hundred Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops, who had flocked from all parts of the world, solemnly proclaimed this prerogative of Our Blessed Lady a dogma of faith. On the morning of that memorable day, the boys of the Oratory, and many from the Festive Oratory, devoutly approached the sacraments of confession and communion in honour of Mary Immaculate, who in her maternal goodness had protected them. In the evening, Don Bosco, by a suitable discourse, prepared their minds for the thanksgiving. He spoke to them in a manner adapted to their intelligence, of the great mystery which on that day had been defined as a dogma of faith. He then told them of the power of Mary, her goodness towards her devout clients, and went on to say, that all danger of cholera being now past, they ought to thank God for preserving them. He compared the passage of the cholera in their country, to the passage of the exterminating angel in Egypt, and to make them better understand the great benefit that had been conferred on them, he described the many heartrending scenes which

had taken place in many parts of Liguria, Piedmont, in Turin itself, and even in houses in the neighbourhood. "Therefore," he added, in conclusion, "my dear children, thank God for having kept you alive in the midst of a thousand dangers. But that our thanksgiving may be more pleasing to Him, let us unite in a cordial and sincere promise, to consecrate to Him alone the rest of our days, loving Him with all our hearts, practising our religion like good Christians, observing the commandments of God and His Church, and fleeing from mortal sin, which is a disease infinitely worse than the cholera and the plague." After the discourse he intoned the *Te Deum*, and the boys took up the hymn with the liveliest transports of thanksgiving and devotion.

As a fitting close to this chapter, a word of praise must be given to the Turin Municipality. The committee took the greatest care to prevent the spread, and to ameliorate the sad effects of the pestilence, by publishing wise rules concerning health, by erecting hospitals, by providing for the care of the sick, and by helping many of those who had been deprived of their parents. For the latter they opened a temporary school near the Church of St. Dominic, where they provided lodging, food and clothing for a great number, who, without this charitable assistance, would have remained abandoned in their terrible misfortune. Moreover, not content with supplying these poor boys with the necessaries of the body, they made arrangements for their religious and moral education, and requested Don Bosco to be their teacher. With the greatest pleasure he acceded to their praiseworthy desire. He therefore divided his time between the cholera-stricken and the orphans, and that the latter might receive the necessary instruction, he chose some of his most capable boys to teach them, especially Christian Doctrine. These arrangements continued till the end of November, when the Municipality closed the school and confided some of the children to the care of the Oratory, and others to that of another benevolent Institute. Twenty

of the smaller boys were consigned to Don Bosco, and from that day became his adopted children. They were taught various trades, and in course of time left the Oratory, well prepared to fend for themselves. In recognition of his services in this direction, the Municipality sent the following letter to Don Bosco :

“ Turin, 17th December, 1854.

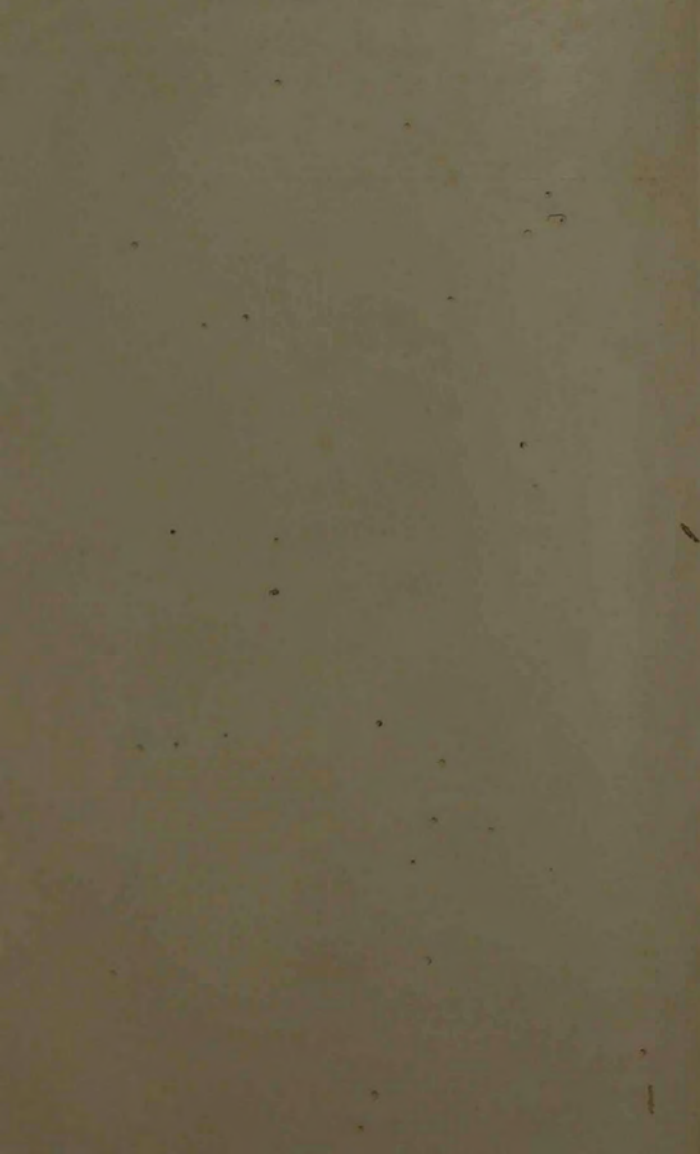
The Mayor, in the name of the Committee of Public Welfare, on behalf of the poor cholera-stricken and their families, begs to express his gratitude for the noble and generous help given by you in the instruction of these poor boys who had been temporarily housed in the school of St. Dominic, and who certainly will not fail to pray to God for their worthy teacher.

In fulfilling the duty imposed on him, the writer wishes to express his own feelings of marked esteem and admiration.”

In another note, dated the 4th of the same month, requesting Don Bosco to receive a boy named Andrew Fioccardi, the same gentleman adds? “ I take this opportunity of thanking you in the name of the Committee for your efforts on behalf of the poor boys whose parents fell victims to the fatal disease which, for almost four months, afflicted our city and neighbourhood.”



DON BOSCO MEETS HIS PUPIL DOMINIC SAVIO,
NOW VENERABLE.



CHAPTER XL.

*A saintly pupil of the Oratory. — The little apostle.
The peacemaker. — The favourite of Heaven. —
A prophecy.*

AS a reward for what the Oratory had done during the epidemic of the cholera, Our Lord in that very year sent to Don Bosco a boy who was destined to shed lustre on the institution. During the three years he spent at the Oratory, he gave such a noble example, that its effects can yet be perceived and will be for a long time to come. The lad referred to was young Dominic Savio, who was born at Riva di Chieri on the 2nd of April, 1842, and died at Mondonio on the 9th of March, 1857.

His stay at the Oratory assumed such a singular and extraordinary character, that it was quite an event, and this work would not be complete without a special mention of it.

Of this saintly youth, who was a school-mate of the writer, we have a beautiful life from the pen of Don Bosco himself. It forms a valuable addition to the *Catholic Readings*, and it has already done, and continues to do great good among the young.

One of the virtues Dominic caused to shine more brightly among his companions, was a great zeal for the salvation of souls. He was indeed a little apostle. In order to become more inflamed in the holy exercise of helping his neighbour, and to succeed the better in it, he read the lives of such saints as St. Philip Neri, St. Francis of Sales, St. Francis Xavier, etc., who have worked in an especial manner for this end. He often spoke of the missionaries who were labouring for the

conversion of the heathen; he prayed for them and envied their lot. He was sometimes heard to exclaim: "How many souls are for ever lost because there is no one to preach the Word of God to them! How many boys are there in great danger of perdition because there is no one to instruct them in their religious duties!"

He was not satisfied with mere desires, but worked zealously as well. As far as his age and capability would allow, he devoted himself with energy and joy to instructing in Christian doctrine the little boys in the church of the Oratory, and if anyone seemed to be in special need, he assumed with perfect goodwill the task of teaching him catechism on any day of the week or at any hour of the day. Everything became sweet and easy to him, when he thought of co-operating in the salvation of a soul.

Some of the more exemplary boys of the Oratory, who had at heart the welfare of their companions, had formed a sort of league in order to influence for the better the more unruly boys. Dominic Savio was enrolled and was soon its life and soul. The diligence he exercised during recreation time to attain this good end was truly wonderful. If, for example, he had anything he could offer as a little prize, he would go among these boys, saying, "Who will have it?" And when a crowd of competitors had gathered, he would add quietly, "I'll give it to the one who answers best a catechism question." He, however, questioned only the most unruly, and no sooner had a satisfactory answer been given than he bestowed his little present. Thus in a short time he won the hearts of all the little scapegraces, and by these he was continually surrounded.

He sought the company not only of this class of boys, but also of another who were not less in need of his solicitude. Among those frequenting the Festive Oratory were some who were somewhat uncouth and ignorant, and they for the most part were shunned by their companions. These were the very ones most desired and sought after by Dominic Savio. He never

went by appearances nor followed the bent of natural sympathy, but having only the soul in view, he approached them, amused them by telling stories, invited them to walk with him, induced them to talk, and, in fine, lifted them from their lonely condition by many a little device. The following was one of his favourite plans. When it happened that anyone had given up the practice of confession for an unusually long time, the zealous boy somehow managed to meet with the erring one and to chat or play with him. After a time he would change the conversation or suspend the game, and say to his friend: "Will you do me a favour? On Saturday I am going to confession; will you accompany me?" Generally, in order to please him, the companion would answer yes. This was sufficient for Dominic, and he would immediately resume the game or conversation. Next day he would do the same thing with another; and on the following Saturday evening or Sunday morning, it was an edifying sight to see him at the feet of his confessor, with two or three, and sometimes even seven or eight boys who were least given to the practice of piety, drawn by him to this salutary act of religion. These occurrences were very frequent and of great advantage to his companions. They also afforded consolation to Don Bosco, who used to say that Dominic Savio drew more fish into his net with his little games than many preachers with their sermons.

This zeal rose almost to heroism when it was question of preventing some one from offending God. The following example is taken from amongst a great many others.

At that time the boys residing at the Oratory numbered over a hundred; Don Bosco was therefore unable to teach them all as of old, and a regular school for the boarders had not yet been established at the Oratory, because masters were needed. Accordingly, the boys who were pursuing their studies frequented two private schools in Turin, which were attended by many children of the better families of the town. While

Savio was attending lessons at one of these schools, two fellow-students gave him an opportunity of showing his zeal. Having quarrelled, they exchanged angry words and challenged each other to fight with stones in the evening. Dominic having heard this, was very much pained and anxiously desired to reconcile them. He tried to dissuade them from their foolish quarrel by telling them that vengeance was contrary to reason and religion; he wrote notes to both, threatening to refer the matter to the professor, and even to their parents, but all his efforts were in vain. Then his magnanimous heart suggested to him a plan which succeeded. He waited for both after school, and said to them: "Why do you keep up this wretched quarrel? Since you persist in it, all I ask of you is to agree to one condition that I shall propose." They consented, provided it did not interfere with their dispute. He assured them it would not. They had already determined to continue their quarrel by a regular fight that evening, so Savio told them he would not let them know his proposition till then.

They made him promise not to let anyone know of the forthcoming fight, fearing it might be stopped. When evening came, the combatants arrived at the appointed time on the field of battle. They took up their positions at a certain distance from each other, and were about to commence hostilities when Savio said: "I wish you now to fulfil the condition to which you agreed." So saying, he drew out his little crucifix, which he was accustomed to wear round his neck, and holding it on high with one hand, said: "I wish both of you to gaze on this image, and then to pronounce these words: 'Jesus Christ, though innocent, died pardoning his executioners; I a miserable sinner, wish to offend Him by revenging myself.'" Then, falling on his knees before the more infuriated, he said: "Give me the first blow." Altogether taken aback by this, the boy assured Savio that he would not touch him and would not allow anyone else to strike him. Having knelt down before the other also and received a similar

answer, Savio rose up, and in a voice trembling with emotion, said: "How is it that you are ready to save me, a miserable creature, from offence, and are not capable of pardoning an insult to save a soul which cost the Blood of your Divine Redeemer, and which you are placing in danger of perdition by this sin?" Still holding the crucifix, he remained for a few moments silent and in tears. At such a spectacle of charity the anger of the two combatants was overcome. One of them avowed later on that he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself in presence of the boy. Some days after, already friends with each other, they reconciled themselves to God in the tribunal of confession.

It is not surprising that God favoured this pious youth with many of those heavenly gifts, of which we read in the lives of the Saints. Often after holy communion, or while praying before the Blessed Sacrament, he fell into an ecstasy and remained so for hours. One day he was absent from breakfast, class and dinner, and nobody knew where he was. About two o'clock in the afternoon, Don Bosco was informed, and immediately suspected that he was still in the church, a thing which had happened more than once before. Without saying a word to anyone he went to the church and then to the choir, where he found him erect and immovable. One hand was resting on a rail, the other on his breast; and his face, with an angelic look, was turned towards the tabernacle. Don Bosco called him but he did not reply. He then shook him, and Savio turned round and exclaimed: "Oh, is Mass already finished?" When told it was two o'clock in the afternoon, he seemed confused and humbly asked pardon for his transgression of the rule and his absence from school. Don Bosco sent him to dinner, and to free him from the importunate questions which his companions would perhaps have put to him, told him to say that he had just been carrying out one of Don Bosco's orders.

On another occasion he went to Don Bosco and said: "Please come with me, you are needed very urgently."
"Where do you wish me to go?" asked Don Bosco.

"Be quick, I will show you," he replied, "there is no time to be lost." Don Bosco, who had for a good while been a witness to the extraordinary things which God deigned to work in this pious youth, put on his hat and followed him. After a fast walk, he led Don Bosco into a house and showed him a room on the third floor. "This is where you are wanted," he said, and leaving Don Bosco, he returned at once to the Oratory. A woman opened the door, and seeing the priest, said: "Quick, or you will be too late. My husband became a Protestant, and now that he is on the point of death he wishes to be reconciled to the True Church." Don Bosco went at once to the sick man, who was in the greatest anxiety, and heard his confession. Just then the parish priest, who had been sent for, arrived, and had barely time to administer Extreme Unction to him by one single anointing.

Some time after, Don Bosco asked Savio how he had known that there was a sick man, reduced to such an extremity, in that house. The youth looked up at him with an air of distress, and Don Bosco did not question him further, knowing that it is more painful to holy souls to reveal the gifts conferred on them by God than the sins they have committed.

After his love of God, came the love of Mary Immaculate and his reverence for the Pope. Amongst the most devout boys he established a Sodality in honour of the august Queen of Heaven. He kept Her feasts, the novenas in Her honour, and especially the month of May, with such piety, that he inspired all with wonder and devotion.

Of the Pope he spoke with the deepest respect, he prayed fervently for him, and expressed a great desire of seeing him before his death, saying repeatedly that he had something of great importance to tell him. Don Bosco having often heard him talk in this manner, asked him what was the important matter which he wished to communicate to the Pope.

"If I could speak to him I should tell him that in the midst of the tribulations that are awaiting him, he

must not cease to show himself most solicitous for the welfare of England; God is preparing in that kingdom a great triumph for the Catholic Faith."

"What reasons have you for saying this?"

"I will tell you, but I do not wish others to know about it. If you go to Rome, please tell Pius IX that one morning as I was making my thanksgiving after communion, I had a great distraction, and I seemed to see a vast plain full of people, surrounded by a thick mist. They were walking along like men who had lost their way and did not know where to set their feet. 'This country,' said a man who was standing by me, 'is England.' I was about to seek further information from him, when I saw Pope Pius IX, as I have seen him represented in certain pictures. He was robed in great majesty, and, holding aloft a bright light, he advanced towards this immense crowd of people. As he approached, the brightness of the light dispelled the mist and the men were left in broad daylight. 'This light,' my friend said to me, 'is the Catholic Religion, which is to enlighten England.'"

It was thus this devout boy related the matter to Don Bosco, who, in 1858, having gone for the first time to Rome, communicated it to Pope Pius IX, who heard it with pleasure. "This," said the Pope, "strengthens me in my resolution to labour energetically for the welfare of England, towards which country I have already shown the greatest solicitude. This narrative comes to me as the advice of a pious soul, if nothing more."

As later events proved, Savio was a true prophet. And in fact, who is there that does not know the progress which Catholicism has been making in the United Kingdom these last fifty-five years? The ecclesiastical hierarchy was restored, first of all in England, then in Scotland; liberty has been granted to Catholics in the exercise of their religion, and also the faculty of preaching and teaching. The numerous churches that have arisen both in the towns and in the country, the daily conversions of distinguished persons, the dispelling of prejudices against the Pope and the

Catholic Church, the great eagerness with which people seek to know the truth, all these and other facts are an evident proof that many years back young Savio saw into the future with the eyes of one inspired by God.

But a soul adorned with so many virtues and favoured with such high gifts was far more worthy to be in Heaven than on earth, and God called him to Himself.

Never of a strong constitution, he gradually became visibly weaker, and this occasioned grave fears for his life. All the care lavished on him at the Oratory and all the remedies having proved unavailing, Don Bosco sought the opinion of his medical advisers. They unanimously agreed that the boy should be kept from all study and sent to breathe the air of his native country.

They sent word to his father, and his departure was fixed for the 1st of March. Dominic agreed to this decision, but only to make thereby a sacrifice to God. On being asked why he was opposed to going home, he answered: "Because I desire to end my days at the Oratory." "You will go home, and when your health is somewhat better you will come back." "Oh no, no; I shall never return." He seems to have known by revelation the day and hour of his death.

When he reached home, the doctor paid him a visit, and judging that he was suffering from inflammation, bled him. After the operation the illness seemed to take a turn for the better, so at least the doctor asserted, and so his parents believed, but Dominic held a different opinion. Guided by the thought that it is better to receive the sacraments in good time than to risk losing them, he called his father and said to him: "Father, it would be well to hold a consultation with the heavenly doctor: I wish to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion." His wish was satisfied. He received the holy Viaticum with angelic fervour, and, both before and after, burst forth into such beautiful and ardent prayers, that one might have thought him to be a saint in colloquy with God.

Meanwhile the surgeon kept on bleeding him till he

had done so ten times, and the boy submitted without showing the least sign of impatience. He was only too glad to shed his blood for the love of Our Lord, who had shed His Precious Blood on the Cross.

A few days after his arrival, the doctor was congratulating the patient on the improvement of his health, and said to his parents: "Let us thank Divine Providence; we have been fortunate, for the disease is overcome; all that is needed now is judicious nursing." His parents rejoiced at such words, but Dominic laughed, and added: "The world is overcome; it only remains for me to appear in a becoming manner before God." When the doctor had gone, he asked to have Extreme Unction administered to him, and his parents and even the parish priest, deceived by the serenity and cheerfulness of the sick boy and by the words of the doctor, granted his request, not so much from necessity as from fear of displeasing him. Having received Extreme Unction with the devotion of a saint, he asked also for the Papal blessing. Fortified by all the comforts of holy Religion, he showed such a heavenly joy, that no pen can describe it. During those precious moments, pressing the crucifix to his bosom, he recited some pious verses which were familiar to him.

It was the evening of the 9th of March. To hear him speak or to look at his face, he seemed like one who was lying on his bed to rest. His joyful demeanour, his radiant countenance, and the full possession he kept of his faculties, would have dispelled from anyone the idea that he was at the point of death. An hour and a half before breathing his last, the parish priest came to see him, and listened with delight and wonder, while recommending his soul to God. He made frequent ejaculations, all of them expressing the liveliest desire of going speedily to Heaven.

When the parish priest had gone, expecting to see him soon again, the boy fell asleep and took half-an-hour's repose. On awaking, he turned towards his parents, and said:

"Father, it is time."

"I am here, my son, what do you want?"

"The time has come; take my prayer-book and read to me the prayers for a happy death."

At these words his mother burst into tears and left the sick room. His father was filled with sorrow, and tears drowned his voice. However, he made a great effort and began to read the prayers. Dominic repeated each word attentively and distinctly; but at the end of each part he said alone: "Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me." When he came to the words: "When at length my soul admitted to Thy presence shall first behold with terror Thy awful Majesty, reject me not, but receive me into Thy bosom, where I may for ever sing Thy praises," "Oh, yes!" he added, "that is just what I desire: to sing for ever the praises of the Lord." He afterwards appeared to be taking again a little repose, like one who is reflecting seriously on a matter of great importance. After a few moments he opened his eyes again, and with a smile, said in a clear voice: "Good-bye, father, good-bye. Ah, what a beautiful sight! . . ." So saying, with a heavenly smile, he expired, his hands joined across his breast in the form of a cross. In the evening of the 9th of March, 1857, there was an angel less on earth; an angel more in heaven.

That young Dominic Savio went immediately to his reward, we may piously gather from the virtues practised by him during life in an uncommon degree, from the heavenly gifts with which he was adorned, from his enviable death, and above all, from the many graces and favours that have been obtained, even to the present day, through his intercession.

It was affirmed above that Dominic's coming to the Oratory must be considered an event of outstanding importance, and with reason, for if the beauty and fragrance of a flower shows the fruitfulness of the soil which gives it life; if the flavour and sweetness of a fruit argues the soundness of the tree that bore it, may we not rightly conclude that the sanctity of Dominic Savio is an undoubted proof of the excellence of the

education received by the boys at the Oratory, in which, for three years, he was a pupil, and which to him was the stepping-stone to such exalted perfection. He shed lustre on the Oratory by the great good he did there, and by the greater good that is still being done. Indeed, in the way of virtue, young Savio was, and always will be, a model for the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales; and each one of them, in succeeding years, will be able to say to himself: "Within these very walls, by the observance of the same rules, with the help of the same practices of piety, a boy of my age became a saint; in this same place he became most pleasing to God; here, in fine, as in a well-cultivated garden, he was preserved, he grew as a chosen flower, and rendered himself worthy of being transplanted into Heaven. Now if such was the case with him, why should I not be able to do the same? *Si ille, cur non ego?*" In this manner boys will derive strength to practise the same virtues and feel impelled to labour for a noble end, will be inflamed with zeal to help others, and will cherish the hope of becoming equally dear to God. Following his example and modelling their lives on his, they will become remarkable for their piety and industry, and capable of becoming one day the consolation of the Church and the firm support of civil society.

CHAPTER XLI.

The first Prefect and Economer of the Oratory. — The Marquis Dominic Fassati.—A clever catechist. — A merry carnival. — Remarks on Festive Oratories. — In straitened circumstances. — Providential help. — A lottery. — The Mayor and His Majesty's Minister. — Urban Rattazzi at the Oratory.—St. Clement and Archbishop Fransoni.— Rattazzi and Don Bosco.

THE favour of having for a time as a pupil so holy a youth as Dominic Savio, was not the only one which Our Lord deigned to confer on the Oratory about this time. In the same year, 1854, God sent a most exemplary and hard-working priest from the Archdiocese of Turin, Don Victor Alasonatti, of Avigliana, to aid Don Bosco. He was the first Prefect and Economer of the Oratory and rendered great assistance to Don Bosco; he was also a second father to the boys, and a capable supporter of the Festive Oratories. In order to devote himself more exclusively to the interests of the Oratory, this holy priest, setting aside the more or less worldly considerations laid before him by certain relatives and ecclesiastics, to induce him not to leave them, generously abandoned the ease and comfort which his family circumstances afforded him, and gave up a considerable salary derived from an important professorship.

What moved him principally to join the Oratory was the reflection that Don Bosco badly needed a priest who would remain continually with him at Valdocco; another motive, was the knowledge that a wider field lay open before him where the exercise of his sacred

ministry would be exceptionally advantageous to so many boys.

He remembered also, that though Don Bosco could offer no other salary than food and clothing, he had promised him, in God's name, a crown of glory in Heaven. Having therefore put everything in order, he left his home, his native place, his relations and friends, and came to the Oratory on the eve of the Assumption. He remained with Don Bosco until his death, which took place at Lanzo on the 8th of October, 1865.

A most hard-working and holy priest, he devoted the last years of his life to the task of obtaining from the Holy See the recognition and approval of the cultus *ab immemorabili* of Blessed Cherubino Testa, of Avigliana, his native place, and in this he was successful, though his health suffered very much in consequence. For some months previous he had been afflicted with a serious ailment, which was slowly bringing him to the grave.

He daily awaited the decree of Beatification, and when at last it came, he read it with signs of deep emotion. Afterwards he asked the Director of the College to read it to him, and a few hours later, fortified by the rites of holy Church, he breathed forth his soul in peace. His happy death was looked upon by all as a reward bestowed on him by the newly-beatified. Favours both from God and men to the Oratory did not end here. If up to that time people of every station in life had taken the greatest interest in its welfare, from now onwards their numbers went on increasing, as did also their zeal and solicitude. The works of charity, the assistance rendered by the boys to the victims of the cholera during the terrible epidemic, and the tribute of public praise from the Municipality of Turin, made Don Bosco's institute, its nature and beneficent object more widely known. On the other hand, the extraordinary, one might almost say miraculous, preservation of his boys from the contagion, showed the special protection and the sanction of Heaven towards the work of Don Bosco. Hence the generosity of former benefac-

tors continued and even increased, and the example set by them was followed by many others.

Amongst those charitable persons who for many years so generously supported Don Bosco's work, was the Marquis Dominic Fassati.

He belonged to one of the noblest families of Piedmont. Faithful to his King, he had served him both in peace and in war, and had distinguished himself in the campaigns of Lombardy in 1848-49. For his bravery he had been honoured with the command of the King's bodyguard. He had married Mary De-Maistre, a lady of illustrious parentage and gifted with such rare qualities of mind and heart, that Queen Mary Adelaide, wife of Victor Emmanuel II, chose her as a lady-in-waiting and made her a friend and confidante. This marquis, distinguished by his great merits and attainments, having heard of Don Bosco's work, became both an admirer and supporter of it. He used to come often to the Oratory as though he were a member of it, and do his share in instructing both the boys of the Festive Oratory and the boarders.

For many years, on feast-days and during Lent, he taught catechism to a large class of poor artisans, even putting off his meals to a less convenient time on this account. Once, on arriving somewhat late and finding another catechist in his place, the noble but humble man exclaimed: "It is my fault, and I should do penance." So saying, he sat down on a bench among the boys and stayed till the end, listening to the catechism.

Great was his zeal and wonderful his industry in endeavouring to make the boys attentive and persevering in their work, and to advance them in the knowledge of their religion. Accustomed to order, he, like a good soldier, arranged his boys in such a manner as to have them all under his eye, questioning unexpectedly, now one, now another, so that not knowing who might be asked, all paid the greatest attention. He took down on a sheet of paper notes on their conduct and the names of the absentees.

From time to time he distributed pictures, medals,

books and the like, to the most diligent. Although he had a serious and soldier-like appearance, yet so much was he liked by them, that they tried always to be present at his class, and when they saw him coming they showed signs of youthful pleasure. In a word, Marquis Fassati kept such perfect discipline among the boys, and had such a complete mastery over them, that he might be proposed as a model for teachers. Anxious to become ever more and more perfect in the art of teaching, he did not think it beneath him to assist at the conferences given by Don Bosco to his catechists from time to time. He used to say that no conversation, no assembly, no social entertainment, however brilliant, gave him so much satisfaction as half-an-hour spent in giving catechism to the boys of the Oratory.

A truly edifying example, well worthy of being copied by Catholics, especially at the present time.

In other ways the marquis showed his benevolence on various occasions. One of these was in connection with the carnival of 1855. Don Bosco, from the first years of the Oratory, had introduced the practice of the exercises for a good death. These exercises consisted in going to confession and communion as though they were to be the last, and in reading certain prayers for a happy death. They took place every month, and were also held on the last day of the carnival in suffrage for the holy souls in Purgatory. Knowing this, Marquis Fassati, on one occasion, said: "On the last day of the carnival the boys of the Oratory help the poor sufferers in Purgatory by offering up their confessions, communions and prayers, and it is my wish to do something for them in return."

On the morning of the 20th of February, over a hundred boys from the school and many others from the Festive Oratory heard Mass, went to the sacraments and responded to the prayers for a happy death recited by Don Alasonatti, which were offered for the Holy Souls. For them they offered, in addition to the practices of piety, also the inconvenience caused by the intense cold which was excessively severe at that time.

But on leaving the church they found an unexpected reward in the shape of an excellent repast. It seemed as though the souls in Purgatory were rewarding them by the hands of the marquis, for the relief afforded them through their spiritual exercises. There is no doubt that in reward for his charity, Our Lord bestowed on him that patience, resignation and fortitude which he afterwards displayed when untoward events happened, and also the grace of a most happy death.

These and similar acts of charity on the part of other gentlemen of Turin were an effective stimulus to boys to frequent the catechism classes and the religious functions of the Oratory. They served to verify the truth of that passage of Holy Writ: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all things else shall be added unto you." As the boys received from time to time these other things spoken of in the Gospel, they attended more often and more willingly to the affairs of God and their souls. By degrees they were well grounded in their religion, their virtue grew stronger, and thus they became good Christians, useful and respectable citizens.

And here, since a favourable opportunity presents itself, a few remarks on Festive Oratories can be given for the benefit of directors and promoters. If they wish to have them well attended by boys, healthy attractions are indispensable. Without these, the greater part of the boys, being their own masters either because they have no parents, or because their parents take no care of them, cannot be induced to assist at the sacred functions and at the religious instruction there given. The waywardness of these young people incites them to avoid instinctively anything like restraint; hence the need of attracting and catching them like flies with honey. In order then that a Festive Oratory may prosper, games and amusements of every sort should be provided, whilst kindness and tact on the part of the Superiors are imperative at all times. From time to time let little dramatic entertainments be given, also small raffles, presents, outings, treats, and the like. With

such attractions the Oratory will always be full of boys, many of whom might be tempted to remain in ignorance of their religion, while acquainted with every species of evil, and to spend their time in the public squares, in the streets and in the outskirts of towns. We shall have the sorrow of seeing an impious and lawless generation rise up; we shall have to witness the formation of organizations and societies for flooding the world with the errors of paganism and reducing it once more to a state of barbarism. In many towns of Italy, France and elsewhere, sad examples of this are to be found. Let those Catholics who are in easy circumstances be generous in these sad times; let them not be afraid to make some little sacrifice in order to lead so many of the young to the path of virtue, that they may be won back to God, to their country and to Heaven. If we delay any longer we shall be too late; ignorance, passion, bad company will make of so many poor and unguarded youths, recruits and followers of evil societies, the disciples of those who glory in being the votaries of Satan. Let the rich beware, lest sooner or later God should make of one of these unfortunate beings a scourge to punish them for their indifference, through which so many have grown up in wickedness and crime. Let us all strive, at least by our charity and good works, to obtain mercy from God on the day, perhaps not very far off, when His just anger will be manifested.

If through the mercy of God the generosity of our benefactors increased, the needs of the Oratory were not in the least diminished. In 1854-55 the destitution of a large number of families entailed a great increase of poor boys in the school. For want of room, many, it is true, had to be refused, but at times the lot of certain boys, and the perils both of soul and body to which they were exposed were such, that Don Bosco had not the heart to refuse them admittance. Moreover, many, not only from Turin but from other parts, in order to obtain admission more easily, had recourse to the local authorities, and not infrequently to ministers

of State, who in their turn recommended them to Don Bosco's charity. The number, therefore, grew rapidly, expenses became heavier, and large debts were incurred, especially with the baker. The year 1855 was a most remarkable one; it was disastrous for Piedmont, and weighed heavily on Don Bosco and his boys. Within a few months five persons of the royal family were carried away by death, including Queen Mary Teresa and Queen Mary Adelaide, two saintly women, who were truly solicitous for the welfare of the poor.

Mary Teresa, wife of Charles Albert, and mother of Victor Emmanuel II, often sent large alms to the Oratory, sometimes through Don Murialdo, at other times through Cavalier San Giusto, who was attached to the Court. On one occasion she sent a thousand lire in suffrage for the soul of her deceased husband. Another time, Don Bosco, finding himself in great need, wrote to ask her for help, and the next day she sent him another thousand lire. On many other occasions she proved an instrument of Providence to Don Bosco. Hence her death was for him and his boys a very great loss.

At this time also, the despatch of 15,000 Piedmontese soldiers to join the allies against Russia in the Crimean war, an outburst of grape-disease, which for some years devastated the most flourishing vineyards in Piedmont, the scarcity of the harvest in the country, the reappearance of cholera in Sardinia — these and other circumstances affected in their turn the condition of both rich and poor. Hence the Oratory, which depended on charity for its support, was reduced to straitened circumstances.

From time to time, however, Almighty God deigned to show that He was not unmindful of His little ones. One day Don Bosco was going out into the city in search of help, when Count Renato d'Agliano, a nobleman of Turin, illustrious no less by his great piety than by his rank, went up to him and said: "My wife is seriously ill. Will you kindly pray and get your boys to pray for her recovery?" Saying this he gave him

an alms, which was just sufficient to pay half the bread bill. Don Bosco thanked the charitable gentleman, and exhorted him to have confidence, pointing out to him that by that work of charity he had placed Our Lord under the obligation, so to speak, of granting his request.

That same evening, at night prayers, Don Bosco had an Our Father and Hail Mary recited for the recovery of a sick lady, enjoining that they should also be recited on the following days, till further orders. On the third day the count returned to the Oratory, and in words of the deepest gratitude he related that, to the doctor's surprise, his wife was out of danger and almost completely recovered. Full of gratitude to God for so unexpected a favour, he brought another offering. Divine Providence, admirable in its works, disposed that this alms should equal the first, so that within three days Don Bosco was able to pay the baker's bill.

These acts of benevolence inspired Don Bosco with still greater confidence in the goodness of God, and encouraged him to continue his efforts to provide for the needs of his boys. All accounts of these times show him to have been like a poor but anxious mother who, surrounded by a numerous family, and fearing lest her little ones should suffer from want, gives herself no rest till they are provided for.

In order then not to put too great a strain on the generosity of his customary benefactors, Don Bosco made an appeal to public charity. A few paintings having been left over from the former lottery, Don Bosco planned a second one on a smaller scale, with tickets of 20 centesimi each. "Two years ago," he said, "we appealed to the faithful for money to erect our church and house; we now renew our appeal, but this time for bread."

Acting on this plan he established, at the beginning of 1854, a committee of charitable ladies and gentlemen of Turin; he obtained the necessary authorisation, and circulated the tickets in every direction. He sent them to all the bishops and parish priests in the kingdom;

he distributed them to the town councillors, to the senators, to the deputies, to the king's ministers; he sent them to all persons invested with any dignity, whether ecclesiastical or civil, and he did not forget the more or less wealthy persons, thus placing them under the agreeable necessity of doing a good work for the relief of so many poor boys confided to him by God. The appearance of the cholera about this time obliged him to postpone the drawing till the following year.

Each lot of tickets was accompanied by a letter, which ran as follows :

“ Turin, 8th May, 1855.

DEAR SIR,

The special needs of the present time, and the great number of children who have been left without a home during the fatal invasion of the cholera, have put me under the necessity of considerably increasing the number of boys in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, so that their actual number amounts to a hundred. Being therefore reduced to great straits, not knowing whom to appeal to for bread, I sought advice from some pious and worthy gentlemen, and they suggested a small lottery. This proposal having been agreed to and the legal formalities fulfilled, it now remains to distribute the tickets. This work I have entrusted to the care of certain pious persons who, on former occasions, have helped me when in need. I therefore make bold to have recourse to your well-known generosity, by sending you these tickets, requesting you to distribute them among those whom you may think disposed for such works of charity. If you should be unable to dispose of them all, and are unable to retain them for yourself, allow me to ask you for one more favour, namely, to send them within eight days before the drawing to any of the members of the committee. This may likewise be done with regard to the money realised from the sale of tickets that have been distributed or retained.

I would have wished to spare you this trouble, but in view of the great expenses to be met and the large number of poor boys asking for bread, I had to fall back on this expedient. Believe me, by doing this, you will truly be "feeding the hungry."

Whilst tendering you in advance my sincerest feelings of gratitude, I assure you that I shall unite with my boys in begging God to pour down His blessings upon you and upon all those whose welfare both for the present and the future life is nearest to your heart.

With sentiments of esteem and thankfulness, I have the honour of subscribing myself,

Yours most sincerely in J.C.,

JOHN BOSCO."

Truly edifying was the help given to Don Bosco on this occasion. Nearly all retained the tickets received and sent their value, adding words of encouragement. The Mayor of Turin took a most prominent part in the work, and even Urban Rattazzi, then Home Secretary, did not refuse his assistance. The letters written on this occasion by these two distinguished men are worth reproducing here, because they show the judgment they had formed of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, and in what esteem they held it.

„Cavaliere Notta, Mayor of Turin, wrote on the 13th June, 1854, as follows :

" Being anxious to show, although in a humble way, my great desire of contributing to the best of my power towards the usefulness of the Festive Oratories, begun and supported in such a praiseworthy manner by you, for the moral and material benefit of boys, I deem myself most fortunate in being able to respond to the invitation received from you by retaining the hundred lottery tickets for the benefit of the above-named Oratories. Whilst enclosing the price of the said tickets, I hope and pray that your work may always

find the support it deserves from those who are able to afford it. Allow me to subscribe myself,

Your most devoted servant,

NOTTA."

Short but none the less courteous was the letter from Urban Rattazzi, who is properly regarded as a famous statesman. From his private office he wrote to Don Bosco on the 12th May of the same year, as follows:

" REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I willingly accede to the request made by you concerning your pious work of helping to meet the great expenses which occur at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. I enclose forty lire, whilst returning the 200 lottery tickets sent me. Thanking you for having given me a share in this work, I have the honour of signing myself, with feelings of esteem and regard,

U. RATTAZZI."

To many acquainted with Rattazzi's political opinions and activities, it may come as a surprise that the minister should have taken an interest in Don Bosco and his work. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the lawyer Rattazzi, both as a deputy and a minister, always looked favourably upon the Oratory and school. He was wont to say that the Government was obliged to protect such an institution, because it co-operated effectively in making useful citizens as well as good Christians. He himself set the example. He encouraged Don Bosco in his work, sent subsidies, recommended boys, and even entrusted to him a young cousin of his own, named Caesar Rattazzi, that he might be brought round to better sentiments. Every time Don Bosco went to see the minister, this latter assured him that he need have nothing to fear. These kindly dispositions arose from the moment he first became acquainted with Don Bosco when he visited the Oratory *incognito*. The fact is well worth relating here.

It was about 10.30 on a Sunday morning in the month

of April, 1854. The boys of the school, with many other day-boys, were assembled for the second time in the church. They had sung Matins and Lauds from the Office of the Blessed Virgin, heard Mass, and Don Bosco having ascended the pulpit, was telling a story from Church History, when in came a gentleman unknown to all, even to Don Bosco. Seeing that a sermon was being delivered, he sat down on one of the benches placed at the bottom of the church for the faithful, and stayed to listen till the end. Don Bosco had begun on the preceding Sunday the life of Pope St. Clement, and on that morning he was describing how that holy Pontiff, through hatred of the Christian religion, had been exiled by the Emperor Trajan to the Chersonesus, now known as the Crimea, where, as related above, the war had that year broken out. When he had finished his narrative, he asked, as was his wont, if the boys had any question to ask about the story he had just told, or the moral they might derive from it.

This custom also placed the boys under the necessity of remaining attentive, while at the same time his story excited additional interest. On that morning he asked one of the day-boys. This latter, contrary to all expectations, put a question, to the point indeed, but unsuited for the place and for the most perilous times. His question was this: "If the Emperor Trajan committed an injustice by driving Pope St. Clement from Rome and sending him into exile, has our Government done wrong in sending Archbishop Fransoni into exile?" To so unexpected a question Don Bosco answered with composure: "This is not the place to discuss whether our Government did well or not in sending our beloved Archbishop into exile; we shall speak of that some other time. It is certain that in every century, and from the very infancy of the Church, the enemies of Christianity have always directed their principal attacks against her rulers, the popes, the bishops, the priests, because they believed that once the pillar is removed the edifice must fall, and that if the shepherd is struck, the sheep will disperse and fall an easy prey to the ravenous wolves.

But whenever we hear or read that this or that pope, this or that bishop, this or that priest has been subjected to any penalty, as for example to exile, to prison, or even perhaps to death, we must not at once believe those who tell us that he is really guilty. It may turn out that he is a victim to his duty, a confessor of the faith or a hero of the Church, as were the apostles, the martyrs, and so many popes, bishops, priests and laymen. We must always bear in mind that the world, the Jewish people and Pilate condemned to the death of the Cross our Divine Saviour Himself as an impious blasphemer and a subverter of the people. And yet He was truly the Son of God, He had recommended obedience and submission to those in power, and had ordered to be rendered to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's and to God the things that were God's."

Having added a few words on the duty of remaining firm in the faith and in the attachment and respect towards the ministers of holy Church, Don Bosco came down from the pulpit, and the boys, having said the usual Our Father and Hail Mary in honour of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and sung a hymn, filed out of the church by the side-door. After them came the stranger, who, on entering the yard, asked to speak to Don Bosco. The latter had just then gone up to his room, accompanied by one of the boys. The usual formalities over, a dialogue ensued within hearing of the boy, who, according to custom during these perilous times, had, after introducing the gentleman, remained there until told by Don Bosco that he might go. The dialogue was as follows:

Don Bosco. " Might I ask to whom I have the honour of speaking? "

Rattazzi. " To Rattazzi. "

Don Bosco. " ' Rattazzi, ' * did you say ! The great

* It should be observed that they spoke in the Piedmontese dialect, and the word *rattazzi* in this dialect signifies a great rat. Don Bosco, in humorously repeating the name, caused the minister not a little amusement.

Rattazzi, Deputy and formerly President of the Chamber, and now one of the King's Ministers? "

Rattazzi. "The very one."

Don Bosco (smiling). "Then I may prepare myself for free lodgings at His Majesty's expense! "

Rattazzi. "And why, may I ask? "

Don Bosco. "For what Your Excellency heard a little while back in our church concerning his Grace the Archbishop."

Rattazzi. "Nothing of the kind. Without staying to consider whether the question put by the boy was well chosen, your reply was most judicious, and no minister could find any fault with it. Besides, although I disapprove of politics being discussed in church, especially with boys who are not yet able to form a proper conception of such things, nevertheless a person is not bound to deny his own opinions before anyone. I may furthermore add that in a Constitutional Government, the ministers are responsible for their own actions, which may therefore be criticized by any man, even by Don Bosco. For my part, although I do not approve of all the ideas and actions of Archbishop Fransoni, I am glad that the severe measure put in force against him was not taken under my ministry."

Don Bosco. "If such be the case, I may rest assured that your Excellency will not have me confined in close quarters for this time, but will yet allow me to breathe freely the air of Valdocco. Let us therefore pass on to something else."

After this facetious beginning, a serious conversation of about an hour ensued. Rattazzi, with a series of questions, elicited from Don Bosco a full and exact account of the origin, scope, progress and results of the institution of the Oratory and of the school. Kind-hearted by nature, he went away with so favourable an impression, that, from that day, he became the advocate and protector of Don Bosco's work. This was a special favour of Providence, for the conditions of the times became yearly more difficult, and as the Government was often in the hands of Rattazzi, who continued

throughout to be a man of influence, the Oratory found in him a firm support. Without him it would probably have suffered many a severe shock and undergone most serious losses. Nothing of the sort, however, happened. It seems that Our Lord wished to make use of him to do good and prevent evil, just as, for a similar end, under the reign of Nabuchodonosor, He made use of a powerful minister, the youthful Daniel, and of his companions. God never changes, He is always a provident Father. Happy the man who loves Him and confides in Him.

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CHAPTER XLII.

The preventive system in moral education. — A specimen of its efficacy. — La Generale. — An outing to the youthful prisoners. — Address of Don Bosco. — The History of Italy.

AMONGST the various questions put by Rattazzi to Don Bosco in the above-mentioned conversation, was one concerning the means he employed to keep order amongst so many boys who flocked to the Oratory.

"Have you not at least two or three guards in uniform or in disguise at your disposal?" asked the minister.

"I have no need of them, your Excellency."

"Indeed? But these boys of yours are in no way different from those of other people. They are, to say the least, unruly and quarrelsome. How do you reprimand them, how do you punish them to keep them in check and prevent them from being disorderly?"

"The greater number of the boys are lively, it is true, but nevertheless, to prevent disorder no violence or punishment is made use of in their regard."

"All this seems to me a mystery; what is the secret of it?"

"Your Excellency is aware that there are two systems of education; one may be called the repressive, the other the preventive system. The former aims at bringing up a man by force, by the use of restraint and punishment when the law has been transgressed, and the fault committed; the latter seeks to educate him with mildness, and therefore helps him in a kindly manner to observe the law, and sets before him the

means most suitable and most efficacious for that purpose; this is precisely the system in vigour amongst us. Here care is taken, in the first place, to infuse into the hearts of the boys the holy fear of God, to instil in them a love of virtue and a horror of vice, by means of the teaching of the catechism and of suitable moral instructions. They are directed and sustained in the way of virtue by timely and judicious advice, and especially by the practices of piety and religion. They also receive, as far as possible, friendly assistance in recreation, in school, in their work; they are encouraged by admonitions, and as soon as they show signs of forgetting their duty, they are charitably admonished and recalled to better sentiments. In a word, every means which Christian charity suggests, is made use of to induce them to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, from a motive of conscience enlightened and guided by religion."

"This is certainly the most suitable method for the education of rational creatures; but does it prove efficacious for all?"

"In ninety out of a hundred cases, this system has a gratifying result; in the other ten it exercises at all events an influence beneficial enough to render them less obstinate and less dangerous; hence it is an extremely rare thing for me to have to send a boy away as incorrigible. In this Oratory, as also in those of Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia, boys present themselves or are at times brought to us, who, through their wayward character, or indocility, or malice, were the despair of their parents and of their masters, and who, after a few weeks, seem no longer the same; from wolves, so to speak, they are changed into lambs."

"It is a pity," Rattazzi remarked, "that the Government is not able to adopt such a method in its penal establishments, where, to prevent disorder, warders by the hundred are required and the prisoners become daily worse."

"And what is there," pursued Don Bosco, "to prevent the Government from following this system in

its penal institutes? Let Religion be introduced; let a suitable time be set aside for religious instruction and practices of piety; let the one in charge give due importance to these matters; allow the minister of God to enter there, and permit him to treat freely with those unfortunate souls and speak to them words of love and peace, and then the preventive method will gradually do its work. After a while the warders will have less to do and the Government will be able to give back to their families and to society many useful members; otherwise it will be spending money in order to correct or punish for a time a greater number of idle and guilty persons, and when it has set them at liberty, it will have to be continually on the watch to defend itself against them, because they will be ever ready to do worse."

Don Bosco kept on in this strain for some time, as he had acquired a thorough knowledge of the state of young and adult prisoners. Following the example of Don Cafasso and Don Borel, he had been making frequent visits to them since 1841, and was now able to show the minister the beneficial effect of religion on their conduct.

"On seeing the priest," he continued, "on hearing the word of comfort, the prisoner recalls those happy years in which he assisted at catechism; he remembers the advice of the parish priest and of the schoolmaster; he acknowledges that, if he is now in prison, it is because he has ceased to frequent the church or because he has not put in practice the advice received. Such remembrances crowding in upon him, not infrequently touch his heart; he repents, suffers with resignation, and resolves to change his conduct. At the expiration of his sentence he re-enters society with the resolve of making amends to it for the scandal given. If, on the contrary, the comforting aspect of Religion and the influence of its maxims and practices are withdrawn; if he is deprived of the conversations and advice of a friend of his soul, what will become of the poor unfortunate man in that hateful abode? Never moved by a friendly voice to raise his thoughts beyond this world; never

animated to reflect that by sin he has offended not only the laws of the State, but God, the supreme Lawgiver; never exhorted to ask pardon for his misdeeds, nor encouraged, to bear his temporal punishment instead of suffering an eternal one; in his miserable condition he will see nothing but the frown of adverse fortune; hence instead of tears of repentance he will shed tears of rage; instead of purposing to amend his ways he will remain obstinate in evil; from fellow-prisoners he will learn new ways of malice, and with them will make schemes for committing crime more artfully, in order not to fall again into the hands of justice, rather than to improve and become a good citizen."

Don Bosco, seizing the favourable moment, pointed out the utility of the preventive system to the Minister, and above all, its special advantage in public schools and in houses of education where simple and guiltless souls have to be trained — souls who so easily yield to the voice of persuasion and love.

"I am well aware," concluded Don Bosco, "that to promote the adoption of this system does not belong to your Excellency's department, but a remark, a word from you would carry great weight in the deliberations of the Minister of Public Instruction."

Rattazzi listened to these and other suggestions of Don Bosco with deep interest; he was fully convinced of the advantage of the system in use at the Oratory, and promised that on his own part he would always give preference to it before all other systems in Government institutions. If afterwards Rattazzi did not always keep his word, it was because he oftentimes lacked the courage to put forward and defend his own religious convictions.

Soon after Easter of 1855, just a year after this important meeting, an unusual event occurred, which, as it were, brought the Home Minister to make a trial of the efficacy of the preventive system in the moral education of even the most neglected boys. There was, in Turin, a reformatory school for certain lads who are put there by their parents as intractable, or sent there

by the police-court for some act of law-breaking. This establishment was called *La Generale*, and it was opened by the Government of Piedmont in March, 1845, on the south side of the city. It was capable of holding 300 boys and was under the care of the Minister for Home Affairs.

Many of the inmates' parents took little or no interest in their education; others belonged to disreputable or suspected families; some had one or both their parents already in prison; not a few were orphans, left in such neglect, that they became mixed up with some escapade or other which brought them under the notice of the police. Young men who had reached the age of twenty-one but had not completed the term of their punishment, were transferred to the prisons for adults. The inmates were shut up at night in separate cells and during the day employed in working in the fields or in some art or trade, while they were continually watched by the guard, sometimes even with fixed bayonets. In the beginning it was necessary to punish the daily revolts, quarrels, strifes and blows, breaches against morals and other such criminal proceedings; but by and by, when religion was given its proper place, it became known, loved and practised by them, discipline was rendered easier, their habits improved, and the young men began to lead a new life. If at times some great disorders took place in this institution, the principal cause was found in the fact that religion, through neglect, could exercise little or no influence there, and that the repressive system was preferred to the preventive.

When the Government opened this Penitentiary and entrusted it to the care of the Society of St. Peter in Chains, Don Bosco obtained leave to go among the boys, who were deserving of the greatest compassion. With the permission of the Governor of Prisons, he instructed them in Catechism, preached to them, heard their confessions, and oftentimes went among them, conversing with them in a friendly manner, just as was his custom with the boys of the Oratory. It is needless to say that those young prisoners, seeing themselves

treated with such benevolence, came to look upon Don Bosco as a father, and showed him at all times the most sincere proofs of their esteem and love, and in order not to displease him, they endeavoured to adopt a course of life which, as far as they could judge, was ir-reproachable. On one occasion they worked a miracle, so to speak, and afforded a singular proof of the power of the preventive system in subduing the most stubborn and rebellious characters.

The incident has been published by many writers, among whom may be mentioned l'Abbé Mendre, Dr. d'Espinez, and Count Charles Conestabile. From the latter's *Religious and Moral Works in Italy*, the account here given is quoted.

“ The influence of Don Bosco over youth cannot be better proved than by the following fact. Don Bosco used to act occasionally as the Spiritual Director of a House of Correction in Turin. He had been giving a Retreat to the young prisoners and it had been very beneficial to their souls. He perceived that among his audience and his penitents there was a sincere return to a good life, and at the same time a great esteem for his own person. The holy priest felt himself moved at this, and determined to obtain for those poor lads a little break in their imprisonment. He appeared one day before the Governor of Prisons and spoke as follows : ‘ I have come to lay a proposal before you ; I wonder if there is any likelihood of its being accepted ? ’ ”

“ ‘ We shall do what we can, Father, to please you,’ replied that official, ‘ for your influence over our prisoners has been very great.’ ”

“ ‘ Well, then, allow me to ask you a favour for these poor young fellows, whose exemplary conduct for some little time has given no cause for complaint ; allow me to take all of them out for a day ; I shall take them for a picnic out in the country ; this walk will do good to both soul and body.’ ”

“ The governor, taken aback, was surprised, and exclaimed : ‘ But surely, Father, you are not serious ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I am quite in earnest, replied the priest, ‘ and I beg you to consider my demand.’ ”

“ The discussion lasted long. Don Bosco insisted, but the governor alleged the inflexibility of the regulations; finally, unable to take anything upon himself, he consented to speak of it to the minister.

“ The minister at that time was Urban Rattazzi, a man who, if wanting in moral qualities, was nevertheless gifted with a powerful mind. He reflected an instant on the proposal which the Governor of Prisons presented to him in the name of Don Bosco and then sent word to the latter that he desired to see him. Don Bosco at once presented himself before the minister with that simple and candid air which was natural to him and which he ever maintained, even in the presence of the highest personages. The minister received him with great kindness.

“ ‘ I wish, Father,’ he said, ‘ to consent to the proposal which has been lately made to me in your name. You may carry out your plan concerning the walls, and it will do those young prisoners great good, both from the moral and the physical point of view; I shall give the necessary orders; from afar, carabineers in disguise will follow you to keep order in case of need, and to use force in case anyone should refuse to return in the evening.’ ”

“ The minister had pronounced these words as though they expressed his final decision and as though he thought he had satisfied every wish of Don Bosco. But the latter smiled on hearing carabineers mentioned.

“ ‘ Your Excellency,’ he replied, ‘ I am most thankful to you for your kindness, but I shall put my design into execution only on condition that you allow me to be alone with my boys, that you give me your word of honour not to send any policemen. I take upon myself the whole responsibility, and your Excellency may have me put in prison if any disorder happens.’ ”

“ The minister, greatly surprised, exclaimed: ‘ But when evening returns, you will not bring back as many as one of those youngsters.’ ”

" ' You may have full confidence in me,' Don Bosco replied; and his countenance plainly showed that he would not yield.

" It was a question then either of leaving or taking them. On the other hand, Rattazzi was desirous of making the experiment; and besides, this priest inspired him with the fullest confidence; he therefore promised Don Bosco to do as he wished.

" A few days later a joyous band composed of upwards of 300 boys, led by a priest, sallied forth from Turin, taking the road to Stupinigi, a village about four miles distant, where there was a royal residence and park. A horse loaded with provisions went before them. They were Don Bosco's *protégés*, whose joy at being allowed to leave their prison and enjoy their liberty for a day can easily be imagined. Their conduct was irreproachable; no untoward event came to disturb that day's peace, and there was no need either to warn or to scold in order to keep discipline. Evening found them all back in their unwelcome abode, more resigned to their fate, and more docile than before.

" The minister was anxiously awaiting the result of the outing; in spite of the confidence with which Don Bosco inspired him, he did not feel quite at ease. Don Bosco, without losing time, went straight to the minister, who was astonished at the priest's account of the day.

" ' I am thankful to you, Father,' he said, ' for all you have done for our young prisoners, but I should like to know from you, why it is that the State has not the same influence over the boys as you have? '

" ' Your Excellency,' was the reply, ' the force we make use of is a moral force; it is not so with the Government; whereas it only knows how to command and punish, we appeal principally to the heart of the boys, and our word is the Word of God.'

" The minister was thus made to understand that the Church possesses a mysterious force which is given from above, and which no persecution will ever prevail against."

With these words Count Conestabile concluded his account of the prisoners' outing, and the fact was recorded in *The Official Bulletin on the State of the Prisons*.

* Further research has revealed some details concerning the way in which Don Bosco prepared his three hundred prisoners to avail themselves in a becoming manner of the great favour granted on their behalf. On the evening immediately preceding that memorable day, he called them all together and addressed them in terms more or less as follows :

" My dear boys, I have some news to tell you which will be a source of great pleasure to you. As a reward for the goodwill you have shown to me up to the present, for the good conduct you have kept of late, and, above all, the manner in which you have corresponded to my efforts during the Retreat, I have been to the governor and then to the minister and have obtained permission to take you to-morrow for a walk to Stupinigi."

At the sound of these words a cry of surprise and joy, impossible to describe, came forth from every mouth. Silence having been restored, Don Bosco continued : " You see what a favour has been granted you ; to say such a favour is very rare is not sufficient ; it is altogether unique, and up to this day it has never been granted." Loud and enthusiastic shouts of " Hurrah for the minister ! Hurrah for Don Bosco," again interrupted his speech. " Yes, certainly, hurrah for the minister," Don Bosco went on ; " but now listen to what I am going to say to you, for it is most important. I have pledged my word that you will, one and all, behave so well, as to require neither warders nor policemen to look after you ; I have promised that to-morrow evening you will one and all return here. Can I rely on your conduct ? Can I rest assured that none of you will try to escape ? " " Yes, yes, rely on us, we'll behave well," came spontaneously from all sides. One of the older lads called out : " As sure as I am here, should anyone try to get away, I'll run after him and

tear him to pieces." "And I," said another, no less violent, "will break the head of anyone who should dare to displease you." "The rogue who should dare to dishonour our party will certainly never return home alive," shouted another burly fellow of eighteen.

"Enough, enough," said Don Bosco, "this sort of language is not right and it grieves me to hear it. I trust in you all, I know you are well disposed towards me and will not cause me any displeasure. I will just remark, however, by the way, that the whole of Turin will have their eyes upon you to-morrow. If anyone were to misbehave himself, he would disgrace the others and would disgrace me above all, who have asked for and obtained this favour, and the public will have reason to say I was imprudent and that I allowed myself to be deceived. You also will share in the disgrace and will pass for boys in whom no confidence can any more be placed. And then, what would be the use of trying to run away? Unless you had wings to fly, after a few hours, or after a day or two at the most, you would again be arrested and placed in a worse prison. If, on the contrary, each one behaves well and returns in the evening without resistance, who knows whether at some later period the same favour may not again be granted you, and you will thus, from time to time, be able to enjoy similar walks? But all these are but human considerations; there is another, far more important. Only recently you have promised God to be good and not to offend Him any more. He is watching you now from Heaven, ready to bless you now and in the future, if you are faithful to Him. Give then, to-morrow, a proof of the sincerity and firmness of your resolutions. Let all maintain good order; away with disobedience, disturbance, quarrels. Do you promise this?"

"Yes, yes, we promise; take our word, you will see." One of their numbers added: "You will be our commander-in-chief, and in the name of all my companions, I assure you no general will ever have soldiers more docile and better disciplined."

Having received this assurance, Don Bosco went on

to announce the hour for starting, the order to be followed in going, in halting, and in returning, and taking leave of them to return to Valdocco, he said to them: " Good-bye till to-morrow morning." The poor lads could scarcely contain themselves for joy, and from that evening they showed themselves more quiet and obedient towards their warders than ever they had been before.

In that same year, 1855, the boys of the Oratory and, at the same time, all the youth of Italy, received from Don Bosco what may well be called a gift, which will be an imperishable record of the sincerity of his love towards them. The reader will learn with surprise how, in the midst of so many anxieties and fatigues, entailed by the management of so numerous a family, for which food and clothing had also to be provided, Don Bosco, nevertheless, found time to write and get printed a *History of Italy*, which is one of the most interesting and important works that has come from his pen.

As the great friend and wise educator of youth, he saw in those days, with deep regret, how shamefully some perfidious writers, by means of short manuals, summaries and compendiums perverted the history of Italy by bringing up old and oftentimes refuted calumnies against the Popes, holding them up as enemies of Italy, misrepresenting, misconstruing or passing over in silence the most glorious deeds, and thus palming off as historical truths what were but pure inventions or opinions of unsound minds, simply because they served to cast a slur upon the Papacy. Nay, those Roman Pontiffs who had done most for Italy were traduced as the cause of its calamities.

This conspiracy against truth, this poisoning of youthful minds, was a source of great affliction to Don Bosco, and so he had recourse to the most efficacious remedy in his power. Those words are precious in which he expounds the scope he had in view in writing that work: words which deserve to be reported here because they reveal how the sound education of youth was his constant thought, the principal object of all his labours.

"It is a universally admitted fact," he writes, "that books have to be suited to the intelligence of those for whom they are intended, just as food must be adapted to one's age and state of health. Following out this principle, I have endeavoured to tell the history of Italy to the young, adhering as regards the matter, the wording and the size of the volume, to the same rule by which I have been guided when writing other books destined for the same end. Confining myself accordingly to facts that are certain and afford moral instruction, I leave aside those things that are uncertain, private conjectures, too frequent quotations from authors, and also all advanced political discussions, which often prove useless and, at times, hurtful to youth.

"My readers may nevertheless rest assured that I have not touched on any period without comparing what I have written with the most approved authors, and consulting writers, as far as possible, contemporaneous, or nearly so, with the time of the events referred to. I have spared myself no labour in reading modern writers who treat of the subject, selecting from each one what seemed to serve best for my undertaking. I have done my best to make my work useful to that portion of human society which forms the hope of a happy future, — youth. To expound true history, to instil the love of virtue, the horror of vice, respect towards authority and religion, was the end I had in view in every page."

It is not to be wondered at that competent men, such as learned writers of the *Civiltà Cattolica*, and the famous Nicolo Tommaseo should have praised the work very much; the former calling it "a book which, of its kind, is perhaps without a rival in Italy," and the latter, "a modest book, but one that in schools will serve far better as a history text-book than many celebrated works."

This was a book much needed indeed in those times, and is, even now, a real blessing. God alone knows the good it has done to youth and the evil from which it has preserved them. It had hardly made its appear-

ance and its merits become known, than at once fathers of families, masters, teachers, who desired to have their boys and pupils taught the history of their country, but not at the same time poisoned thereby, hastened to provide them with it; nay, at the outset, the Minister of Public Instruction, John Lanza, expressed a desire to have it adopted in the Government schools. The boys of the Oratory read it with assiduity, sometimes they recited whole chapters by heart, and Don Bosco himself, to encourage them, praised and rewarded those who knew it best, just as he used to do for catechism and other subjects.

As a stimulus to, and a reward for, good conduct among his boys, Don Bosco also introduced a most laudable practice, which has been in force for many years, namely, rewarding the most deserving in the following way. The distribution of prizes generally took place on the evening of the Feast of St. Francis of Sales, both for the students and for the artisans. The week before, each one wrote down on a piece of paper the name of a given number of boys whose religious and moral conduct seemed to him most irreproachable, and then handed it over to Don Bosco. He would sort them out, and the six, eight, ten, or even more boys who received most votes, were read out that evening and rewarded in the presence of all. It is worthy of remark that the judgment thus given by their companions was always so just and reasonable, that the Superiors themselves could not have chosen differently. No one, in fact, is better able to know us than those with whom we live, with whom we are on familiar terms and who, without our noticing it, are always witnessing our words and actions.

CHAPTER XLIII.

An accident. — Evidence of God's protection. — Another drawing of prizes.—An appeal.—Government subsidies. — The Minister Rattazzi's decree.

OWING to the war in the Crimea and other events no less disastrous, Don Bosco received every day increasing demands to take poor boys into the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. Besides those received on the recommendation of their parents or the parish priests or the Municipal authorities, many came of their own accord. Nearly every Sunday, amongst the boys who frequented the Oratory or came there for the first time, Don Bosco found some who were in such a forlorn state or in such danger to both body and soul, that if they were not quickly rescued, they would have certainly fallen into evil ways. Many boys were in a like condition at the Oratory of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuovo, and that of the Guardian Angels at Vanchiglia.

Every week, either one or other of the directors of these two Oratories took in some boys who were in a pitiable state. The Government also recommended, at one time the son of a public official, at another a soldier's orphan child, or again, a boy whose conduct, though not sufficiently bad to deserve imprisonment, yet boded ill for the future unless he received careful training. Recommendations of a similar kind were very frequently made to Don Bosco by different ministers and by local bodies; and as long as there was an empty corner, he never gave a refusal. By this almost over-charitable procedure, every nook and corner of the house at Valdocco was occupied by a bed; during the summer some boys had to sleep even in the belfry.

Seeing that the demands were increasing, Don Bosco determined to build a new wing, extending from the central gateway to the Church of St. Francis of Sales. He had an interview with Juvenal Delponte, architect and contractor, and asked him if he had any money to start building.

"No," was the reply.

"Neither have I," added Don Bosco.

"Then what shall we do?"

"Let us make a start," said Don Bosco, "and before the time comes to pay the workmen, Our Lord will send us some money."

In the month of March, 1856, the work was begun; the old house, which remained a standing relic of humble beginnings, was pulled down and the new building begun according to the plan already made. During recreation-time the boys also lent a hand in knocking down walls and carrying bricks, thus saving time and money. Amongst other bricklayers were the brothers Charles and Joseph Buzzetti, Don Bosco's first pupils, who, from that time, were always ready to help him. As both of them were very intelligent and their fidelity was beyond all doubt, they became really expert in the art of building, and were soon recognised as the leading contractors in Turin. As it was necessary that the building should be ready for the following autumn, the works were carried on at such a rate, that, by the end of July, not only was the new building roofed in, but, as the ceilings of the four stories had likewise been completed, hopes were entertained that it might soon be inhabited. But a disaster occurred.

On the 22nd of August, about ten in the morning, one of the workmen was removing the supports from the arches of the new building. On the previous day he had removed the supports from the lower floors and now he was removing the scaffolding from the last floor but one. He had nearly completed the work when a pole dropped from his hands and fell with its point towards the floor, which at once gave way. It then fell on to the next floor, which likewise gave way, and so on, till

the ground floor was reached. In a moment the three floors in that part of the building were reduced to a mass of ruins.

This accident proved very expensive, as the fallen part had to be rebuilt, but in this misfortune the protecting hand of Divine Providence was made manifest.

Two remarkable instances may be mentioned here. The ground-floor, which for some days had been cleared of all scaffolding, was very commodious and well ventilated. It was therefore greatly frequented by the boys and assistants during recreation time. Some played there, others read or studied. At 9.30, however, the bell had rung and every one had at once retired. Some went to the ordinary classes or to those concerned with school management which were given during the autumn vacations; others, to the common study. They had not been in their places very long when they were alarmed by a great noise as of something falling. The ceilings, in fact, had just tumbled in. Had the fall taken place a little sooner, many boys might have been crushed to death.

No less remarkable was the case of the bricklayer who was on the first floor when it fell. No sooner did he perceive that it was giving way, than he at once thought of getting to a place of safety, and ran towards the side wall. The bricks began to give way under him, and he, throwing himself instinctively on one corner which had not fallen, remained hanging with his legs in the air. He had a pair of old slippers on, and these fell among the fragments and mortar. It was impossible not to see the hand of God in thus sustaining that isolated piece of ceiling, thanks to which the bricklayer, though resting on it with his whole weight, was able to save himself. Not one of the men at work at the time around the building suffered the least injury.

Don Bosco was away on this occasion. When, on his return to the Oratory in the evening, he saw the disaster, he was much grieved. Hearing that no lives had been lost, he thanked God, and with a serene and

cheerful countenance, said to the boys who surrounded him: "How is it that, with so many of you boys at home yesterday, you were not able to hold up the ceilings and prevent them from falling? What a useless good-for-nothing set of fellows you are! However, I will overlook it; it is the devil who has been playing us a trick. It is the second time that he has brought the house down on the top of us; but it does not matter. He is at war with heavenly powers and he will not prevail. If the ceilings have fallen we shall raise them up and they will not fall again."

Benefactors of the Oratory in Turin, on hearing what had happened, were filled with compassion for Don Bosco, and instead of withdrawing their help, showed greater zeal in forwarding his work. Nevertheless, as the expenses already incurred and those which still remained amounted to several thousand lire, he determined to have recourse to public charity by means of a grand drawing of prizes. In so doing, Don Bosco was influenced by various reasons. He wished, above all, to give to a greater number of the faithful an occasion of performing a great act of charity, either by making offerings or distributing tickets, and thus procure for them greater merit and for God greater honour and glory. In the second place, he wished to refrain from applying to his customary benefactors, so that they might give alms for the support of so many other charities both in Turin and in the rest of Piedmont. Lastly, he wished to procure the necessary funds to meet the debts of the building already incurred, and to bring it to completion.

Don Bosco had no sooner manifested his intention of holding a drawing of prizes, than several ladies and gentlemen, ecclesiastics and laymen, from Turin and elsewhere, vied with one another in seeking enrolment as promoters of the work. They numbered 350, and the articles collected came to upwards of 2,900.

Worthy of mention here is the invitation published and distributed by the promoting committee. It ran as follows:

" Invitation to a Drawing of Prizes on behalf of the Oratories of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova, of St Francis of Sales at Valdocco, and of the Guardian Angels at Vanchiglia. ,

" The charity of the Gospel which inspires man with the most beautiful works of beneficence, refrains from all pharisaical show. However, when the glory of God and the good of our neighbour are in question, it does not shrink from coming before the public, holding out its hand to generous persons, and even announcing the good work it has already accomplished, in order that it may serve as an invitation and inducement to help those in need. This reflection has led the Committee established for this Drawing, to give an outline of the principal works carried on in the Oratories, and thereby acquaint everyone with the destination of the money that is to be derived from it.

" We believe that it is publicly known how Don Bosco, in his anxiety to provide for the moral advantage of neglected youth, succeeded in opening three Oratories for boys in the principal quarters of the town. There, on feast-days, are assembled a great number of lads who, for the most part, have found their way to the Capital from the outlying towns and country. In these Oratories there is a chapel for religious services; rooms are set apart for school, and there is a playground adjoining for recreation. The boys are enticed there by prizes, and are entertained with gymnastics and other innocent amusements after they have assisted at the sacred ceremonies. The attendance is very great and exceeds at times 3,000. When the season of the year allows it, reading, writing and music lessons are given. A considerable number of pious gentlemen devote themselves to teaching catechism and getting employment with honest masters for boys out of work, thus displaying a father's interest in their behalf. At the Valdocco Oratory there are also day and evening schools, especially for those boys who, for want of suitable clothes or on account of their unruly conduct, cannot get admittance into other public schools.

“ The evening schools are well attended. Here also, reading, drawing, music (vocal and instrumental) are taught, and this serves to keep the boys away from bad company, where they would certainly run the risk of losing the little money acquired by their work, as well as their morality and their religion. Amongst these boys, whether from the town or from the country, some there are who are so poor and destitute that they could not be taught an art or trade without being lodged, fed and clothed. To meet this pressing need, a house attached to the Valdocco Oratory has been provided. Here such boys, to the number of a hundred and fifty, live and are brought up as good Christians and honest workmen.

“ Having thus briefly set down the state of these Oratories, one may easily see for what purpose the Lottery is being organised. The expenses incurred for the rent of different buildings, for the carrying on of schools and churches, and the maintenance of 150 boys, are necessarily very heavy. Three years ago, when the cholera broke out, it was necessary to erect a suitable place to harbour forty orphans, some of whom are still in the house. This year also, it has been found necessary to complete a building which was started some years back. All these undertakings, although carried on with the strictest economy, make a further outlay of 40,000 lire indispensable. This sum, with the help of charitable persons, has already in great part been paid, but there still remains a debt of 12,000 lire.

“ In order to meet these expenses to provide for the carrying on of the good work commenced, we considered that a Lottery was the best means by which to enable persons of every condition to help according to their means and as their charity might suggest.

“ The necessary authorisation was therefore solicited from the Government. The demand was favourably received, and by a decree of the 2nd of February, every permission which seemed necessary to ensure the success of the Drawing was granted.

“ We are persuaded that our fellow-citizens and the

charitable people in the country to whom the good work of the Oratory appeals, will join with us and give us their help by sending such articles as may serve as prizes, and by purchasing tickets. A certain number of charitable persons have undertaken to become promoters of the work, imposing on themselves the burden of collecting prizes, and sending out tickets according to a plan agreed upon by them.

"We have merely shown the object of the Oratories and the principal means which are employed in order to carry them on. The work appears to be self-commending without requiring any words from us in its favour. We shall only note by the way that, by taking part in this good work, you will further private and public interests, and will earn both the gratitude of man and the blessing of God. The Oratory boys will always remember the benefactors who have helped to put them in a position of earning an honest livelihood, and of saving their souls."

A detailed account cannot here be given of the troubles, worry and fatigue which this drawing occasioned Don Bosco, Don Alasonatti, and many other worthy gentlemen, who often generously spent whole nights in business connected with it. Through the promoters, tickets were distributed in thousands, and people of every rank and condition bought them, not so much for the hope of gaining a prize as from the satisfaction of giving a helping hand to a work which they considered most useful to society.

Mention must here be made of the praiseworthy help given by the Government at this time. In the very beginning, at the request of Don Bosco, the Minister Rattazzi had the goodness to give a thousand lire to meet the first expenses of the new building. On that occasion he sent the following letter, dated May 9th, 1856:

"The undersigned minister, whilst commending the project of the Rev. Don Bosco, Director of the Oratory at Valdocco, of enlarging the present building, thus to extend its benefits to a greater number of poor boys,

begs to inform him that in order to help on the good work, he has determined to allot a subsidy of 1,000 lire from the funds of this Ministry. He deeply regrets that on account of the present state of the Treasury a larger sum cannot be given. Of the above-named sum, 500 lire will be handed over by the cashier of this Ministry, and the remaining 500 lire by the treasurer of the province of this Capital.

U. RATAZZI."

After the accident to the building described above, the minister made another subsidy of 1,000 lire in the name of the Government, in order to help in the repairs necessary. It was accompanied by the following letter :

" Turin, 4th October, 1856.

VERY REVEREND SIR,

Wishing to show in a particular manner the interest which His Majesty's Government takes in the welfare of the Institute at Valdocco, founded and directed by the Very Rev. Don Bosco, the undersigned, aware of the pecuniary straits of the same, and knowing how the sum already given is inadequate for its needs, directs that another sum of 1,000 lire be made payable from the funds of the Ministry.

The undersigned notifies the Rev. Director of this decision, and that directions have been given for the disbursement of the aforesaid sum.

U. RATAZZI."

Finally, on the occasion of the drawing, Rattazzi, on the part of the Ministry, sent as a prize a beautiful oil painting, and also a copy of a decree worthy of notice here, not only on account of the subscription which accompanied it, but also on account of the terms in which it was couched. The following is this historic document :

" THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME OFFICE,

(1) Having seen the programme of the Drawing for the benefit of the Oratories of St. Aloysius at Porta

Nuova, of St. Francis of Sales at Valdocco, and of the Guardian Angels at Vanchiglia, under the care of Don Bosco, and under whose auspices they were founded and are maintained with the greatest benefit to poor boys;

(2) Having seen the letter of the aforementioned Don Bosco with which was offered to the minister 400 tickets at 50 centesimi each, with a request to accept them;

(3) Considering that without the fitting help which Don Bosco expects from public charity, to which in great part he has confided his philanthropic work, he will be in want of the means indispensable to carry on his work with success and advantage to the poorer classes;

(4) Bearing in mind that the Ministry is aware of the financial difficulties which more than once have pressed the Valdocco Oratory, from which the other two Institutions of Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia derive their assistance and maintenance;

(5) And that it is a principle adopted by the Government to help, as far as in its power lies, every Institution under whatever denomination which undertakes to educate the masses and provide that moral education which neglected youth could not otherwise obtain, decrees:

That from the temporary funds of this Ministry for the present year, there be assigned to the Rev. Don Bosco, Director of the Oratory of Valdocco, and Chairman of the above-mentioned Drawing, the sum of 200 lire, the price of the 400 tickets at 50 centesimi each, in addition to the same tickets which will be returned for the benefit of the said Oratories, for whose benefit Don Bosco with praiseworthy zeal has organized the Drawing. The central office is charged to carry out this order of payment of 200 lire from the Provincial treasury of this Capital to the said Don Bosco.

The Minister, U. RATAZZI.

Turin, April 30th, 1857."

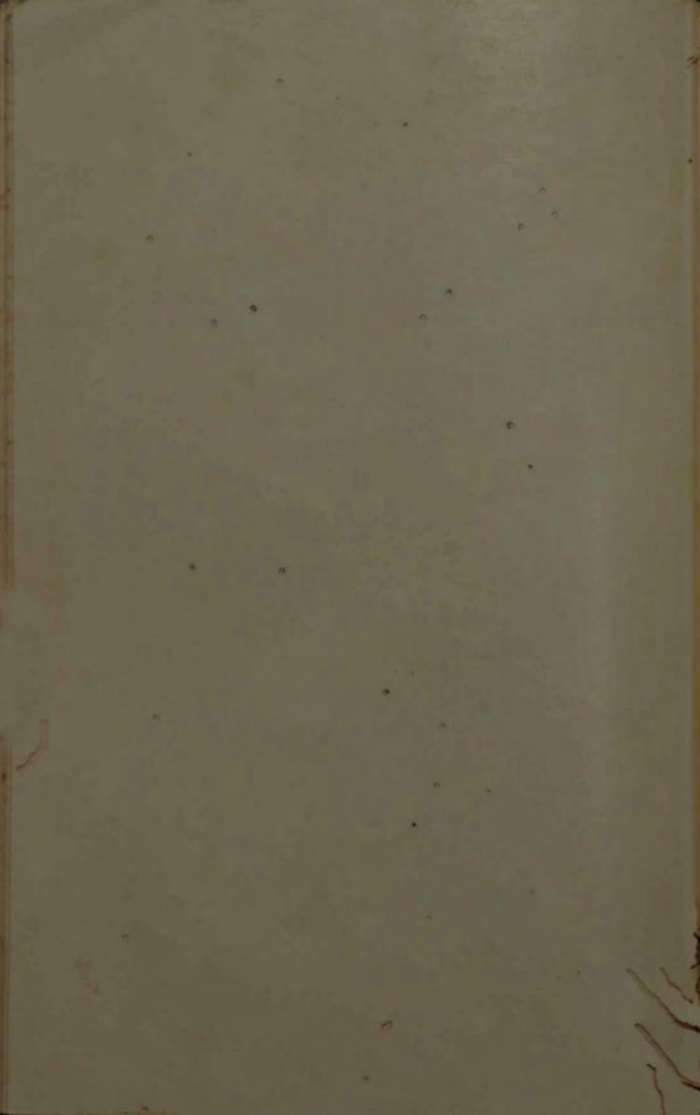
It was thought proper to reproduce this document here, since it shows what the Government thought of the work of the Oratory. Although the men who held the reins of Government professed principles widely different from those of Don Bosco, yet from their mature experience they recognised that the education which he imparted to his children was a sure pledge for the well-being of the family and of society. Accordingly they desired the prosperity and the growth of his Institute and helped it as occasion offered.

And assuredly, he who devotes his talents and sacrifices his substance and life for the good of the sons of the people, has a right not only to the praise but also to the help of constituted Authority; and according to Urban Rattazzi, it ought to be "the principal duty of the Government to help, as far as possible, every Institute which under whatever denomination, undertakes to instruct the people and to facilitate that moral education which they could not otherwise obtain."

On his part, Don Bosco willingly held communication with the civil authorities, and thus rendered a two-fold service, one to his boys and the other to the Government. By means of this agreement, he on the other hand received subsidies from the Government for his Institutes, and in exchange took boys under his care and made them useful members of society; and by so doing he practised that precept of Jesus Christ: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's."



DON BOSCO AT THE AGE OF 60.



CHAPTER XLIV.

The lottery and its result. — Use of the new building. — Death of Margaret Bosco. — Beginning and growth of a new section of boys. — Professors Bonzanino and Picco.

THE drawing of the winning numbers of the lottery took place in Turin at the Town Hall on the 6th of July, 1857. The profits accruing from it were sufficient to cover all the expenses of the new building and moreover to help Don Bosco out of several other difficulties, thus giving him further motive for gratitude to God.

Meanwhile the new building had been brought to completion, and there was urgent need of using it at the approach of winter, in order to shelter a goodly number of boys who had applied for admission and had been accepted; but the walls were still too damp to allow of it. Don Bosco soon overcame this obstacle. Not wishing to leave any longer so many boys exposed to neglect and want, he contrived to obtain by industry what could not be expected from nature in such a short time. He had large braziers kept blazing day and night in the new rooms to dry the walls and make it possible to sleep there without danger to health. The result was quite satisfactory, and from November, 1856, the new house was almost full, raising the number to 150 boys.

Don Bosco rejoiced at seeing his family increased by so large a number thus taken away from the allurements of vice and put on the path of virtue; the older boys also were glad to see their ranks increasing by new recruits and to be looked up to as elders. On their part,

the newcomers were happy to find themselves in a place of safety and well provided for; their relatives were pleased to know that their children were well taught and trained, for which they showed the liveliest gratitude, and the benefactors were gratified to see the practical results of their charity.

But amid so many motives for rejoicing, there suddenly came a cause for grief. On the 25th of November, Margaret Bosco, who was to all a second mother, and by her kindness and motherly care made the boys forget that they had either lost or were far away from their own, was taken from them. During her illness, which was a violent inflammation of the lungs, the boys prayed most fervently for her cure, and were kept for many days suspended between hope and fear. At almost every hour of the day one or other of the boys was at the patient's room to enquire after her health.

In the evening, after prayers, all awaited with anxiety, either from Don Bosco or Don Alasonatti, some news about her, and no one went to bed without first recommending her to Our Lady of Consolation. Great concern was felt when Don Borel, her spiritual director, had been to hear her confession; sorrow was general when the last rites of Holy Religion were administered, for the illness had come to a crisis, and death was fast approaching.

No pen could describe the grief which followed the announcement that Don Bosco's and the Oratory's mother had passed away. A sadder and more moving spectacle had never taken place there till then. At the death-bed was her son Joseph, who had come from Castelnuovo to assist her with Don Bosco; his aunt, Mary Occhiena, and Mrs. Rua. As soon as she expired, the two brothers looked at each other without saying a word, and then burst into tears, a sight which touched the hearts of everyone present. She expired at 3 a.m. That very same morning Don Bosco, accompanied by young Joseph Buzzetti, went to celebrate holy Mass in the crypt of the Sanctuary of Our Lady

of Consolation. There, after offering up holy Mass in suffrage for her soul, he stopped to pray for a long time before the image of Our Lady. Amongst other things he said to her "I and my children are now bereaved of our mother; oh! be thou for the time to come in a special manner my Mother and theirs also."

The funeral was modest but impressive. A solemn Mass was celebrated in the church of the Oratory, and the boys made a general communion in suffrage for the soul of their great benefactress and mother. All then escorted the coffin to the parish church, and the singing of the *Miserere* was accompanied by the plaintive strains of the band. The cortege was so orderly and edifying, that amongst others Madame Gastaldi, mother of Canon, afterwards Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin, affirmed that she had never assisted at such an affecting funeral.

In the following year the Oratory experienced two more losses; on the 9th of March it lost young Dominic Savio, of whom mention has already been made; and on the 22nd of June it lost Mrs. Occhieña, Don Bosco's aunt on his mother's side, whose place she had filled so well, rendering every sort of charitable service.

It seemed that Our Lady had granted Don Bosco's prayer, by taking his work in a particular manner under her protection. Indeed, from that time the Oratory began to develop in an almost miraculous manner; this it has not ceased to do even to the present day, and, let us hope, it will ever continue to do so, to the advantage of religion and civil society.

Looking back now on the course of events, it is befitting to say a few words on the origin and progress, among the boys received into the Oratory, of another section which, from the year 1857, became of the greatest importance. As we have seen, the first boys assembled by Don Bosco in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, were artizans destined for some trade or other according to the bent and capacity of each one; but the needs and various conditions of those recommended to

him soon made it necessary to have students as well. This need arose gradually about 1848 and 1849.

On the occasion of the so-called War of Independence, the seminaries being occupied by the soldiers, Don Bosco, at the request of Archbishop Fransoni, received at the Oratory as many clerics as possible, so that, far from the distractions of their family and from the perils of the world, they might continue in the career they had chosen. They remained as boarders, studied there, and assisted at the practices of piety performed in common; but they attended the morning and evening classes given by professors of the Turin Seminary, some of whom lectured at their own house, and others in a room adjoining the seminary set apart by the Government for this purpose.

But one thing gives rise to another. About the same time, Don Bosco felt more keenly the need of having masters and fellow-workers of whom he might freely dispose.

With a view to providing himself with them, he began to pick out from among the boys sent him by Providence those who were best behaved and gave hopes of success and put them to study. In 1850 this class consisted of twelve boys; but some of them afterwards became religious, others chose another career, and only a very few remained at the Oratory. Such a poor result did not dishearten Don Bosco; he made another selection of boys, and this time they proved more faithful to him.

Meanwhile, as fast as the number of boys increased, this section too continued to increase. Amongst the boys recommended to Don Bosco, either by the Government, Municipal authorities, or parish priests, not a few belonged to families once in easy circumstances, but, owing to reverses of fortune, fallen from their former state. To apprentice boys of this description to a fatiguing and somewhat rough trade did not always seem befitting or possible. Some, on the other hand, gave proof of such rare talent, that it seemed almost a pity not to educate them; it was easy to understand,

moreover, that boys of this class, if properly trained, would in time be able to render important services to civil society. Now Don Bosco, who suited his charity as far as possible to the need, circumstances and propensity of each one, put these boys to study rather than to manual labour. In the course of a few years the students were equal in number to the artizans.

As far as his occupations would allow, Don Bosco taught them himself; but in 1852, being unable to attend personally to them, he began to send them to the private school of Joseph Bonzanino, professor of classics, and then to the more advanced classes of Don Matthew Picco, professor of rhetoric. These two kind persons willingly undertook the task as a work of charity, receiving Don Bosco's boys free, and deserved well of the Oratory as well as of many families. For a long course of years, hundreds of boys received instruction there, many of whom were destined to become professors of great repute, medical men, judges, solicitors, and barristers. Not a few, having embraced the ecclesiastical state, worked zealously in many dioceses either as curates or as parish priests, and a good number became fellow-workers of Don Bosco, devoting their lives, after his example, to the care of youths in his various Institutions.

The establishing of this section among his boys was a truly happy idea, one we may consider inspired by God; for through it Don Bosco rendered his Oratory serviceable to a large number of families; thus he cultivated talents which otherwise, through lack of means, would have remained neglected; he gave to civil society not only honest workmen and skilful artists, but also distinguished professors, and what is even more, during these years, perhaps the most unfavourable and most fatal to ecclesiastical vocations, Don Bosco was the means of supplying the archdiocese of Turin, nay, all the dioceses of Piedmont with hundreds of clerics and priests. In this way he also began the nursery of that band of helpers by whose means he was able to extend

the benefits of instruction and moral education to thousands of poor boys in both hemispheres.

In fact, after a few years, namely in 1856, some of the students, having finished their classical course and embraced the ecclesiastical state, became in their turn masters and professors, and Don Bosco, with their help, opened classes and later on organised a complete course of studies, to the great advantage of his institution.

CHAPTER XLV.

A suggestion from Urban Rattazzi. — The first foundation of a Society suited to the needs of the age.—Reflections of Don Bosco and recommendations of Archbishop Fransoni.

THE Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, by thus bringing boys together on feast-days, and by sheltering and educating the children of the people, was rendering every year most signal services. Hence it came to pass that many who knew and admired the good thus accruing to society, wished to see this work established on a solid and lasting basis; and not a few, both priests and laymen, from time to time mentioned this matter to Don Bosco. In order to comply with the wishes of so many benevolent persons, Don Bosco would have willingly formed a society to carry on the work; but the attitude of the Government just at that time made him deem his undertaking such a work useless and perhaps even dangerous. Leaving therefore everything in the hands of God, he went on in his usual way, saying a kind word to all who approached him on this subject.

One day, however, Urban Rattazzi himself, with whose name the reader is already familiar, happened to make this very same proposal. It seems that Divine Wisdom, Who is "playing in the world"—*ludens in orbe terrarum*—was pleased to make use of this very man, who, along with Count Camillus Cavour, had been among the first to take steps for the suppression of religious congregations, in order to remove all hesitation from Don Bosco's mind and to urge him to found that Society which, afterwards when firmly established,

was to take the place of many others swept away by the Revolution. This fact is so singular and of such importance for the Oratory, that it seems well worthy of special mention here.

One day in 1857, the Minister Rattazzi sent for Don Bosco, and, speaking to him for some time about the result of the lottery, about the work of the Oratories and the advantage which the Government might expect from them, he said :

" I hope, Don Bosco, that you will live for many years to come to educate the hundreds of boys you have with you ; but you are mortal like everyone else, and if you were suddenly called away, what would become of your work ? Have you already thought the matter over ? If so, what measures do you intend to adopt to secure the permanent existence of your Institute ? "

To such an unexpected question, Don Bosco answered half seriously, half in joke :

" To tell you the truth, your Excellency, I have not reckoned on dying so soon ; I have thought about procuring some help for the present, but not as to the means of carrying on the work of the Oratories after my death. Now, since you have mentioned the matter, might I ask you, in my turn, by what means do you think it possible for me to establish such an institution on a safe footing ? "

" In my opinion," replied Rattazzi, " you should select a certain number of laymen and ecclesiastics, form a society under certain rules, imbue them with your spirit, teach them your system, that they may not merely give you assistance, but may carry on the work after your departure."

At this suggestion a light smile played on Don Bosco's features. It was a well-known fact that Rattazzi, seconded by his colleagues, had, in 1854, laid before the Piedmontese House of Deputies, and in the following year carried through, the first law for the suppression of religious orders which, for centuries, had existed in the Sardinian States ; hence it seemed

strange to Don Bosco that this very same man should advise him to institute another of these congregations. He therefore replied :

" But does your Excellency believe it possible to found such a Society in these days? The Government, two years ago, suppressed certain religious communities, and is perhaps preparing now to do away with the rest, and do you think it would allow the establishment of another of a like nature? "

" I am fully acquainted," replied Rattazzi, " with the law of suppression and also with its scope. This law is not in your way at all, provided you found a Society in accordance with the requirements of the times and the laws now in force."

" And what would that mean? "

" It should not be a Society which has the character of mortmain, but one in which each member keeps his civil rights, submits to the laws of the State, pays the taxes, and so forth. In a word, the new Society, as far as the Government is concerned, would be nothing more than an Association of free citizens, united and living together, and having the same benevolent scope in view."

" And is your Excellency sure that the Government will allow the institution of such a Society, and its subsequent existence? "

" No constitutional or regular Government will oppose the founding and development of such a Society, just as it does not prevent, but rather promotes commercial, industrial and other similar Societies. Any Association of free citizens is allowed as long as its scope and acts are not opposed to the laws and institutions of the State."

" Well," said Don Bosco, in conclusion, " I shall think the matter over, and since your Excellency shows so much kindness to me and to my boys, I shall make bold to have recourse, if necessary, to your wisdom and authority."

The words of Rattazzi, who was looked upon in those days as an oracle in political affairs, were for Don

Bosco as a ray of light, and made things appear feasible to him which, owing to the nature of the times, he had thought impossible before.

He had also made the acquaintance of Don Anthony Rosmini, and he used to go at times to confer with him, as also with his immediate successor, Don Pagani; this latter even cherished a hope that Don Bosco would attach the Oratory to the Institute of Charity, founded by Rosmini a few years before. But after the above-mentioned conversation, Don Bosco set about to form a distinct Society, which should have for its principal scope the care of neglected youths, and he accordingly laid its first foundations. He began by framing and writing down certain rules according to the scope of the new Society; he interviewed certain priests and laymen of Turin, who, on hearing of his project, willingly offered their services. He then mentioned the matter to his clerics and to some of the best boys of the Oratory, and in a short time he was surrounded by a dozen individuals, on whom it seemed he could rely.

Some of these members remained at their own homes, limiting themselves to help in the Oratory on feast-days, or to teach in the night schools, or visit the boys in the workshops during the week, and seek an honest employer for those out of work or in danger. Others, on the contrary, took up their abode at the Oratory, living in common with Don Bosco, and were always at his command.

The foundations thus laid, Don Bosco soon perceived that in order to raise up a lasting work and one deserving the blessing of God, much more was needed. The Society suggested by Rattazzi was purely a human one. In order that such an Association might live and thrive, help from Heaven was required. He therefore began to reflect, and to ask himself: "Cannot this Society, whilst having a civil character before the Government, acquire also the nature of a religious Institute before God and the Church; cannot its members be free citizens and religious at the same time? I think so myself, for in any State a Catholic

may be subject to the King or to the Republic, and subject at the same time to the Church, faithful to both, observing the laws of both."

Don Bosco did not remain satisfied with his own conclusions, but conferred on the subject with learned and pious persons, and treated of it at length with his spiritual director, Don Cafasso. He wished to consult also Archbishop Fransonì, and as he was unable to go to Lyons, where that champion of the Church was still in exile, he wrote to ask him for his advice. The illustrious prelate gave his full approval to Don Bosco's plan, encouraged him to carry it out, and in order to place him on the safe road, he recommended him to go to Rome and to ask advice and suitable direction of Pope Pius IX. Don Bosco complied willingly with the exhortations of his archbishop, who, in his turn, hearing that Don Bosco was going to Rome to lay the matter before the Holy Father, sent him a most favourable recommendation. In this document, the excellent pastor showed his great benevolence and goodwill towards Don Bosco, praised his charity and zeal for the education of youth, laying stress on the religious and moral good which he had already done at Turin by his Oratories, and most earnestly entreated the Holy Father to give him assistance and advice, and the support of his authority.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Don Bosco starts for Rome. — Prayers of the boys. — The orphanages of Tata Giovanni and of St. Michael at Ripa. — Charity schools. — Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. — Festive Oratories. — Visit to Cardinal Antonelli. — Audience of Pope Pius IX. — His Blessing. — Rules of the pious Society of St. Francis of Sales. — Interview with Cardinal Gaude. — Don Bosco's return to Turin.

THE 18th of February, 1858, will ever mark a memorable date in the annals of the Oratory. On the morning of that day Don Bosco took leave of his boys and set out on his first journey to Rome. It was like the parting of a father from his family.

In those days a journey to Rome was not a simple matter nor free from dangers; hence, as prudent persons were wont to do, Don Bosco made his will, so that, as he said, there might be no obstacle in the way of the Oratory, should he be destined to fall a prey to the fishes of the Mediterranean. This very measure of prudence served to render his departure all the sadder, so that many of the boys, seeing him leave the Oratory, could not restrain their tears.

The cleric, Michael Rua, went with him as his secretary, and the boys of the Oratory, like affectionate children, accompanied him with their good wishes, and their heart and mind were constantly with him. Every morning a number of the more devout amongst the boys went to holy communion, many made visits to the Blessed Sacrament during recreation time, and not a few practised various mortifications in order to obtain for him a prosperous journey. The prayers and self-denial of so many loving children could not but be most pleasing to Our Lord, who hearkened to them and bestowed abundant blessings on their father.

It is not convenient to relate here minutely all that happened to him on his journey by land and sea, nor all that he did in Rome; suffice it to note down only what seems to have some reference to this story, leaving the rest for another work and another time.

They travelled from Turin to Genoa by rail, from Genoa to Civitavecchia by steamer, and the rest of the way by carriage, reaching the Papal City on the 21st of February. There, he was the guest of the noble and illustrious family of Count De Maistre at the Quattro Fontane, and was treated with the greatest attention and charity. At the outset he made the acquaintance of the most distinguished personages in the city, and began at once to visit the most celebrated places.

Don Bosco also made it his business to visit many charitable institutions for boys, where he obtained suggestions for the promotion of the spiritual and material good of his own.

On the 27th of February he went to visit the school which bears the name of *Tata Giovanni*, and it proved to him a source of great pleasure on account of its origin, scope, and the system there adopted, which much resembled his own. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a poor mason named John Burgi, daily seeing numbers of boys wandering in rags and with bare feet through Rome, was touched with compassion and provided a refuge for a certain number of them in a small house hired for the purpose. God blessed the work, and the number of boys continued to increase; the premises were enlarged, and the boys, full of gratitude and affection, began to call their benefactor by the name of *Tata*, which in their dialect is father. Hence the Institute acquired the name of *Tata Giovanni*. Burgi's means were very slender, but, kind-hearted as he was, he felt in no way ashamed to go and beg for his adopted children. Pope Pius VI, under whose pontificate this Institute was founded, became its great benefactor, and his successors followed his example.

Boys from nine to fourteen were received and kept till

they were twenty; the older and more reliable boys were put in charge, and those who were more advanced taught the elements of reading and arithmetic. Some clerics and laymen gave evening classes. The greater number of boys learned a trade in workshops in various parts of the city, just as the Oratory boys used to do in the beginning. Some were allowed to study arts and sciences, but only after giving long and satisfactory proof of eminent piety and talent.

The Institute was placed under the protection of Our Blessed Lady and St. Francis of Sales. The hours of rising and of going to bed, the dormitories, the supervision, the rooms named after a Patron Saint, everything seemed to bear the stamp of the Oratory, and Don Bosco was pleased to find that he had planted at Turin the work of Tata Giovanni without even knowing it. Works of charity are all more or less similar, since they all have God for their author and are inspired by the Church, and they change neither with time nor place.

Pius IX, as a simple priest, had been for seven years Superior of the school. This explains the special benevolence which he showed towards it, and also towards the Oratory, which at that time bore a marked resemblance to it. In that year, the boys there numbered one hundred and fifty.

A most interesting visit was that which he made on the morning of the 6th March, to the Hospice of St. Michael, at Ripa, which then gave shelter to some eight hundred boys. Cardinal Tosti, president of the establishment, was kind enough to accompany him over the whole place. On visiting the workshops, Don Bosco saw trades being taught there just as at the Oratory, but most of the boys were occupied in design, painting or sculpture, and several at the printing press. Pius IX, in order to benefit this institute, had granted it a privilege, by which the school books used throughout the Pontifical States could be printed there only. Don Bosco felt great satisfaction at seeing so many boys thus placed on the path of virtue and of an honest life; he must also have conceived the holy desire and

asked of God to give him the means to develop his own charitable works.

There were several other visits deserving of mention in this book. In the afternoon of the 3rd of March, he was conducted by Duke Scipio Salviati to Santa Maria dei Monti to visit the school supported by the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul; there were about sixty boys there, and the master made them read a little, then recite the catechism, and finally work out a few sums in arithmetic. The boys were intelligent, attentive to every question, and replied without becoming in any way confused. Don Bosco wished also to know if they understood what they read, and on questioning some of them, he found that in some cases it was not so. He accordingly gave the master a few polite and prudent hints on the subject, which were received by the latter with gratitude. On the whole, he found this school conducted on the lines which aim in a special manner at rescuing boys from the perils of the streets, instructing them in the truths of faith and in the precepts of Christian morality, and giving them an education suitable to their condition, without pretending in any way to make them learned above their station, which would end by making them ambitious and conceited, useless to themselves and, perhaps, even harmful to society. Of the same nature were the evening, day and Sunday schools for the day boys and artisans of the Oratory.

That very evening Don Bosco went to assist at a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul, opened under the title of St. Nicholas. The president was Marquis Patrizi, nephew of the Cardinal Vicar. On being requested to say a few words to the members, Don Bosco gave them a short address, exhorting them to cultivate with great ardour the spirit of the Conferences, and to look upon and promote as a work of predilection, the protection of poor and neglected boys. Don Bosco had already, with the help of Count Charles Cays, established in the Oratories at Turin these same Conferences amongst the grown-up boys, and this he

related to his auditors, exhorting them to practise the same in the evening schools at Rome. The Conferences for younger people had, for their scope, to train their members in good time in the practice of works of charity towards the most needy families, and also to arrange for the religious instruction of their children.

He paid a visit also to the festive Oratories. He devoted to this end a whole Sunday, which fell on the 14th of March. Marquis Patrizi, mentioned above, acted as his guide. In the morning he visited the Oratory of Our Lady della Quercia. In a large sacristy some forty boys were assembled, who, by their vivacity and their behaviour bore a marked resemblance to his little urchins at Turin. Mass, confession and communion for such as were prepared, catechism and a short instruction: such were the functions held for their benefit. Two priests attended to them, one hearing confessions, and the other keeping good order. Some members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul taught catechism and directed the practices of piety, while the Marquis himself signed the attendance cards which every boy took home with him each Sunday.

For want of suitable accommodation these boys went in the afternoon to another Oratory, that of St. John, and Don Bosco at the right moment called there also to make a visit. He saw there a hundred boys playing at various games. But there was no religious instruction or services, perhaps because there was no priest free for this work of charity; hence, it rather deserved the name of a recreation ground than that of an Oratory.

After chatting for a while with those boys, who showed good dispositions, Don Bosco, accompanied by the Count, passed on to Transtevere to see a third Oratory, that of the Assumption, frequented by upwards of eighty grow-up lads. He was well pleased with it. A spacious playground adapted for every kind of amusement, with a church close by, frequented mostly by young men, the singing of hymns and the sacred functions, reproduced in his mind a lively picture of the Oratory at Turin. He was also delighted

to see the Director, Don Biondi, instructing and questioning the boys, just as he himself was in the habit of doing on Sunday mornings after relating some portion of ecclesiastical history.

It has been thought well to give an account of Don Bosco's visits to these institutions, because when he saw in Rome the very same thing he had been doing in Turin for the course of seventeen years, he became more confirmed in the resolution of continuing his work and of trying to make it lasting by means of the approval and support of the Holy See.

This being his principal object in going to Rome, he wished to obtain an audience of Pope Pius IX, in order to lay his plans before him and get his advice. For this purpose Don Bosco called on his Eminence Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State, who received him on the 28th of February with signs of the greatest kindness, and gave him an audience lasting nearly two hours. His Eminence was pleased to make reference to Don Bosco's writings, especially the *Catholic Readings* and his *History of Italy*, and discussed the festive Oratories, the boys of the House and the arrangements made for them; he then went on to speak of the Holy Father, of his flight from Rome in 1848, of his sojourn at Gaeta, of the offering of thirty-three lire, and of the rosary beads which Pius IX had presented to them as a token of his pleasure. Finally, the Cardinal assured Don Bosco that he would announce him to His Holiness and procure him a private audience, which he did. In the evening on the 8th of March he received the following note: "The Rev. John Bosco is hereby informed that His Holiness has been pleased to arrange for an audience to-morrow, the 9th of March, between twelve o'clock and one."

At the time appointed, Don Bosco and the cleric, Michael Rua, arrived at the Vatican. As this audience was of great importance to the Oratory, it is worth while to relate its details here, taking them from a special memoir.

Whilst various thoughts were crowding in their

minds, a bell rang, and the Prelate beckoned to them to advance and present themselves before Pius IX. Don Bosco was at first not quite at his ease, but making a sign to Michael Rua, he said: "Let us go in." The cleric Rua followed him, carrying a copy of *Catholic Readings*.

They entered and made the usual prostrations; but all apprehension vanished when they beheld the Pontiff's venerable but kindly countenance, and they were at once reassured. They were unable to kiss his feet, for he sat at table; they kissed his hand, and the cleric Rua, remembering the promise he made his companions, kissed it once for himself and once for the others. Then the Holy Father made a sign for them to rise and come before him. It should be noted here in passing, that some mistake had been made in announcing Don Bosco's name, for the Holy Father said:

"Are you a Piedmontese?"

"Yes, your Holiness, I am a Piedmontese, and I am most grateful for the privilege of an audience with the Vicar of Christ."

"What work are you engaged in?"

"Your Holiness, my time is devoted mainly to the education of boys and to publishing *Catholic Readings*."

"The instruction of youth has ever been of great utility; but at the present day it is more necessary than ever. There is another priest I believe, at Turin, who takes great interest in youth?"

Don Bosco now perceived that he could not have been properly announced, and when the mistake was rectified, the Pope at once became more familiar, and asked him several questions regarding the boys, the clerics and the Oratories. Turning to the cleric he asked him whether he was a priest.

"Not yet, your Holiness," replied young Rua, "I am only a cleric in my third year of theology."

Then, the Holy Father said to Don Bosco, with a smiling countenance: "I remember the offering you sent me at Gaeta, and the thoughtful sentiments with which the boys accompanied it."

Nuova, of St. Francis of Sales at Valdocco, and of the Guardian Angels at Vanchiglia, under the care of Don Bosco, and under whose auspices they were founded and are maintained with the greatest benefit to poor boys;

(2) Having seen the letter of the aforementioned Don Bosco with which was offered to the minister 400 tickets at 50 centesimi each, with a request to accept them;

(3) Considering that without the fitting help which Don Bosco expects from public charity, to which in great part he has confided his philanthropic work, he will be in want of the means indispensable to carry on his work with success and advantage to the poorer classes;

(4) Bearing in mind that the Ministry is aware of the financial difficulties which more than once have pressed the Valdocco Oratory, from which the other two Institutions of Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia derive their assistance and maintenance;

(5) And that it is a principle adopted by the Government to help, as far as in its power lies, every Institution under whatever denomination which undertakes to educate the masses and provide that moral education which neglected youth could not otherwise obtain, decrees:

That from the temporary funds of this Ministry for the present year, there be assigned to the Rev. Don Bosco, Director of the Oratory of Valdocco, and Chairman of the above-mentioned Drawing, the sum of 200 lire, the price of the 400 tickets at 50 centesimi each, in addition to the same tickets which will be returned for the benefit of the said Oratories, for whose benefit Don Bosco with praiseworthy zeal has organized the Drawing. The central office is charged to carry out this order of payment of 200 lire from the Provincial treasury of this Capital to the said Don Bosco.

The Minister, U. RATAZZI.

Turin, April 30th, 1857."



POPE PIUS IX
APPROVES THE RULES OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY — •
3RD APRIL, 1874.

Don Bosco replied: "We were only sorry at the time that we could not do more and we were greatly consoled at the news that our humble offering had been acceptable to your Holiness. You must know, Holy Father, that in Turin you have a number of children who love you tenderly, and every time they have the opportunity of speaking of the Vicar of Christ, they do so with transports of joy."

The Holy Father listened with great satisfaction, and again turned the conversation to the subject of the Oratories, till at a certain point he suddenly put the following question to Don Bosco:

"If you were to die, what would become of your work?"

Don Bosco, who was anxious to come to the main question, seized at once the favourable occasion, and having replied that he had come to Rome to provide for the future of the Oratories, he handed him the recommendation of Archbishop Fransoni. The Pope read the letter, and learning of Don Bosco's intention, was very pleased and said: "I see that we agree." He exhorted Don Bosco to draw up the Rules of the Pious Society according to the scope which he had conceived, and he made some important suggestions. Amongst other things he said: "It is necessary that you should establish a Society with which the Government cannot interfere, but at the same time you must not be satisfied with binding its members by mere promises, otherwise you would never be sure of your subjects, nor could you count on them for any length of time."

Pius IX was not slow in understanding what was asked of him, and was as prompt in giving an answer; hence, not only this matter, but many others as well were treated of in this audience. In conclusion, Don Bosco asked a blessing for those persons who were in any way connected with him. He also asked several favours, which were graciously accorded. Amongst these was the privilege of a private chapel for the House and for Don Montebruno's at Genoa.

The cleric was sent for, and on his arriving, Don

Bosco asked the Pope for his blessing, and both knelt down to receive it.

"I give it to you with all my heart," replied the Holy Father, in a tone betraying emotion, so that they also were greatly moved. This is the special formula made use of by Pius IX :

* "May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, descend upon you, your companion, your helpers and benefactors, and upon all your boys and all your workers, and may it remain now and for ever and ever."

There is no need to show how the blessing of Pius IX has produced its effect; the works accomplished by the Oratory up to the present time are an eloquent proof of it.

After this consoling audience Don Bosco thought of returning at once to Turin, but shortly afterwards Pius IX sent his chamberlain, Mgr. de Merode, to invite him to give a retreat to those detained in the State prisons, and eventually he was pleased to give him a private audience on two different occasions, conversing with him at great length and of many things, and treating him with a kindness beyond all expectation. Let the following fact serve as an example. Towards the end of the audience Pius IX said to Don Bosco :

"You surely want something more?"

"Your Holiness," he replied, "has been good enough to grant me all I asked, and now it only remains for me to tender you my heartfelt thanks."

"Come, come now, there is something else you want?"

At this reply Don Bosco remained silent for a moment, when the Pope added :

"What? Would you not like to make your boys merry when you see them again?"

"O yes, Your Holiness, certainly."

* *Benedictio Dei Omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti descendat super te, super socium tuum, super tuos in sortem vocatos, super adjutores et benefactores tuos, et super omnes pueros tuos, et super omnia opera tua, et maneat nunc et semper, et semper, et semper.*

"Wait a moment then." So saying, he opened a small safe and placed in his hand twenty-five gold coins, saying: "Take these and give your boys a treat."

One can imagine the impression made on Don Bosco by such fatherly attention on the part of Pius IX, and how delighted his boys were when he told them about it and gave them the treat in question. Enlightened by the advice and comforted by the words of the Vicar of Christ, Don Bosco, during the time he still remained in Rome, revised the rules of the Pious Society of St. Francis of Sales, already written in the previous year; some he omitted, and made alterations here and there, in order to make them more conformable to the sentiments of Pius IX. His Holiness read them carefully, adding certain observations in his own writing, and sent them to his Eminence Cardinal Gaude. This illustrious prelate, a distinguished son of St. Dominic, had paid a visit to the Oratory in the previous year. He therefore already knew the work and its Founder, with whom he was on excellent terms.

Before leaving Rome, Don Bosco held several conferences with him on the subject, and they agreed together that the Rules should be practised for a time in their amended form, and then forwarded to his Eminence, who was to present them to the Holy See for approval. Unfortunately the Cardinal was soon afterwards called to his reward. The death of this trustworthy adviser and powerful protector of Don Bosco, which occurred on the 14th of December, 1860, caused the approval to be delayed; but of this, more anon.

Having gained the primary end which had brought him to Rome, overwhelmed with kindness by the most distinguished personages and by the Supreme Pontiff himself, Don Bosco commenced his return journey on the 14th of April, and arrived safely in Turin on the 16th, welcomed and cheered by the boys with such enthusiasm and affection, that no father could expect more from his children.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Catholic Readings in the Pontifical States. — The circular of the Cardinal Vicar and its good effects. — Pope Pius IX's feast in the three Oratories. — Students of the Cottolengo at school at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales. — The war of 1859 and an inspection. — Soldiers' sons and French soldiers at the Oratory. — Don Bosco with the Turcos at Collegno. — Subsidies from the King and the Government.

THE basis of the Society of St. Francis of Sales being thus laid in accordance with the design of Don Bosco and that of Pius IX, in this way also the future of so many boys, not only of those actually under his guidance, but also of those to come, was assured. This was certainly a source of great good to the Oratory, but it was not the only one. When speaking to Pius IX about *Catholic Readings*, Don Bosco obtained from His Holiness that his Vicar, Cardinal Patrizi, in a special circular, should recommend them to all the archbishops and bishops in the Pontifical States, in order that they might introduce them into their respective dioceses. The circular is dated May the 22nd of that same year, and it is here reproduced as a proof of Pius IX's benevolence and of the great esteem in which he held this periodical publication of the Oratory.

" ILLUSTRIOUS AND REVEREND SIR,

It is an undeniable fact that wicked men are striving with all their might to demoralise the peoples of different nations, in order to use them in the furtherance of their designs. To bring this about, they

make use of various means, amongst which there is one which is of the greatest service to them, viz., the diffusion of books and tracts that are corrupt, and often opposed to the dogmas of our Holy Religion. The evil principles are not evident, but they lie concealed under a subtle veil of hypocrisy embellished with an elegant and pleasing style. As these publications seem at first sight to treat of amusing or interesting subjects, they soon find their way amongst the unwary in every class of men, who thus take, almost unwittingly, the poison which will perhaps prove fatal to them. This happens, moreover, not only in populous cities, but also in the smallest and most obscure villages, where the old custom of spending some time, especially in winter, in reading some pages of the Bible History, or of some other good and religious book, is replaced by the reading of heretical and immoral pamphlets.

Good Catholics, however, are ever on the watch to resist the efforts of the wicked; hence, in order to combat such grave evils, a Society has been formed of learned and pious laymen and ecclesiastics, who propose to meet the evils which we now have to deplore, by bringing out every month little books bearing the title of *Catholic Readings*, which, by their variety of matter and easy style, are at once interesting and within the reach of all. The one scope of these "Readings" will be to preserve in Catholics the integrity of their faith and the soundness of their morals, thus increasing in them that respect and love which they owe to the Supreme Pontiff as the universal Father of all the faithful, and to unite them more closely with their bishops.

His Holiness, always anxious for the common welfare, and fully aware of the good achieved by *Catholic Readings* in places where they are in circulation, has approved and commended the plan of introducing them into the Pontifical States, and for this end he has authorised me to invite the archbishops and bishops of the said States to aid and sustain so noble an enterprise, encouraging it as much as possible throughout all the towns and villages within their jurisdiction.

In furtherance, therefore, of the wishes of His Holiness, this circular is being sent out, and I beg you to accept with it the sentiments of profound esteem, with which I subscribe myself,

Your humble servant,

CONSTANTINE, *Card. Vicar.*

Rome, 22nd May, 1858."

This letter had the desired effect; from that day *Catholic Readings* began to circulate not only in the Pontifical States, but in almost all the dioceses of Italy; many bishops, following the example of the Holy Father, recommended it to their parish priests, and these, in their turn, spread the "Readings" amongst the faithful entrusted to their care. A twofold advantage was thus gained: the spiritual good of a greater number of souls, who were thus better instructed and encouraged to lead a more virtuous life, and a great benefit to the Oratory; for as the number of subscribers to the "Readings" kept increasing, work was thereby provided for a greater number of artisans, and any little gain accruing from them, furnished Don Bosco with the means of taking a greater number of boys into his institute and of providing them with food, clothing, and a good education.

On the 24th of June, 1858, a feast was held in honour of Pius IX in the Oratories of St. Francis of Sales, of St. Aloysius, and of the Guardian Angels. On that day, which is also one of obligation in the archdiocese of Turin, Don Bosco wished that his boys should enjoy the fruit of the kindness of the immortal Pontiff. The Vicar of Christ had granted two things at the visit of Don Bosco: a plenary Indulgence for the benefit of their souls, and a sum of money to procure for them a treat. The boys received due notice the Sunday before from their own Directors, and they flocked in great numbers to the respective Oratories in order to approach the holy Sacraments and gain the Indulgence, and also to partake at the same time of the good things provided for them at the expense of Pius IX.

The feast could not have been more pleasing or more joyous. A correspondent of the paper, the *Armonia*, who was present, gave an interesting account of it in the issue of the 29th of June, 1858. It runs as follows :

‘ All that concerns the Supreme Head of the Church is a source of pleasure to good Catholics. They will therefore be interested in the feasts held in the Oratories of St. Francis of Sales, of St. Aloysius, and of the Guardian Angels in remembrance of a favour granted by the Holy Father to the boys attending those Oratories. A few months ago the distinguished priest, Don Bosco, visited Rome, and Pius IX spoke to him about his boys with a kindness worthy of so great a Pontiff. When bestowing on them his Apostolic blessing, he granted them also a plenary Indulgence, to be gained on the day in which they should go to confession and communion. To these spiritual favours he added a sum of money sufficient to provide a treat on that day, in order to encourage the boys to walk in the path of virtue.

‘ The day fixed upon for this function was the 24th of the present month ; we chanced to be present in one of the Oratories and witnessed a most touching spectacle. Having performed their religious duties, these boys, whose countenances reflected the joy and peace of a pure conscience, filed out of the church in order to partake of what the kindness of the Holy Father had provided for them.

‘ On all sides cheers for the Holy Father were heard. But a surprise awaited us in the evening when the crowd was about to disperse and each one was returning to his home. Guided as it were by a kind of enthusiasm, they rallied round their Director and exclaimed with one voice : ‘ Send our thanks to the Holy Father ; may God reward him. Who will ever be able to go and thank him for us in a becoming manner ? Let the Holy Father know that we are overflowing with gratitude towards him, that we revere in him the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and that we all desire to live and die in that religion which has God for its invisible Head and which

has such a tender and good Father, Pius IX, for His Vicar on earth.'

"Thus was the day brought to a close — a day which will leave in their hearts an indelible remembrance of the paternal goodness of the Holy Father."

"These boys who are little accustomed to receive kindness from men, living a life full of suffering and privations, feel the most lively gratitude towards the Head of the Church, who from his high station, far from forgetting the children of the people, shows himself a true father to them just as much as to the great ones and princes of the earth."

About this time Canon Aloysius Anglesio, Superior of the Cottolengo Institute, thought it would turn to God's greater glory to follow the example of Don Bosco and to receive a greater number of boys who were desirous of studying for the priesthood. He and Don Bosco hoped thereby to contribute towards providing the archdiocese of Turin with clerics and priests, of whom it stood in great need in those days, and also to supply their own institutes with reliable subjects for the exercise of the sacred ministry towards the boys received by them.

With this noble end in view, Don Bosco, in agreement with Canon Anglesio, went every year through the country districts, especially in the neighbourhood of Saluzzo and Mondovi, to inquire of the parish priests whether they knew any boys of good character and ability who might have a vocation for the priesthood. When he found such boys, Don Bosco spoke to them, and arranged with their parents to receive them. These boys were afterwards distributed between the Cottolengo and the Oratory. By this means the number of students increased in both institutes, and in 1858 and 1859 they reached upwards of a hundred.

Meanwhile the first classes of the classical course for the boarders were organised in the Oratory, and with its own masters. Canon Anglesio, on his part, as he had not yet sufficient staff for this purpose, and was also unwilling to send his boys out to school in the

town, asked Don Bosco to admit them to the classes at the Oratory, and the latter willingly consented to the proposal. Hence, from 1856 to 1859, on every school day, both morning and afternoon, a good number of these boys came during class hours and followed the same lessons as the Oratory boys. At the end of the scholastic year the distribution of prizes for both parties was held. The occasion was enlivened by singing and instrumental music; many distinguished personages attended, as well as the Directors of the two institutes and many of their benefactors. A number of the Cottolengo students later on achieved brilliant successes; some became exemplary priests, whilst others chose various careers and attained important civil preferments, or distinguished themselves in the ranks of the army.

It has been a great pleasure to relate these facts, because they are a proof of the excellent relations that have always existed between the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales and the Little House of Divine Providence. These two Institutes, which sprang up close to each other and almost at the same time, have always been on the most friendly terms, and it is to be hoped that they will always assist one another in the service of God, who has raised them up in these latter days for the relief of human misery and for the advantage of religion and civil society.

Meanwhile, the year 1859 had come, and in April of the same year, war broke out between Austria and Piedmont, the latter in alliance with the French Emperor, Napoleon III. It is not intended to dwell on this event, but only note down here a fact which concerns our chronicle more closely. In the month of May, the Government authorities sent two officials to make an inspection of the Oratory, to ascertain if the building was suitable for lodging soldiers or as a hospital for the wounded. Don Bosco received these gentlemen with courtesy and showed them all over the house. At the end he said to them: "I wish now to ask you to take back to your superiors Don Bosco's sentiments and a

request about this matter. In the perils and needs of one's native land every citizen must give what assistance he can afford, and Don Bosco is accordingly prepared to do everything in his power: he did so six years ago in the time of the cholera, and he will know how to do so again now that war has been declared. But I must observe that this house affords shelter at the present time to some four hundred boys, and therefore I request the Government to spare me the pain of having to turn them out into the street. In Turin there is no lack, I believe, of public buildings which may serve as military quarters and as hospitals better than this building, which you see would be unsuitable in many ways."

What report the two experts gave to the Government is not known, but, as a matter of fact, the Oratory was not disturbed, and the boys continued to live there unmolested.

After all, the Institute rendered at that time a far greater service than many others. The sudden call to arms in the middle of spring and summer took away many a strong arm from the midst of families, which depended on them for their support, and hence many a mother burdened with a numerous family found herself reduced to the greatest misery.

That this was only too true may be gathered from the fact that in the principal cities, it was found necessary to form committees in order to raise funds to provide for the most needy families. And what did Don Bosco do in these circumstances? Although on account of the war the prices had run high and he therefore found himself often in great straits, he nevertheless received several of the sons of the poorer soldiers, thus alleviating their families and increasing his own expenses and cares.

But he did not stop there: if the Oratory was not converted into barracks or into a hospital, it nevertheless became a *renâez-vous* for the French soldiers stationed at Turin, and especially for the invalids. One of the Oratory Old Boys, who was fairly well acquainted

with the French language, was soon on friendly terms with some of them: he spoke to them of Don Bosco and took them to visit him. Don Bosco received them with great kindness, conversed with them, invited them to come to the Oratory as often as they liked, nay, he even told them to bring as many of their comrades as they pleased.

"You may come here," he said, "to write to your parents, and you will find paper, pens, ink and stamps; you may come to read the French books in which our library abounds, and should any of you wish to learn Italian or arithmetic, I shall give him a teacher. Furthermore," he added, "as we are now in Easter-time and not all of you may have had occasion of fulfilling the precept of Holy Church, I wish you to know that in our chapel you will find confessors who know your language and are always willing to do what they can for the good of your souls."

Such welcome and such kind words filled the soldiers with enthusiasm; on returning to their quarters they related to their comrades what had taken place, and thus many others also had a great desire to go to the Oratory. So much so, that a few days afterwards one could have seen a crowd of soldiers who, when off duty, used to wend their way to Valdocco and come to chat with Don Bosco and the boys. More than one hundred of them approached the sacraments with truly edifying demeanour, showing that they belonged to good, pious families. Don Bosco was well pleased with them, and from time to time he invited some of them to dine with him. It was a pleasing sight to see the red costumes standing out in contrast against the black *soutanes*, and the clerics, priests, and soldiers chatting together.

After a while there were so many of them who had become personally acquainted with Don Bosco, that he seldom went through the town without being accompanied or stopped on his way by some of these French soldiers. On one occasion he was to go to Collegno, a

village some four miles distant from Turin, in order to visit a sick person. On the road he fell in with about a dozen of these *Turcos*, as they were called, some of whom were convalescent, or merely wounded in the arm or hand. As they were going for a walk, they asked Don Bosco to allow them to go with him part of the way, and he readily consented; and as they chatted away, first of one thing, then of another, under the shade of the ancient elm-trees which line both sides of the road, the journey seemed so short, that the party found themselves in Collegno almost without noticing it. On arriving there the *Turcos* wished to turn back, but Don Bosco said to them: "Since you, as invalids, are off duty, wait a little while, and then we can return together to Turin."

They accordingly waited for him. But, contrary to expectation, Don Bosco was unable to get away as soon as he had intended, and when he left the sick man's house it was already twelve o'clock. On coming back to his fellow travellers he said to them: "I hope you will excuse me for having kept you waiting so long; as you see it is now mid-day, you must surely be hungry, and invalids require nourishment; so come along with me, and we shall have, if not a sumptuous banquet, at least some refreshments." So saying, he took them to an inn, paid for a dinner, partook of it in their company, and made them spend an enjoyable day.

It would be impossible to describe the pleasure it gave to the soldiers. On their return to town they related what had taken place, and their officers were so filled with admiration that, on the following day, they came to the Oratory to thank Don Bosco with true French politeness.

For these and other reasons, the French soldiers residing at the time in Turin became so much attached to the Oratory, that on receiving orders to leave the city, they came to see Don Bosco and the class-masters once more and expressed their gratitude. Some of them continued, when away, to keep up correspondence with Don Bosco and with some of the teachers, especially

with Don Rua, who had been their teacher of arithmetic.

After the decisive battle of Solferino, which was fought on the 24th of June, the war had ended with the cession of Lombardy to Piedmont; but it left many a fatherless child, and the Oratory also soon felt its effects. Almost every day new boys arrived, and the beds were pushed closer and closer together to make room for the newcomers. But so many more to keep added to the expenses and increased the debts, so that Don Bosco was soon in great straits. He confided fully in Providence, but it was necessary at the same time to have recourse to such means as prudence might suggest. He therefore sent through Count Cibrario a petition to King Victor Emmanuel, asking for a subsidy for his boys, and on the 31st of August he received the following letter from the Count :

" I had the honour of informing his Majesty of the unfavourable situation of the institute founded by you, on account of the absence of benefactors and the greater expense incurred in providing shelter for boys, whose number has increased on account of the war. His Majesty, wishing to come once more to your aid, has graciously deigned, in accordance with my request, to grant you a subsidy of 250 lire from the treasury."

A few months later the Minister of the Interior granted him another subsidy of 200 lire, which the secretary Capriolo announced in the following terms :

" With the object of assisting the administration of your institute, this Ministry has determined to grant to its founder and director, Don Bosco, a subsidy of 200 lire, and has given orders for the payment of the said sum."

These grants were certainly not sufficient for the needs; but considering the great expenses of the war, they were by no means to be despised. They showed at least that the King and his Government recognised the usefulness of Don Bosco's work, and they were an inducement to private citizens to add their contributions.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Brief of Pope Pius IX. — Thorns and bitterness. — Protestation. — Persecution begins. — Kindness and ill-will. — Excitement amongst the boys. — Speech of Don Bosco. — Anxiety of Don Alasonatti. — The Official Scarf and the search warrant. — Insult repaired. — Personal investigations. — The lawyer and the basket. — Searching the room. — Examination of correspondence. — Incidents. — Bills. — Pontifical Brief. — The Bollandists. — Confession. — The end. — Timely encouragements. — Innocence recognized.

TO DON BOSCO and his young charges, the year 1860 brought both joys and sorrows. To begin with the first. On the 9th of November, 1859, Don Bosco wrote a respectful letter to Pope Pius IX, in which he offered his condolences for what had already been done and was still being done to the injury of religion and of the Holy See, and at the same time explained the efforts made in Turin to stem the torrent of evils threatening to inundate the country. The illustrious Pontiff graciously accepted this testimony of filial submission and inviolable fidelity, and with singular benevolence replied to Don Bosco by a Brief dated January 7th, 1860, a lasting monument of the goodwill of Pius IX towards the Oratory. The precious document being in Latin, Don Bosco translated it into Italian, and then assembling his boys, he read it to them in order that they might share in his consolation. It reads as follows :

" Turin.

TO OUR BELOVED SON, JOHN BOSCO, PRIEST.

POPE PIUS IX

Health and Apostolic Benediction.

In the letter you wrote to Us on the 9th of last November, We have received fresh proofs of your singular faith, piety and reverence towards Us and towards Our exalted office.

We can well understand, Beloved Son, what must be your heartfelt sorrow and that of the Clergy in witnessing the great disorders and the disturbance of public affairs in Italy, and the rebellion in several provinces of Our Temporal Dominion.

This rebellion, as is well known, has been planned and instigated by outsiders, and has been fostered and maintained in every conceivable way.

At this time, a publication, full of hypocrisy, is being circulated amongst the people in order to deceive the ignorant and to undermine the common consent of Christendom in upholding the Temporal Power of the Apostolic See.

In Italy the faith itself is in peril. Pernicious books and newspapers are circulated both in towns and in villages; sectarians also, not only in Piedmont, but also in Tuscany and the adjacent provinces, are pouring out the venom of their heretical teaching through the establishment of public or private schools, to which they draw poor and ignorant children by means of prizes and rewards.

Amid this cruel warfare stirred up by Satan, in the lowliness of Our heart, We thank God, Who, by His Grace, strengthens the Bishops of Italy in guarding, each in his own flock, the deposit of faith.

In this sad time Our heart is greatly consoled by the perfect union amongst Our Clergy labouring for the salvation of souls, and by their constancy in bearing all adversities for the cause of God and of His Church.

We cannot express in words the consolation We have received from that part of your letter by which We see

that the present calamities have increased your devotedness, Beloved Son, and that of other ecclesiastics.

Therefore, united in mind and zealous efforts, by preaching the Word of God, and by the diffusion of good books and pamphlets, labour with all your strength in opposing the evil designs of the enemies of the Church. Nothing is more excellent than this work, and there is no better means of increasing and inflaming the piety of the faithful.

The fruits of your singular solicitude, in drawing a multitude of youths to your Oratory on feast days, and daily to your schools at the appointed times, are seen in their increased knowledge of Christian Doctrine and their devout frequentation of the Sacraments.

Your zeal in the care of poor boys produces daily the most happy results and increases the number of those who, later on, may become useful ministers of the Church.

Continue, Beloved Son, the work you have undertaken for the glory of God and the good of the Church. If some great trial befalls you, have patience; and bear with magnanimity the difficulties of this present time.

Our hope is in God, Who, by the protection of the Queen of Heaven, the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, will deliver us from these great evils and will console His afflicted Church by giving her the victory over His enemies.

We do not doubt that for this end, and to obtain God's speedy help and succour, you will continue, Beloved Son, with your pupils and Community of the Institute, so dear to Us and to you, your supplications and prayers with ever-increasing fervour.

We earnestly pray the same God to keep you and yours in peace, and to stretch forth His right arm for your defence.

We desire you to receive as a pledge of this heavenly assistance the Apostolic Benediction, which with all the affection and love of Our paternal heart, We impart to you, Beloved Son, to your pupils and Community, and

likewise to all those who contribute to your good works or take part in them.

Given at Rome, near St. Peter's, January, 1860, in the fourteenth year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS IX, *Pope.*"

Amongst Don Bosco's worries and trials must be reckoned the suspicions of several Members of the Government, that a nest of conspirators against the State existed at the Oratory. Sharp thorns indeed were the secret enemies and vile calumniators who, to ingratiate themselves with the Ministers and pave the way to lucrative employment, whispered in their ears that Don Bosco was in secret, compromising correspondence with the Jesuits, with Archbishop Fransoni, Cardinal Antonelli, Pius IX, and even with Austria, in order to excite discontent amongst the people and provoke a disturbance of public order. They went so far as to insinuate that there was, at the Oratory, a store of rifles with which, at the appointed time, to arm the youths against the Government; but, evidently, the slanderers had taken the bread-room for an ammunition store. Thorns, likewise, were the inquisitorial examination of Don Bosco's person and dwelling, the visitation of the schools, the cunning questions and moral tortures by which the scholars were pressed to acknowledge that which did not exist. Thorns, also, were the threats of imprisonment against him, who provided daily bread and secured for so many an honourable future; the threatened closing of the Institute and dispersion of its members, casting them adrift or sending them back to their families, thus putting an end to their education.

Finally, most piercing thorns were the dangers that, like a hurricane, threatened to sweep away the whole work of the Oratory, which, during nineteen years, had cost Don Bosco and his Co-operators such solicitude, so much toil and labour. It is true that in past times the Oratory had been subjected to many annoyances, as was seen in the first part of this history:

these, however, were caused by private individuals, and the Authorities, even King Charles Albert himself, had been sympathetic and helpful. But in 1860 things were changed, for it was the representatives of the Government and those in power who were arrayed against the Oratory.

That these fears were not without foundation was clearly demonstrated in those days by the closing of several houses of education, the imprisonment of distinguished members of both the secular and regular clergy, and the forced residence in Turin, to which Cardinal Corsi, Archbishop of Pisa, was condemned in the month of May of this same year.

These then were most piercing thorns; still it must be made clear that nothing is here said in disparagement of public Authority. Don Bosco and his children knew how to distinguish between lawful Authority and the men by whom it was exercised; it may be abused by these, but this is no reason for despising Authority itself, and does not justify revolt against a regularly constituted Government. St. Peter, the first Pope, in the interests of good order, commands all to obey their own masters, even though they be wicked: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward." (I Peter ii, 18). Besides, we know that very often it is not the rulers themselves, but their subordinates, who, through ignorance or pretended zeal, treat the people tyrannically. At times, those in office, to acquire a reputation for courage, impartiality in religious matters, or in the hope of gaining promotion, may distort facts and carry out regulations by illegal methods against innocent, peaceful citizens, whom a lying Press and a perverted public opinion stigmatize as enemies of the State. Such things have happened in all times and under all kinds of governments: in the Holy Scriptures we find the great Assuerus, King of Persia, lamenting a like disaster; when writing to the governors of the Provinces of his Empire, he says: "Many have abused the goodness of princes, and they break out into so

great madness as to endeavour to subvert by falsehood such as observe diligently the office committed to them, and do all things in such manner as to be worthy of all men's praise." (Esther xvi). We may suppose that something like this happened regarding what is now to be related. If it were not so, others will explain at a future time.

It was the 26th of May, the vigil of the Feast of Pentecost. After his frugal dinner, about two o'clock, Don Bosco was going upstairs to his room, when he was stopped by a poor mother, who, accompanied by her son, brought a letter from the Home Office, requesting Don Bosco to receive the boy at the Oratory. Whilst he was reading the letter, three well-dressed men came up, and one, interrupting him, said :

" We wish to speak to Don Bosco."

" Wait one moment," he replied, " and I shall be at your service as soon as I have settled about this boy."

" We cannot wait," was the curt reply.

" What is the matter, then, since you are in such a hurry ? "

" We must speak to you in private."

" Very well, come to the Prefect's room, close by."

" Not in the Prefect's, but in your own room."

" I cannot go there now."

" But you must go : there is no choice."

" What do you want with me ? "

" We have to make a domiciliary visit."

Then Don Bosco understood clearly what he had, at first, suspected ; so he enquired :

" Have you a warrant ? "

" No, but I am the lawyer Grasso, a Government official and police delegate, and these two are the lawyers Tua and Grasselli. We belong to the Home Office."

" By whose authority do you make this domiciliary visit ? "

" Public authorities need no authorization."

" Excuse me, gentlemen ; I take you to be honest

men, but I may be mistaken. Until you show me a written document defining your powers, I am not bound to admit you to my own room or any other place in this house."

"Do you then wish us to employ force?"

"You will certainly not use force in my house. The laws guarantee inviolability of domicile to peaceful citizens, and if you use any violence I will prosecute you as housebreakers."

Whilst this conversation was taking place, eighteen policemen took possession of the courtyard and the staircase, and a division of the same were posted outside the Oratory, preventing the entrance of outsiders and turning out the pockets of those leaving the house. Seemingly the magistrates had mistaken the home of poor boys for an Austrian fortress to be taken by assault. In order, probably, to intimidate Don Bosco, the delegate called up several policemen, and then repeated in a loud, harsh voice:

"Will you now take us to your room?"

"I cannot and will not take you there until you show me who sends you, by what authority and for what reason. And beware of using any violence, for I shall then ring the alarm-bell, I shall call my youths and the neighbours to my assistance, and, regarding you as aggressors and housebreakers, I shall force you to retire."

On hearing these words from Don Bosco, one of the police drew near to arrest him, but the delegate, taking a more reasonable view, stopped him, and said: "As far as possible, let this matter be settled quietly," and turning to one of his colleagues, "Go," he said, "and fetch the warrant which we left in the Magistrate's office."

During the interval, Don Bosco finished his conversation with the boy and his mother, who were bewildered at this unlooked-for discussion and ignorant of its meaning. Don Bosco himself could not reconcile the Minister's recommendation of this boy and the inquisitorial order and threats of arrest on the part of

the Government. Was the former a trap to ensnare him? Or was the warrant issued by an inferior official and unknown to the Minister of the Interior? In any case, Don Bosco had no hesitation in admitting the poor boy at once amongst his pupils. He was even glad that Divine Providence should thus have given him an opportunity of returning good for evil to those who, instead of being grateful to him for decreasing the number of criminals and giving to society well-educated, honest citizens, repaid him with hostile acts, treating him as a conspirator and a disturber of public order.

Two o'clock having struck, the boys of the Oratory had returned to their respective classrooms or workshops; but there were others who, having gone out, were not slow to perceive that something serious was in progress. They recognised this from the number of police stationed here and there, as if to intercept a robber or murderer. Hence a rumour spread that Don Bosco was to be taken to prison; in fact, the carriage was at the door. This report caused the greatest alarm and consternation throughout the house; the boys, furiously excited, would no longer remain in their classrooms and workshops; some shouting and others in tears were begging to be allowed to protect him or go with him to prison. The masters and teachers had great difficulty in quieting the boys and persuading them that Don Bosco was not in any danger; had there been any, they would have been warned and prepared to defend him.

Nevertheless, a few of the older boys were allowed to go out, some of whom approached Don Bosco, saying: "Allow us to get rid of these men."

"No," he answered, "I forbid you even by word or gesture to offend anyone. Have no fear, I shall arrange everything; return now to your duties and tell your companions to remain quiet."

Had it not been for these prudent and peaceful words, a regrettable collision would doubtless have occurred; for, so great was the excitement amongst the boys, that,

to defend Don Bosco, they would willingly have been torn to pieces.

Meanwhile the Prefect, Don Alasonatti, Don Bosco's right hand, was in the greatest anxiety. He feared the imprisonment of Don Bosco no less than the boys had done, and for this reason: in the number of letters Don Bosco received every day, there might be some allusion to politics hostile to the Government and disapproving of the annexation of Romagna. Such a letter, though not written by him, would be sufficient pretext for using violence in the present circumstances. "Alas!" he said, "what will become of me in this house, without Don Bosco. It would be far better if I were arrested."

At last the messenger returned with the warrant, and the delegate, putting on his official scarf, and surrounded by five members of the police, read the following, in an awe-inspiring voice:

"In the name of the law I order the domiciliary visitation of the House belonging to the priest, Don Bosco."

Having said this, he allowed Don Bosco to read the warrant, in which domiciliary visits were ordered also in the case of Canon Ortalda, of Don Cafasso, and of Count Cays. The first two were visited a few days later, the third not until February, 1862. Was it perhaps to keep these orders secret that the delegate had left the warrant at the Magistrate's office?

The part which concerned Don Bosco was as follows: "By order of the Ministry of the Interior a diligent search shall be made in the house of the priest, Don Bosco, and a careful investigation of every corner of the establishment. He is suspected of carrying on a compromising correspondence with the Jesuits, with Archbishop Fransoni, and the Pontifical Court. Should anything illegal be discovered, the person in question must be promptly arrested."

Having read these words, Don Bosco replied: "Such being the case, I give you leave to exercise your authority, being constrained thereto by force. Let us go to my room."

Along the walls and over the door of the library the following words were inscribed: "Praised for ever be the most Holy Names of Jesus and Mary." On reaching this spot, the lawyer Tua read these words in a tone of derision, but Don Bosco, interrupting him, added, "And for evermore," but before finishing the ejaculation, which the boys used to sing, and which was written also on the adjoining door leading to his bedroom, turning round he desired all to take off their hats; seeing that none obeyed, he continued: "You began in a scoffing tone, now you will conclude with due respect; therefore I require all to uncover their heads." These bold words had the desired effect, and then Don Bosco concluded: "Praised be the Name of Jesus, the Incarnate Word."

Entering his room, accompanied by these men and two of the police, Don Bosco abandoned himself to their will, and the shameful scene began. The police pounced upon everything; pockets, purses, pocket-books, cassock, waistcoat and trousers, even the lining of his coat and the tassel of his biretta were searched in this domiciliary visit, in order to find, as they said, the *corpus delicti*. While they were doing this with the greatest brutality, and pushing him about rudely, he murmured: "*Et cum sceleratis reputatus est.*"

"What are you saying?" one of them asked.

"I say that you are treating me as others treated Our Blessed Saviour."

After the personal search, they passed to that of his rooms, one of which he used as a study. The first thing that fell into the hands of the police was a basketful of waste paper, torn letters and other refuse. The lawyer Grasselli, casting his eye on this collection, saw a torn letter with the postage stamp of the Pontifical States.

"I take this," he cried, "let no one touch it."

"Be careful," added the delegate, "and keep all these things."

Then the official, assisted by his colleagues, began searching through the torn letters and refuse, scraping up the dust and rubbish as if he expected to find a

treasure. In this ignoble work he soiled his smart clothes and begrimed his perspiring countenance, until he resembled a rag-picker searching in the dust of the street wherewith to buy a little bread to satisfy his hunger.

"I am truly sorry," began Don Bosco.

"For what are you sorry?" Grasselli inquired.

"I am sorry to see you doing such vile work."

"You are right; but my office, my honour, my duty . . ."

"I sympathise with you all," continued Don Bosco, "and I am sure that if you were free, you would not degrade yourselves in this way. I would rather sweep the street than soil my person and my clothes, as you are doing. And to see you, a lawyer, a judge, a public functionary, one who has earned distinction at the Royal University, obliged to make yourself so dirty!"

"Truly, it is a wretched business."

"Stop," said the delegate, "we must make an end of this work. If Don Bosco will give us the letters we are seeking, we can go away immediately."

"Be good enough to say which letters you want."

"Those that concern the Government."

"I cannot give you what I have not in the house."

"But can you deny having letters relating to the Government, for instance, about the Jesuits, Fransoni, or the Pope?"

"I shall give you full satisfaction; but first tell me if you will believe what I say?"

"Yes, if you speak the truth."

"That is to say, you are not inclined to believe me; therefore my answer would be useless."

"But we do believe you," rejoined Grasselli.

"As Gospel truth," added the others.

"If you believe me," continued Don Bosco, "then depart and go about your business, since neither in this room nor in any corner of the house will you find anything unbecoming a good priest,—consequently nothing to your purpose."

"But," said the lawyer Tua, "we have been assured

that the *corpus delicti* existed here, and that by searching we should find it."

If you do not believe me, why do you ask questions? But say, at least, whether you take me for a fool."

"No, certainly not."

"Then, if I am not a fool, I should certainly not keep any compromising document which might fall into your hands; and if I had received any, I should have destroyed them at once. Continue, therefore, your search, and you will see if I am speaking the truth."

All the cupboards, chests and safes were opened, and the smallest papers, confidential and otherwise, were scrutinized with a zeal worthy of a better cause. Don Bosco, seeing the end was still far off, and wishing to employ his time usefully, with that calmness that never deserts the good man who trusts in God, sat down to his correspondence, which was in arrears. Seeing this, Grasselli said: "Whatever you write must be shown to us."

"You are the masters," said Don Bosco, "you may read what I have written."

He wrote, therefore, and each of the five, in turn, read his letters. But it happened that before the five had finished reading the first letter, he had another ready for them, whereupon the delegate said:

"What are we doing? We are wasting our time reading these letters that Don Bosco writes, and we are not attending to what is the object of our visit. Therefore, let only one read the letters, the rest will continue the search."

Then occurred some amusing incidents which tended to enliven matters, turning into a comedy what promised to be a tragedy. In examining a bureau they came upon a safe.

"What does this contain?" they enquired, eagerly.

"Secret and confidential matters," answered Don Bosco, from his desk, "I do not wish anyone to see them."

" Secret and private matters indeed ! Come and open it."

" I absolutely refuse, holding that everyone has a right to keep secret such things as may be to his credit or to his discredit ; therefore, I beg of you to respect family secrets and to continue your work."

" Secrets or no secrets : either open the safe or we will break the lock."

" As you threaten violence, I shall yield to your demands." So saying, Don Bosco rose from his table and opened the safe. He then went back to his writing, leaving them to examine the contents at their leisure.

The five inquisitors, feeling sure that they were now about to lay their hands upon the *corpus delicti*, crowded anxiously round the box for fear anything should escape them, and gazed eagerly at the pile of papers within. The lawyer Tua at once took possession of the whole to examine them, and leaping for joy, he seemed to say, " It is here, it is here ! " He then took out a sheet of paper and read aloud, so that all could hear : " For bread supplied to Don Bosco by Magra, the baker, 7,800 lire due."

" Oh, this does not concern us," said the lawyer, and he put it aside.

He took up another and read : " For leather supplied to Don Bosco's workshops, 2,150 lire due."

" What are these papers ? " the inquisitor asked of Don Bosco.

" As you have begun," he replied, " you may as well go on and you will see."

They opened a third, a fourth, and so on, and were quite confused and ashamed at finding that these papers were only bills for oil, rice, flour, etc., all still unpaid !

" You have been making fools of us ? " said the delegate to Don Bosco, recognising the trick that had been played on them.

" I have not played you a trick," he answered, " I did not wish you to find out my debts ; but you insisted upon seeing and knowing everything. Never mind, if

you would only pay a few of these bills you would do an act of charity."

This made them laugh, and they passed on to something else.

Among various letters in the archives, they found the Brief of Pius IX, already cited; this they wished to take away.

"I will not allow it," said Don Bosco, "because that is the original text."

"Precisely because this is the original," said the delegate, "we must seize it."

"I will give you a copy instead."

"Where is it?"

"Here is a printed copy."

"But it is not the original."

"It is exactly the same."

"It is a translation."

"Yes, but with it you have the Latin text."

"Let us see," said the lawyer Grasselli, and he began to compare the two line for line, word for word. Recognising that the printed copy was identical with the original, he said: "This copy, in which we have both Latin and Italian, will be better for us and easier to understand." So they were satisfied with the printed copy, leaving the original manuscript, which Don Bosco kept as a precious memorial.

Having resolved, at any cost, to find some incriminating matter of which they might boast to their chiefs, the inquisitors continued to search in the next room, which was used as a library. Whilst some were rummaging in the bookshelves, another taking hold of a large volume of the Bollandists, asked Don Bosco: "What books are these?"

They are Jesuit books, which do not concern you in the least; leave them alone and go on to something else."

"Jesuit books!" he exclaimed, "they must all be confiscated."

"No," observed the delegate, "they are too heavy,

we should require a mule to carry them; but examine what they treat of."

The first, to conceal his ignorance, opened the volume he had in his hands and went on reading for about half an hour, but at last he said:

"To perdition with these books and those who write them. I cannot understand a line, they are all in Latin. If I were a king I would not allow any book to be printed in that language. What are they all about?"

"The one you are reading," said Don Bosco, "contains the life of St. Simon Stylites. Listen a moment: This extraordinary man, terrified at the thought of hell, reflecting that he had only one soul, and fearing to lose it, abandoned his relatives and friends and went to live a holy life in the desert. He stood on a pillar and there lived many years, always declaiming against men of the world, whose only care was how to enjoy themselves, without any thought of the eternal torments awaiting, in the next life, those who have led wicked lives upon earth."

"Enough, enough! If you continue the sermon we shall all have to go to confession."

"Precisely so," said Don Bosco, "to-day is Saturday and to-morrow the solemn feast of Pentecost. About five o'clock the confessions of the boys will begin. What a splendid example you would set them by going first."

"It would be an event worthy to be handed down to posterity," observed the lawyer Tua, "if our domiciliary visit ended with a confession."

"Make your preparation then," said Don Bosco, "and I will very willingly spend the whole evening in hearing you; this will profit you much more than your present search."

"As for me," said the lawyer Grasso, "it would be useless, for at present I have no contrition."

Nearly three hours had now been spent in this fruitless search, and the five inquisitors, wearied with their unpleasant task, were parched with thirst owing to the heat of the room and the quantity of dust they had

swallowed in removing and examining so many old books. Don Bosco saw this and was sorry for them. A short time before, one of the boys, Joseph Buzzetti, had come into the room, seemingly with a message to Don Bosco, but in reality to see what was going on. He was told to fetch something to drink. At this hour the scholars had left their classrooms and were taking their recreation almost in silence. They were gathered in small groups here and there in the courtyard, discussing the situation between fear and hope; others went in and out of the church, praying for the happy termination of this business. All were most anxious to see the end of the affair, which troubled them greatly. When they saw Buzzetti carrying a tray with bottle and glasses to Don Bosco's room, hope revived in their hearts, and they showed great joy, feeling sure that their father was now safe.

The inquisitors were now convinced that Don Bosco was not a person likely to give the Government any trouble. They recognised also the kindness and courtesy shown to them whilst they were actually doing him so great an injury; and, filled with esteem and admiration, they all thanked him and joyfully drank his health.

This act and the remembrance of his pleasant jests and kindly words had now won their hearts. When they had quenched their thirst, Don Bosco reminded them that the time for the Saturday confessions had arrived; therefore he begged them either that they would allow the boys to come to his room as usual, or else that they themselves would begin their confessions.

"I am greatly in need of it," said one.

"And I also," said another.

"And I more than all," concluded the lawyer Grasselli.

"Let us begin, then," replied Don Bosco.

"But if we were to do so," observed the delegate, "what would the newspapers say?"

"And if you go to hell," replied Don Bosco, "what will the newspapers and journalists avail you?"

"You are right, but . . . well . . . another time we shall come expressly for that purpose."

It was already past six o'clock. They had turned out every corner of Don Bosco's room and the adjacent library, but their search had been fruitless. The inquisitors were no longer thirsty, but hungry.

Don Bosco himself was being continually called for by one or other in the house, and the boys who were accustomed to go to confession at that time, and wanted to go to his room, began to dispute with the police who were keeping them out. The officials, therefore, thought it best to come to an understanding, and proposed retiring at once, but Don Bosco refused.

"Draw up a report of what you have done here," he said, "and then you can go away."

"We will do that at the office," answered the delegate.

"That will not suit either you or me," replied Don Bosco.

"Why not?"

"Because your account of what has taken place might differ from mine; therefore draw up the written statement here."

"But, if we have found nothing?"

"Make a negative report, explaining that nothing has been found."

"Will you sign it also?"

"Make a truthful statement and I will sign it."

And so it was done.

About half-past six the inquisitors left the Oratory, and the siege was raised. Hardly were they gone when Don Bosco became the object of the boys' affectionate solicitude; they imitated the angels in the desert ministering to Our Lord when a certain inquisitor had left Him, as the Gospel says. One asked him if he wanted anything, another shed tears of joy on seeing him at liberty; one wished to know what the men had been doing during those long hours; some condemned such an act of hostility, and so on; and he, with a calm and smiling countenance, answered them all, consoling

some, imposing silence on those who complained, calling upon all to thank God, Who had made them worthy to suffer for His sake.

When the news of this inquisitorial visit had spread in Turin, a great number of persons of all classes and conditions, ecclesiastical and secular, rich and poor, made their way to the Oratory to call upon Don Bosco and offer their condolences for the insults he had received. One of these, held in the greatest esteem in the city, endeavoured to perform this charitable office that very evening whilst the search was being made. This was Canon Aloysius Anglesio, the successor of the Venerable Cottolengo as Superior of the Little House of Divine Providence. This holy man, as he was living close by, heard at once what was taking place, and came immediately to the Oratory to speak to Don Bosco; but at the door he was stopped by the police, who prevented the entrance of any stranger. Calling some clerical students, he said, "Go and tell Don Bosco from me to take courage and be of good heart. To-day the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales is being put to the test by Our Lord; but from henceforth it will so develop and increase, that its beneficent influence will be felt outside Turin and extend to many parts of the world." And his words were truly prophetic.

The stream of visitors, beginning with Canon Anglesio, went on for many days. All were severe in their judgments on the perpetrators of this illegal act. "Of what use," they said, is that clause of the Statute: "A man's domicile is inviolable. No domiciliary visit may take place, except by force of the law, and in accordance with legal procedure"? Where will you find a law sanctioning a domiciliary visit and search merely on suspicion? The Penal Code allows this only to the examining magistrate, and where there is grave reason to expect that in that particular house may be found what will tend to elucidate the truth. But here we have nothing of the kind; here there is neither legal prosecution, nor examining magistrate; here we have only either ignorance of the law or a tyrannical abuse of it.

And if public functionaries are allowed thus to break the law, who will feel safe in future? Truly, some officials are doing the Government an ill turn, disgracing it both in Italy and in the estimation of foreign countries." These were the conclusions drawn, and they were unanswerable.

On Tuesday, the 29th of May, the newspaper *Armonia* published an article with the title: "Domiciliary Visit at the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales";

"At present no day passes, in this favoured land of liberty, that we have not to record the arrest of bishops or cardinals, the summoning and imprisonment of parish priests, canons or ecclesiastics, or some domiciliary visit.

"Last Saturday it was the turn of that grand 'conspirator,' Don John Bosco, who, as everyone is aware, 'conspires' by alleviating misery, housing and educating poor boys, and working himself to death in the exercise of charity and of his sacred ministry.

"The magistrate hoped to find in the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales certain papers written against the Government. An escort of police, led by a superintendent with two investigating counsel, were sent to make a strict domiciliary enquiry.

"Don Bosco was just in the act of receiving a poor boy recommended by the minister, when this unlooked-for visit took place. He received these representatives of the law with his usual affability, and although he might have protested against the legality of the warrant, he allowed them to examine the papers and letters they found in his house.

"The search lasted from two till six o'clock, and Don Bosco, who at this time should have been hearing confessions, as it was Saturday and the eve of Pentecost, was obliged instead to be present at this investigation by the police, but he assisted at it with that cheerfulness which is the mark of a good conscience, taking advantage of those hours of enforced idleness to make suitable and Christian reflections, and showing the lawyers that

the work they were engaged in was not one to be proud of.

"It is unnecessary to state that the most careful search was fruitless. Priests are not conspirators, and the ministers know it. Two papers only amongst so many were thought worthy of notice. One, in which was a sentence somewhat too clerical, but this was found to be a quotation from Marcus Aurelius! The other was the Brief of the Pope addressed to Don Bosco, but this, it appeared, had already been published.

"Some time after six o'clock the police quitted the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, leaving the following declaration in the hands of the Director:

"On the 26th day of May, in the year eighteen hundred and sixty, in the house of Don John Bosco, priest, keeping a school for students and artisans, situated in Via Cottolengo, it being his own house:

"In execution of the order issued this day by the Chief of Police of Turin, Signor Chiapussi, by which is ordained a strict domiciliary enquiry in the above house, we the undersigned: Savino Grasso, Superintendent of Police; the lawyers Stefano Tua and Antonio Grasselli, Inspectors, the former of the section Borgo Dora and the latter of that of Moncenisio, and with an escort of police, went to the said House. There, in the presence of the aforesaid priest, Don John Bosco, the object of our visit was notified, and with his assistance we made a diligent search, examining all the papers and books found in his two rooms; but in spite of the most careful scrutiny, nothing was found which could concern the police.

"We have drawn up and signed this account of the proceedings to attest the truth thereof, noting that a similar copy has been left with the aforesaid priest in accordance with his request."

So far the *Armonia*.

The innocence of Don Bosco was thus amply confirmed. This document should have sufficed to induce certain Government officials to leave the Oratory in peace; but this was not to be.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Second enquiry. — A sad scene. — Don Bosco reproves the inquisitors. — The house searched. — Visit to the schools. — Cunning questions and candid answers. — Seizure of copy books.

THE calumnies circulated by the enemies of the Oratory against it were so numerous, that the Minister of the Interior, Aloysius Farini, judged it necessary, for the safety of the Government, to prosecute his enquiries so as to discover the thread of the conspiracy and cut it off at a stroke. To most persons it seemed indeed a mystery that a few hundred poor boys could cause such terror to the Government, which had at its disposal so many soldiers and police; and yet it is an historical fact. Here one may indeed exclaim: *O tempora!*

And now for the second inquisitorial visit. It was ten o'clock on the morning of the 9th of June, scarcely a fortnight after the first inquisition, that three gentlemen, with an escort of police, arrived at the Oratory. These were Signor Masnardi, Secretary to the Minister; Cavaliere Gatti, Inspector General of the Ministry of Public Instruction, and Professor Petitti. The first was charged to examine the accounts and search the buildings; the second, to visit the schools and question the boys, and the third was to take down the questions and answers in shorthand.

Unfortunately, Don Bosco had just gone out into town. Several boys were at once dispatched in search of him, but in vain. That morning he had to visit the house of a benefactor, by appointment; but it so happened, or rather, Divine Providence so arranged, that he should lose his way; and, seeing that he could not arrive at the hour fixed, he retraced his steps and re-

entered the Oratory just at the moment when his presence was desired as an angel of deliverance. For during his absence, a most distressing scene took place. The prefect, Don Alasonatti, taking Don Bescò's place, received the three inquisitors. When they had made themselves known and explained the object of their visit, Signor Masnardi began :

" Show us first your account books."

" Here," said the priest, " is the one giving the Christian and surname, the parentage and birth place of each pupil ; here is the list of the daily expenditure, and here are noted the conditions for admission."

The gentlemen, taking the registers, turned over several pages, and after a few minutes the secretary said :

" But we cannot understand these accounts."

" If you will have a little patience, I will explain them."

" Yes, we wish everything explained, and briefly. Tell us first how many boys live in this house."

" The number of externs frequenting the Oratory is over seven hundred. Of boarders we have three hundred, divided into two categories, students and artisans."

" What pension do they pay ? "

" The greater number pay nothing at all, and everything, including clothes, has to be provided ; the others pay a small sum in proportion to their means."

" How much does this small sum amount to ? "

" Ten or twelve lire per month."

" This certainly would not be sufficient to maintain so many boys for a whole year ; how do you make ends meet ? "

" The Municipality of Turin gives three hundred lire per annum ; the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus, five hundred, and the Archbishop's Fund, one thousand lire."

" All these gifts, added together, make only eighteen hundred lire, and this sum will not cover the expenses of food and clothing. What other means of subsistence have you ? "

"Whatever has been lacking hitherto has been provided partly by Don Bosco and his mother by the sale of their property, and partly by the charity of pious persons." Henceforth we must depend entirely on the alms of benefactors."

"But who are these benefactors?"

"Many of them are unknown to us, and others do not wish their good works to be made public; consequently I am unable to satisfy you on the point."

"Where is the money kept?"

"We have no cash-box, for hardly is a sum paid in, than we have at once to use it for debts owing, or for current accounts."

These conscientious and truthful replies of the prefect did not please the three inquisitors. Instructed by their chiefs, they were persuaded that Don Bosco possessed large sums of money, sent him by the Pope and by the exiled princes, under the pretext of providing for the wants of the boys, but in reality for the purpose of enlisting soldiers and making war on the Government.

This foolish tale was spread by means of hostile newspapers. At this very time, several Jesuits residing in Turin having been searched and unjustly imprisoned, the publications of the sects circulated false reports that the police had found in their possession great riches and important documents, testifying to the existence of a vast conspiracy.

They made out that Don Bosco was in correspondence with the Jesuits; consequently, in his house also, there would be found some incriminating documents. Imbued with these prejudices, the three inquisitors insisted that Don Alasonatti should discover to them the Oratory secret treasury; and Masnardi, in a loud and angry voice, said:

"You are deceiving us; you have money which you wish to hide; you are a Jesuit; but you have us to reckon with."

At this odious treatment, the man of God, always overworked and already in poor health, felt his strength giving way.

"But I have given you no cause for this treatment," he said, and then he swooned away. This unexpected fainting fit shamed the inquisitors, who, seeing that they had acted, not like honest officials, but like highway robbers, tried to repair the mischief, raising up the patient and placing him on a chair.

Just at this moment, Providence sent Don Bosco, who, entering the room and seeing the condition of his worthy assistant, was greatly distressed. Approaching, he took his hand and called him by his name. At Don Bosco's voice, Don Alasonatti seemed to revive, and in a feeble voice, replied :

"Don Bosco . . . help me . . ."

"Be not troubled," he answered, "now I am here, and will see to everything; take courage."

"I suffer violence," was the only answer from the prefect.

"I see that only too plainly," continued Don Bosco, "and am sorry for this occurrence; but remember that 'the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.'"

Having thus comforted his assistant, Don Bosco turned to the inquisitors, and justly indignant, he said :

"You are abusing your power; you are supposed to be judges and you act as executioners. By acting in this manner you will merit neither the blessing of God nor the esteem of men, but rather a note of infamy when the history of our time is written. You have been sent here to search for anything that might be obnoxious to the Government. Carry out the orders you have received, but be not oppressors of honest citizens in their peaceful homes. I shall carry my complaint against you to the ministers, and even to the king himself, and I trust they will not be indifferent to my wrongs."

To this vigorous speech Cavaliere Gatti, meekly and courteously replied :

"Pardon us, Don Bosco, we did not come here to harm anyone; we have only been asking for explanations."

"Explanations should be asked of those who can

give them. I am the responsible Superior of this institute; it is from me you must ask explanations, and not from my assistants."

The other two assured Don Bosco that what happened was quite contrary to their intentions, and thus the incident closed.

Going into the next room the inquisitors then explained to Don Bosco that they were charged to search the house and to visit the schools, but they wished all to be done in a friendly and courteous manner.

"If you were charged to do this in a friendly and courteous manner," observed Don Bosco, "you should not have brought a company of police to frighten the boys."

"Your household may rest assured that not a hair of their heads will be touched," said Signor Masnardi, "the police are here only for show."

"Reviews of soldiers and police are held only on the parade ground," replied Don Bosco; "in private houses they show themselves only to arrest malefactors. To me it seems impossible that reasonable men, learned in the law, like the ministers, can maintain without any proof that there are evil-doers in this school, thus treading under foot the articles of the Statute, which guarantee inviolability of domicile and personal freedom."

The persecuting triumvirate were somewhat disconcerted by this plain speaking, and soon showed that they had overstepped their authority, for after Don Bosco's observations, the police retired one by one and posted themselves in the fields which, at that time, surrounded the Oratory.

The conversation with Don Bosco lasted about half an hour, and the inquisitors received from him all particulars which should have convinced them that the Government had nothing to fear from the institute; still, they were not satisfied. Flattering themselves that they would find at least some trifle of which to boast to their superiors, they asked to see the schools, and Don Bosco complied. Don Alasonatti, revived and refreshed, also wished to accompany them.

Here it should be noted that Cavaliere Gatti, who declared that he was specially charged to visit the schools, knew but little of Latin and Greek, as he had been merely a teacher of History and Geography in the National College, and at this time was made Inspector of Elementary Schools by the Minister of Public Instruction.

So he confined his questions to the subject of History and Geography, trying to entangle the boys with cunning questions. Masnardi, seated at the top of the bench, made whispered enquiries of the boys near him, and Professor Petitti took notes and examined the copy-books.

Their purpose was to draw from the scholars, or to find among their writings, some words which might be interpreted as hostile to the king or to liberal institutions, so as to accuse Don Bosco of giving an education harmful and dangerous to the State. Here are some examples of the questions.

In Class I of the secondary course, taught by the cleric Celestino Durando, Cavaliere Gatti, whilst putting questions in geography about the frontiers of Italy, enquired of a pupil :

"How many forms of monarchical government are there?"

"Two: absolute and constitutional monarchy."

"Which is the better of these two forms of government?"

At a question so much beyond his capacity, the boy did not know what to answer. Gatti perceived this, and as if he wished to extract a disapproval of the constitutional government established in the country, he made this insinuation :

"Do you not think that an absolute monarchy, in which the king decides everything and does what he pleases is the best?"

At this suggestion, the boy's teacher felt himself obliged to tell Gatti that these were not questions suitable for boys in Class I.

"How can you expect from a child," he asked, "an

adequate reply to such a question which would require the serious consideration of an older person well versed in politics?"

But the scholar, as if an angel had whispered in his ear, replied:

"It seems to me that any form of government may be good if those in authority are honest men."

Such an appropriate answer confounded Gatti and his colleagues, and for many days was the subject of the boys' conversations.

The most puzzling questions were those put to the 4th and 5th Classes, taught by the cleric John Francesia. Here, a pupil of the 5th Class was questioned, and answered as follows:

"Have you studied Roman History?"

"Yes, sir, I have studied that part, which, according to the scholastic syllabus, will form the subject of the final examination."

"Can you tell me who killed Julius Cæsar?"

"Julius Cæsar was killed by Junius Brutus and the other conspirators."

"Brutus certainly did well to kill that oppressor of liberty, that tyrant of the people, do you not think so?"

"On the contrary, I say Brutus did wrong, because a subject should never rebel against his sovereign, much less take his life."

"And when the sovereign does wrong?"

"If he does wrong he will be judged and punished by Almighty God, but his subjects must not fail in respect."

"Tell me: would it not be lawful to strike a blow at Victor Emmanuel, so that he might leave in peace the friars, nuns, priests, bishops, and the Pope?"

"Cavaliere Gatti," said Don Alasonatti, "these are not questions to ask of boys; this is no longer an examination, but a snare to entrap them."

Quite unmoved, the inquisitor insisted, and the boy replied:

"No, sir, it would not be lawful; if a king does wrong he will have to give an account to God at the

appointed time, but his subjects cannot in conscience do him any harm. Rather, they should pray that God may have mercy on him, touch his heart and convert him, and in the meantime have patience."

"If we should pray that God may touch his heart and convert him, it is a sign that he is wicked; do you not think so?"

"I did not say that our king was wicked; I spoke in general, and nothing more." Having said this, the pupil, quite upset, burst into tears, and Cavaliere Gatti enquired:

"Why do you cry?"

And the pupil, between his his sobs, replied: "Because you ask me things which have nothing to do with history, and I fear to answer badly."

"Do not be troubled," said Gatti, "you have answered well."

He said this probably against his will, for he could hardly have said anything else.

In the same school, the Cavaliere enquired of a pupil of the 4th Class:

"Do you know the king?"

"I have never seen him, but I know he is our sovereign."

"A wicked king, who persecutes priests, religious and the Church, is it not so?"

"These things do not belong to the history we have to learn, so that I cannot answer you."

"If you have not learnt them in your history lesson, you have heard them spoken of?"

"No, I have heard nothing of the kind; in the *History of Italy* written by Don Bosco, from which our lessons are taken, honourable mention is made of Victor Emmanuel and his ancestors."

"After all, the persecutors of the Church are scoundrels; now, Victor Emmanuel persecutes the Church, therefore he is a scoundrel."

"You, sir, know the facts better than I do and you may draw that conclusion; but I have never said, nor have I heard from Don Bosco or from my teacher, that

the king is a scoundrel. But I remember that some time ago, when the king was ill, Don Bosco ordered prayers for his recovery and for the good of his soul, and I took part in those prayers."

"You give these answers because someone has suggested them to you?"

"No, sir, I answer what is in my mind and in accordance with the truth. No one has made any suggestions, because certainly no one could have guessed that you would ask such questions."

In Class III, taught by the cleric John Turchi, the geography of Italy was the subject of examination, and the questioner appeared satisfied with the ready and satisfactory answers given by a boy named Aloysius Jarak, the son of a learned rabbi of Ivrea, who had been instructed and baptised, with his son, some time before.

But the pupils subjected to real torture were those of Class II, the teacher of which was the cleric Secondo Pettiva. Here the inquisitors succeeded in finding something to boast of. Examining the exercise books of the pupils, they found that the professor had dictated an extract from a Latin letter of Pope Pius IX, which had already appeared in the public newspapers.

"How is this?" asked Gatti, "Do you give your scholars dictation from the Pope's letters?"

"Pray observe, Cavaliere, that this is not a letter," said the master, "but only an extract from a letter, and a specimen of the purest Latin, which reads like an extract from one of Cicero's works."

The Cavaliere, who knew scarcely any Latin, paid no attention to this remark, and replied:

"Anyhow, these are not the authors from whom the school lessons should be given."

"I have not given the Pope's writings to my scholars; I have only dictated a few lines as an exercise for translation to determine their places. For these, which are given once a week, I choose generally a separate exercise: this extract came into my hands, and seeing it was adapted to the capacity of my scholars, I dictated it to them."

These explanations had no effect; the three inquisitors, being convinced that they had at last discovered the thread of the conspiracy, determined to question each pupil of this class, from the first to the last; but as the boys had to go to dinner, they decided that the examination should take place in the afternoon.

It was now mid-day. The clerics, assistants, technical instructors, masters and boys, went to dinner, and the inquisitors, accompanied by Don Bosco and Don Alasonatti, employed this time in going round the house in search of the chimerical *corpus delicti*. They did not leave a single corner or hiding place unvisited; any object in the least degree suspicious was seized and removed. They went to the refectory whilst the boys were there, examining the food and asking them if they had enough to eat. Afterwards they visited the kitchen, the cellar, the bedrooms, the workshops, and even the lavatories. In the kitchen they turned the pots and pans upside down, and ordered the cupboards to be opened, then the jar of oil and the sack of rice, to be inspected. Cavaliere Gatti, who, of the three, was the most eager, seeing a paving stone recently fixed, immediately suspected that underneath he would find the *corpus delicti*, and standing upon it he tapped it with his foot to discover if it sounded hollow. In the same place, a cupboard being opened, two mice ran out, and Don Bosco began to laugh.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Signor Masnardi.

"In truth," he replied, "I ought rather to pity you for bringing into contempt your position and authority by such childish enquiries; but I laughed because you have frightened the mice."

Going down into the cellar, they searched not only the dark corners, but the barrels. Seeing a large cask, Masnardi asked if it were full or empty.

"Unfortunately it is empty," said Don Bosco.

Then Masnardi got up so as to look inside, showing that he suspected it was full of money — or perhaps of conspirators, like the horse of Troy. Disgusted and

ashamed at not finding what they sought, the three inquisitors consoled themselves by saying :

" We have been assured that in this house there is the *corpus delicti*, therefore by searching we ought to find it."

" And I assure you," replied Don Bosco, " that in this house there has not been, neither is there any *corpus delicti*, therefore you will not find it, if you search from now till doomsday."

They had still to search the dormitories, whither they were conducted. Here they probed and turned over the mattresses, but found nothing.

It was past two o'clock, and the boys, having finished their troubled recreation returned, the students to their classrooms, and the artisans to the workshops.

Then these functionaries, giving up their unseemly occupation, returned to the examination of the pupils, which was much more to their taste. Don Bosco left them to take a mouthful of food, as he had not yet broken his fast.

To be more at liberty, the examiners went to the prefect's office and called the pupils in, one by one, torturing them with questions which would have disgraced any inquisition. In proof of this is given the interrogatory of one of these poor boys :

" To whom do you go to confession ? "

" To Don Bosco."

" Since when ? "

" I have been two years in this house and I have always been to him."

" Do you go of your own accord ? "

" I go most willingly.

" What does he say to you in confession ? "

" He gives me good advice."

" Tell me ; I am most anxious to hear it."

" I have heard that what is said to us in confession is not to be repeated outside. Besides, if you want good advice, you have only to confess to Don Bosco, and he will give you as much as you want."

" I have no time to-day. But tell me, does he not say that the Pope is a saint? "

" He says that the Pope is called Holy Father; and I believe truly that he is a saint, for he is v^{ery} good and he is the Vicar of Christ."

" Does he not say that those who have taken away part of the Papal States are wicked? "

" These matters have nothing to do with confession? "

" But are they not sins? "

" If they are sins, let those who have committed them see to it when they go to confession. I have not done them, consequently I am not bound to confess them."

From this specimen may be judged the rest. Cavaliere Gatti persisted in his enquiry as to what the professor had said before or after dictating the extract from the Pope's letter, but all were unanimous in affirming that he had added nothing.

Either through weariness or the conviction that the *corpus delicti* was not to be found, the inquisitors, after about seven hours of useless toil, abandoned their unworthy task and took their leave. They took possession, however, of a packet of exercise books, to examine at their leisure in the office; Gatti added a copy of the life of the youth, Dominic Savio, found on one of the pupils of Class I; and Don Bosco, making up a good parcel, added also the rules of the house, which were then only in manuscript. When giving them, he said, " In these rules the ministers will see upon what principles and moral maxims the education we give to our boys is based, and they will understand that, far from giving trouble to the Government, this institute co-operates in promoting the well-being of families and of society, by training up good children and upright citizens. I hope therefore," he added, " that in future you will leave me and my boys in peace."

But through the malignity of certain unworthy officials, such was not to be the case.

CHAPTER L.

The Turin Magistrates and the workmen of the Oratory. — Politics and riches of Don Bosco. — Decision of Urban Rattazzi. — Explanation and petition of Don Bosco to two Ministers.

A FEW days after the enquiry related in the previous chapter had taken place, the Magistrate Chiapussi, at whose instigation it is not known, called before him several men who had been at the Oratory — some of whom were still employed as the heads of the workshops, or as servants, while the others had found situations in the town.

Of these he had made inquiries in order to find out what were Don Bosco's politics, and whether Pius IX had sent him money to enlist soldiers; but none of them could make any damaging statements.

Amongst those thus questioned was one who had been the head shoemaker and at that time was doorkeeper. This man was about forty years of age, and had known Don Bosco for a long time; he was a cripple, but fluent of speech. Although this was his first appearance before the public authorities, he was not frightened, and answered frankly and courageously.

"Your Worship has questioned me about Don Bosco's politics; I have known him many years, and I reply that his only policy consists in considering how to provide for his poor boys."

"But, does he not speak to you about joining the Pope's soldiers to make war on the king?"

"He has certainly made no such proposal to me, because I am a cripple and would have to be carried; but as doorkeeper, I am in frequent intercourse with the older boys, both boarders and externs of the Oratory,

and I can assure you that I have never heard anyone say that Don Bosco had spoken any such words. He often speaks of fighting the devil with the arms of prayer and the frequentation of the sacraments, but he does not meddle with the wars, nor with the soldiers of this world."

"It is said that Pius IX has sent him a large sum of money; do you know anything about it?"

"In 1858, when Don Bosco was in Rome, I remember that Pius IX gave him a sum of money to provide a feast for all the boys who attended the three Oratories, at Valdocco, Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia; but I have never heard, and I do not believe that since then he has sent the sum of money you say. If that were true we should not see Don Bosco continually going forth to beg in Turin for the support of his boys, and he would not be tormented so constantly by his creditors. Your Worship may imagine the scenes which, as doorkeeper, I witness to my regret. The creditors, knowing the hours when he is accustomed to go out and return, lie in wait for him, and then one implores, another complains, and another uses threats in order to get paid. The poor man promises to satisfy all, that no one shall lose a penny, but that for the present they must have patience, for he has nothing, absolutely nothing. When I myself was working as a shoemaker, I know the leather-merchant sometimes refused to supply him, because Don Bosco was unable to settle his account at once. And do you believe, sir, that if Don Bosco had so much money, as is reported, he would not use it to prevent these annoyances?"

"And the money which he sends to his brothers, with which they buy farms and build houses and mansions, where does he get it?"

"That is not true, sir, for Don Bosco has neither father, nor mother, nor sisters, but only one brother who works in the fields with his sons."

"But I have been told that, during the holidays, he takes his boys into the country at Castelnuovo d'Asti; to whose house does he take them?"

"He takes them to his own house; but this, far from being a stately mansion or a large farm-house, is so small that the boys can scarcely find shelter from the inclemency of the weather, even though they crowd into the stable and the hay-loft."

"It may be as you say, but you cannot deny that Don Bosco receives money. Can you tell me who are his chief benefactors?"

"Certainly Don Bosco must have benefactors in Turin who supply him with funds, otherwise hundreds of boys whom he maintains would die of hunger, or would have to be turned into the streets; but I do not know who are his benefactors. I wish that all the inhabitants of Turin were benefactors of Don Bosco, including yourself and the other magistrates. If you can help Don Bosco, your alms will be well employed."

These words, spoken with so much nonchalance and gaiety, set them all laughing.

Like the first, these local and personal enquiries ended in nothing, because the accusations were entirely unfounded. To the suggestive and cunning questions, the answers given by both the boys and the servants were so good and appropriate, that they seemed to have been prompted by their Guardian Angels. There might even seem to be verified in them what Our Divine Lord said in the Gospel: "Lay it up therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before how you shall answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay." (St. Luke xxi). Such considerations moved all to thank God heartily and to persevere in their mode of life, being assured that He would always extend to them His powerful help.

These vexations were for all, and especially for Don Bosco and Don Alasonatti, a real trial; but through the goodness of God they turned out beneficial. It was no slight advantage to gain by them the sympathy of good men, and even of those who were not of the same way of thinking in religious matters, but who were considered honest citizens, loving true liberty. The

better class of newspapers undertook Don Bosco's defence, gaining for him esteem and sympathy both at home and abroad; and his benefactors, with true charity and compassion, helped him the more willingly for the love of God. Even some of the Members of Parliament, did not fear to stigmatise the annoyances suffered as an abuse of the law and describe them as illegal and impolitic acts: illegal, because contrary to the Statute; impolitic, because they were calculated to injure an institute which gave food, lodging and education to several hundreds of poor boys, many of whom, without such a home, would have given great trouble to the Government.

Amongst others, Urban Rattazzi, no longer one of the ministers, but only a deputy or member of Parliament, sent for Don Bosco, and when he came to his house, made him give a full account of all the inquirers had said and done. On hearing what had passed, he was very angry and offered to question the Ministry in Parliament. He said: "I am not a lover of priests, but I esteem good work by whomsoever it is done and to whatever party he may belong. The Ministry, by harassing and permitting its officials to harass similar institutes, is guilty of injuring the cause of philanthropy, and commits a crime which should be denounced by all civilized nations." Don Bosco thanked the ex-minister for his good intentions, but decided that it was not desirable to have these facts published in the Houses of Parliament, choosing rather to leave his cause in the hands of Divine Providence and make use of peaceful means. For this end he wrote to the Minister of the Interior and to the Minister of Public Instruction a brief explanation, in the form of the following petition:

" TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE MINISTER.

I beg respectfully that you will be kind enough to read these brief explanations regarding the House called 'The Oratory of St. Francis of Sales' at Valdocco. On Saturday the 9th inst., by order of the Ministry, a search was made in the classrooms and

dormitories, and enquiries made regarding the providing of food, the income and expenditure, and also as to the funds by which this charity is maintained. I have no knowledge of the motives underlying this Government measure, but if your Excellency will be so good as to explain them, I can assure you that I shall be able to give you complete satisfaction, without further trouble to the Government and without causing an irreparable injury to the work of the Oratories. Meanwhile I humbly beg you to remember that :

1. I have been in Turin for twenty years, and I have spent all my life in the sacred ministry, in prisons and hospitals, seeking also in the streets and squares for homeless children, so as to bring them up respectably, teaching them either to work or to study, according to their capacity and inclination ;

2. I have always striven to fulfil my priestly duties without asking or receiving any stipend. On the contrary, I have used, and will continue to use, all my means for the upkeep of the Institute and for the maintenance of the boys received there ;

3. I have always most carefully avoided politics ; I have taken no part either for or against the changes which have recently been made ; and to prevent any party spirit, it has been forbidden in this house to mention politics. Therefore, no one has ever had anything to do with newspapers. I have judged that thus a priest can exercise his charitable ministry towards his neighbour in all times and places, and under every kind of government. But, whilst I assure you that I have always avoided politics, I can with equal frankness certify that I have never said, or done, or encouraged anything against the laws of the State ;

4. My schools have never been legally approved, because they are charity schools. But the inspectors and ministers of Public Instruction knew all about them, and gave their tacit approval by personal visits, coming to assist at the examinations, as was done by Cavaliere Baricco, Inspector Nigra, Cavaliere Aporti, and others. They showed their approval also by giving money and

books, and sometimes by dispensing from fees, and also by letters. I send herewith the copy of one of these from the Minister Lanza, in which he encourages the work of the Oratories and of the classes which are held there. The explanation of this favour of the Minister of Public Instruction may be found partly in two orders of the day: one of the House of Senators; the other, of the Deputies, in which the king's Government is advised to maintain and promote works like those in question. It is true that the law regarding teaching requires certain formalities, the preliminaries of which I was arranging with this minister, who has always been and is our special benefactor. These arrangements would certainly have been completed before the beginning of the scholastic year 1860-1861, when the general application of the law comes into force.

5. For some years, the workshops being overcrowded, and the demands for admission increasing, a larger number of boys have devoted themselves to study. Many of my former students are now earning their living elsewhere, some as certificated teachers, others as musicians, and others again, having completed their ecclesiastical studies, are labouring in the sacred ministry in various countries.

If your Excellency, after reading the above, wishes to take some further steps in this matter, I shall be quite ready to submit. I only beg of you humbly that the matter may be arranged privately, as by one who wishes that these good works should be done in the best possible way; but not with threats and menaces, by which sometimes these works are irreparably damaged.

Having now made known to you what is weighing on my mind, I commend my poor boys to your kindness, begging your sympathy in the trouble they have experienced; and, wishing you every blessing, I have the honour to remain, with esteem and gratitude,

Your Excellency's devoted servant,

JOHN BOSCO, *Priest.*"

Turin, June 12th, 1860.

CHAPTER LI.

Malicious insinuations. — Audience refused. — Don Bosco and the Secretary Silvio Spaventa. — Important Conference with the Ministers Farini and Cavour. — Promises and hopes of peace.

UNDER ordinary circumstances, one would have expected that Don Bosco's explanation, given above, would have reassured the Government, and thus put an end to the persecution of the Oratory. But in those times such hopes were vain. A malevolent Press daily invented and spread abroad the most extravagant accusations, seeking to influence public opinion, and to incite the civil authorities against the institute. The character of the men at the head of affairs made its cause less hopeful, for the doubtful issue of the Italian Revolution rendered them dupes of their agents, seeing dangers and enemies where they did not exist, or full of fears, trying to intimidate those whom they suspected as unfavourable to their designs.

Most violent were the attacks of a mischievous Press. "In the house of Don Bosco," said one newspaper, "compromising correspondence will be found, if carefully searched for." Another wrote: "Let the Government send unprejudiced and clever men; they will discover the thread of the conspiracy." The *Gassetta del Popolo* was the most venomous: "The Oratory of St. Francis of Sales," it said, "is the centre of reaction; the Ministry will never succeed in warding off the dangers which threaten us as long as the den of Valdocco exists." Several other sectarian journals expressed themselves in the same strain.

There was no lack of respectable journalists to point

out the absurdity of such accusations, and the injustice and baseness of similar attacks, while several periodicals undertook a triumphant defence; but the others, as if in obedience to secret orders, ignored all explanations, and repeated their calumnies, inciting the Government to make an end of the Oratory. Any day the authorities might resort to extremes, and order the closing of the institute and the dispersion of its inmates.

To dissipate the threatened storm, Don Bosco decided to call upon the Minister Farini, feeling certain that he would have no difficulty in proving his innocence, in a personal interview. To this end he requested an audience. He expected that this would be speedily granted, but he was mistaken; he repeated his request several times, but in vain. It would seem that the judge feared the presence of the culprit, or rather it seemed that the higher powers had decreed the destruction of the Oratory. It was indeed well for the boys, that in those critical times God had given them as guardian, advocate and father, a man who not only would have given his life, but would have turned heaven and earth upside down, rather than allow them to be torn from his side by violence. Humanly speaking, without him everything was lost.

As Don Bosco was unable to obtain an audience of Farini, he applied to the Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior, Cavaliere Silvio Spaventa, who also refused to receive him; and in order to weary him out and avoid the meeting, it was put off by the ushers from one day to another, from morning till evening, and again from evening till morning. At last, he was received in the following manner.

It was the 14th of July, and the Secretary held out hopes of an audience at eleven o'clock. At the hour appointed, Don Bosco, accompanied by the cleric John Cagliero (who was destined to be raised to the cardinalate), went to the chambers of the Ministry. On the way he said, amongst other things, to the cleric who accompanied him: "These gentlemen of the Ministry have a great desire to destroy the Oratory,

but they will not succeed, because they have to deal with one who is more powerful : they have to deal with the Blessed Virgin, even with God Himself, who will frustrate their designs."

Having reached the waiting-room, Don Bosco sent in his name; but Spaventa, either forgetting or repenting his promise, sent word that it would be difficult to receive him, having so much important business on hand. On receiving this message, Don Bosco said : " I shall wait until the Secretary is able to receive me." And with imperturbable calmness, in spite of the heat, hunger and thirst, he remained waiting until six o'clock in the evening.

During this interval of seven hours, a great many persons of all sorts and conditions, and even very late arrivals passed into the audience chamber, but Don Bosco's turn never came. This conduct was so outrageous, that even the ushers were moved with compassion for him. Finally, Cavaliere Spaventa, ashamed perhaps at such treatment of a citizen, who, although a priest, was on an equal footing with the rest before the law, decided to speak to him. Going therefore to the door of his room, he said, with an angry voice and threatening aspect : " Don Bosco, for what reason do you insist on seeing me? " At these words all the spectators, servants and ushers, turned their eyes upon the poor priest, who answered thus :

" It is necessary that I should have a moment's conversation with you."

" What do you want? "

" I wish to speak to you in private."

" You can speak here : all those present are trustworthy."

Then Don Bosco, disregarding the Secretary's rudeness, said in a loud and clear voice :

" Signor Cavaliere, I have five hundred poor boys to maintain; from this moment I put them in your hands and I beg that you will provide for their future."

" Who are these boys? "

" They are poor children, either orphans or homeless,

whom the Government first sent to me, and now wishes to turn out into the street."

"Where are they now?"

"They are in my house."

"Who maintains them?"

"The charity of several benefactors."

"Does not the Government pay for them?"

"Not one centesimo."

During this dialogue of questions and answers, brief but interesting, all the bystanders drew near to Don Bosco, astonished, and wondering to see how the matter would end. Perceiving that he was not cutting a fine figure in treating thus a man who maintained gratuitously five hundred poor children in his house, Spaventa changed his mind and consented to a private audience. He invited Don Bosco to his room, made him sit down by his side, and with a gracious air, he said:

"I know that you do much good; tell me in what I can serve you, for, as far as it depends upon me, I will do so willingly."

"I beg respectfully," replied Don Bosco, "that you will explain the reasons of the inquisitorial visits, and of the persecution I have suffered from the Government."

"Well, your political opinions . . . your spirit . . . But I am not in a position to tell you all. The Minister reserves many things to himself. It would be better to speak to him; I may, however, tell you that all annoyances would cease if you would speak plainly and reveal your secrets."

"I do not understand what secrets you mean, sir."

"The Jesuitical secrets, to discover which was the object of the search you complain of."

"I am absolutely ignorant of any such secrets, and I am anxious to learn what they are, so as to be able to give any explanation in my power. If you will deal frankly with me, I shall answer with equal sincerity."

"I cannot meddle in this matter; question the Minister, and he will tell you all."

"If you cannot tell me what I want, you can at least do me a signal act of kindness."

"In what way?"

"By procuring me an audience with the Minister."

"I shall see about getting one; but at this hour it would be difficult. Nevertheless, I shall make enquiries. Remain here a moment, but do not speak to any one of this business, as it might be misunderstood and misinterpreted to your prejudice."

Saying this, Spaventa went out to the apartments of the Minister Farini; returning in half an hour, he said to Don Bosco:

"The Minister is engaged, and cannot say at what time he can see you."

Don Bosco, having expressed his thanks, returned to the Oratory. It was eight o'clock in the evening, and he had been without food all day.

The next day, Don Bosco received a letter from Count Borromeo, attached to the Ministry, saying that on the following day, about eleven o'clock, the Minister Farini would grant him an audience.

After evening prayers and the usual short address, Don Bosco begged that all, on the following day, would pray for an affair of the greatest importance, would hear Mass and, if possible go to Holy Communion for his intention; and his request was not made in vain.

The next day, the 16th July, was the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and Don Bosco, full of confidence in the protection of the Blessed Virgin, went early to the Ministry of the Interior, Signor Farini arriving also a little before the appointed time. Don Bosco's companion, the cleric Francesia, related afterwards that as soon as the minister perceived him, he greeted him courteously, shook hands and conducted him to the audience chamber, where they had a conference of the greatest importance, since it was a question of life and death for the Oratory.

"So you are Don Bosco," Farini began. "We have already met once before, at Stresa, in the house of Don Rosmini, and I am glad to renew our acquaintance.

The good you are doing to our poor boys is well known to me, and the Government is much beholden to you for your services in this philanthropic and social work. Tell me now what I can do for you."

"I wish to know the reason of the numerous inquisitorial visits made during these last three months."

"Very well. I will tell you plainly, wishing to hear your explanation. So long as your Reverence confined yourself to the care of poor children, you were respected and honoured by the Government, but since you abandoned the sphere of charity to enter the political arena, we are obliged to be upon our guard and watch your movements."

"This is exactly what I want to know," rejoined Don Bosco. "It has always been my great wish to keep free from politics, and therefore I am anxious to learn which of my acts are considered suspicious."

"The articles which you write in the paper the *Armonia*, the reactionary assemblies held in your house, your correspondence with the enemies of the Nation — these are the acts which cause the Government to distrust you."

"If your Excellency will allow me to make a few remarks on what you have been pleased to confide to me, I will speak with the candour you desire. Allow me first to observe that no law, as far as I know, forbids the writing of articles for the *Armonia* or for any other paper; nevertheless I can assure your Excellency that I have not written for any paper, and have no connection with any."

"You may deny it as much as you please, but the fact remains, that a large number of the articles published in that paper are from the pen of Don Bosco. This is confirmed by so many proofs, that no doubt remains on the subject."

"These proofs I do not fear, and I declare boldly that they do not exist."

"Do you mean to say that I rely on facts which have no existence and that I am a liar and calumniator?"

"Certainly not, because you relate what you have been told; but the account given you is not truthful, the facts submitted to you are substantially untrue. In this case, the shame of the calumny falls upon the one who sets it afloat, and not upon him who receives it in good faith."

"But speaking thus, Father, you censure my subordinates, you censure both public and private officials, you censure the Government itself, and I must request you to correct your statement."

"If your Excellency can prove that I do not speak the truth, I shall withdraw and correct what I have said."

"A good citizen should not blame the public authorities."

"Excuse me, sir, I have no intention of blaming any one in authority, but only of speaking the truth with the candour of an honest man, defending himself against false accusations, and with the courage of a good citizen, who puts the Government on its guard against being led into acts and judgments injurious to its faithful subjects, thus covering it with shame in the sight of the world. Therefore, as an honest man and a good citizen, I am bound to say, and shall always protest, that to accuse me of having written those articles of which I know nothing, to call my charitable establishment a revolutionary centre, to say I am a correspondent of the enemies of the State, all this is to calumniate me. Such accusations are pure inventions of malicious men, made for the purpose of deceiving the authorities, and inciting them to commit gross errors, to the destruction of justice and true liberty."

This bold speech of Don Bosco surprised Farini, who, being amazed and also displeased, tried to intimidate him by a menacing frown and an arrogant tone, saying:

"You allow yourself, Don Bosco, to get too heated and be carried away by indiscreet zeal, and you do not consider that you are speaking to a minister, who could send you to prison."

"I do not fear," replied Don Bosco, "anything that men can do to me as a result of speaking the truth; I fear only the judgment of God, if I should tell a lie. Besides, your Excellency loves honour and justice too well, ever to disgrace yourself by imprisoning an innocent citizen, who, for twenty years, has devoted his life and his means to the good of his neighbour."

"And if I were to do such a thing?"

"I do not believe that Commendatore Farini could so far fail in justice; but if, contrary to my expectation, this should happen, I could then imitate his example."

"What do you mean?"

"Your Excellency, in your writings on historical subjects, has held up to public reprobation certain persons you esteemed guilty. Well, if you make use of violent measures against me, I shall, as I said, follow your example, and send an account of the disgraceful affair to the Press, I shall appeal to history, and I shall call upon present and future generations to judge between you and me, and to stigmatise such an iniquitous abuse of power. A just and omnipotent God would not fail, in His own good time, to vindicate oppressed innocence."

"But you must be mad, Don Bosco, you must be mad.* If I put you in prison, how will you be able to write and send this account to the Press?"

"Were I to be sent to prison, I do not believe that your Excellency would refuse me the solace of pen, ink and paper; but if I were deprived of these things, and even of life, other writers would be found to take my place."

"And would you be so bold as to consign to history facts discreditable to a minister and to the Government?"

"He who wishes to avoid disgrace should act honourably. I hold that to write and publish the truth

* Poor Charles Farini, who now called Don Bosco a madman, and threatened him with imprisonment, could never have dreamt that, in less than three years he himself would have become insane and be shut up in an asylum. And yet it was so.

is the right and duty of every citizen, and in addition, a service to civilized society. Such an act, far from being blameworthy, is highly to be commended. For my part, I am glad to think that these were the motives which induced your Excellency to write various works, especially the one named *The Roman People*."

Here it seemed to occur to Farini that Don Bosco had recently published a *History of Italy*, much praised by competent judges; and fearing perhaps what might be written of himself when his turn came, he changed his threatening attitude, and returning to the substance of their discussion, he asked:

"Can you in conscience affirm that no reactionary meetings have been held in your house, and that you do not keep up a political correspondence with the Jesuits, with Archbishop Fransoni, and with the Court of Rome?"

"Your Excellency, as you love truth and candour, allow me to say that I am indignant, not with you, whose authority I recognize, but with those who have told such lies about me; with those wretches who, for sordid gain, trample under foot all honest and conscientious principles, selling to the highest bidder the honour and tranquillity of peaceful citizens."

"But the letters . . ."

"They do not exist."

"And the political relations with the Jesuits, with Fransoni and with Cardinal Antonelli?"

"There never have been any. I do not even know where the Jesuits live in Turin. With Monsignor Fransoni and the Holy See, I have no other relations save those which a priest must maintain with his ecclesiastical superiors, in those things which relate to the sacred ministry."

"We have letters and proofs."*

* In explanation of this persistence of Farini regarding the existence of compromising letters, the author asked Don Bosco whether he knew anything about it, and thus discovered a fact hitherto unknown.

The Archbishop Aloysius Fransoni, an exile in Lyons, wishing to send a circular letter to the parish priests, but fearing it would be intercepted in the post, thought of getting it distributed by hand

" If these letters and proofs exist, why does not your Excellency produce them? In this matter I do not ask a favour, but I demand justice, not on my account, as I fear nothing, but for so many poor children who, alarmed by the repeated investigations and by the appearance of police officers in their usually peaceful home, weep and tremble for their future. It grieves me to see them in such a state, held up to public reprobation even by the Press. For them, therefore, I demand justice and honourable amends, so that they may not suffer the loss of their daily bread."

By these last words, Farini seemed much moved and disturbed. Rising from his seat, he began to pace the room in silence. After a few minutes, the door opened, and Count Camillo Cavour, Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the Ministry, made his appearance. Smiling and rubbing his hands, he asked: " What is the matter? " as if he knew nothing. " You must treat poor Don Bosco kindly," he continued, cheerfully, " and arrange everything in a friendly way. I have always been much interested in Don Bosco and am so, still. What is the matter? " he repeated, taking him by the hand and leading him to a seat.

At the sight of Cavour, and from his friendly words, Don Bosco anticipated a favourable ending to this affair; not, indeed, that Cavour's politics were any better than those of Farini, as they were of one mind on that point; but because he was on friendly terms with Don Bosco, understood the nature and object of the Oratory, and had been there many times, assisting

through confidential persons. He wrote to Don Bosco to this effect, asking his help and begging for a reply; but the archbishop's letter to Don Bosco was opened and sequestered by order of the Ministry. Of this occurrence Don Bosco knew nothing, until, the investigations above related being ended, and the interview with Farini having taken place, he received another letter from the archbishop, in which he said that, having obtained no answer, he had sought elsewhere the desired help. In this way, Don Bosco discovered one of the reasons which had aroused the suspicions of the Government, although he had had no hand in it. Farini, who had the sequestered letter in his own possession, could have shown it to Don Bosco, but, no doubt, a sense of shame for this violation of postal secrecy prevented his doing so.

even at religious services. Therefore, with renewed courage, he answered :

" The house at Valdocco which you, Count Cavour, have so often visited, praised and benefited, is now doomed to destruction; those poor children trained to a life of honest labour, in whom you took a kindly interest, are to be cast adrift and exposed to danger; the priest, of whom, though unworthy, your Excellency has often spoken in the highest terms, is now accused of being a reactionary, and even a leader of rebels. And what gives me the greatest pain is, that without any reason alleged, I have been searched, molested, and publicly dishonoured, to the grave injury of my institution, hitherto maintained by charity on account of its good reputation. In addition, morality, religion and the sacraments have been made subjects of derision by the agents of the Government in my house, and in the presence of the boys, who were greatly scandalized. I pass over other serious causes of complaint, as it seems impossible that your Excellency can have given your consent to them. I do not know what will become of me; but such actions cannot long remain hidden from men, and sooner or later God will avenge them."

" Calm yourself, dear Don Bosco," rejoined Cavour, " and rest assured that none of us wish you any harm. We two have always been friends, and I trust we shall remain so for the future. But you have been deceived, dear Don Bosco, and others, taking advantage of your kindness, have induced you to adopt an attitude in politics which can only lead to evil consequences."

" What politics and what consequences do you refer to? A Catholic priest has no other politics than those of the Gospel, and fears no consequences. The ministers, meanwhile, hold me guilty and proclaim me as such to the world, without bringing forward a single proof of the accusations published against me and my institute."

" As you force me to speak," replied Cavour, " I must tell you candidly that, for some time past, your principles and the spirit of your institute are in-

compatible with the politics of the Government. From this, there is no escape."

"And yet, Count, I can escape from your accusation. Let me observe that, if I am for the Pope, and the Government is against the Pope, it does not follow that I am against the Government, but rather that the Government is against me; but leaving this aside, I say: In the matter of religion I am with the Pope, and with the Pope I intend to remain a good Catholic till death; but that does not prevent my being also a good citizen; since it is not my business to treat of politics, I do not meddle with them, and I do nothing against the Government. During the twenty years I have been living in Turin, I have written, spoken and worked in public, and I defy anyone to confront me with a line, a word, or an act deserving censure from the governing authorities. If this be not so, prove it; if I am guilty, let me be punished, but if I am not, allow me to continue my work in peace."

"You may say what you like," exclaimed Farini, "but you will never convince me that you share our ideas, the ideas of the Government."

"Indeed! In this era of liberty, would you then molest a citizen for his private opinions? Is tyranny to be carried so far as to fetter one's ideas? And is not a man free to judge that another is doing wrong, whilst he never says nor does anything against him, because this would be useless or harmful, or because it is not his business to interfere? Now, whatever may be my private opinion as to the conduct of the Government regarding questions of the day, I repeat that, neither in my house, nor outside, have I ever said or done anything which could give occasion to treat me as an enemy of the country, and this ought to suffice for the authorities. But, your Excellency, I must add that, receiving into my house hundreds of poor boys, and bringing them up to gain an honest livelihood, I am co-operating with the Government in procuring the well-being of families and society at large, and increasing

the number of hard-working, decent, and well-informed citizens. These are my politics, and I have no others."

The two ministers could not but approve of Don Bosco's reply, all the more so as it was supported by facts; but Cavour, to show off his knowledge of religion and the Gospel, put this syllogism:

"Doubtless, Don Bosco believes in the Gospel; now the Gospel says that he that is with Christ cannot be with the world; therefore, if you are with the Pope and, consequently, with Christ, you cannot be on the side of the Government. Let us be candid, — either for God or for the devil."

"By such arguments," answered Don Bosco, "it seems you would insinuate that the Government is not only opposed to the Pope, but to the Gospel and even to Jesus Christ Himself. I cannot believe that Count Cavour and Commendatore Farini have gone so far as to renounce the religion in which they were born and brought up, and for which, by their words and writings, they have often shown themselves full of respect and admiration. But, in any case, the Gospel, which your Excellency quotes, answers the difficulty, where Jesus Christ says: 'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' Therefore, according to the Gospel, a subject of any State may be a good Catholic and a follower of Christ, submit to the Pope, do good to his neighbour and, at the same time, keep the laws of his country, except when religion is persecuted and liberty of conscience refused."

"But the Gospel says: 'Let your speech be: yea, yea, no, no'; do not these words oblige a Catholic to declare openly which side he takes?"

"This sentence of the Gospel, I can explain to your Excellencies. The words have nothing to do with politics; they signify that, though in confirmation of the truth, an oath may be lawful, still it should not be used except in cases of necessity; they signify that for a good person to be believed, a simple assertion that the thing is or is not so, suffices without taking an oath; lastly, they signify that honest people should be

believed when they affirm anything, without expecting them to swear. To do otherwise is a sign of distrust on the one side, and of bad faith on the other, and a want of respect to the Holy Name of God, which should never be invoked in vain. To return to our own business, notwithstanding my assertions, do you still believe that I am a conspirator, an enemy of my country and a liar?"

"No, no," replied Cavour, "I have always looked upon you as an honest man, and therefore in future no one shall molest you, and you shall be left in peace."

"Yes," repeated Farini, "Don Bosco may go home and look after his children in peace; he shall have no further trouble, but instead, the gratitude and protection of the king's Government. I advise your Reverence, however, to be prudent, for the times are difficult, and a gnat may be taken for a camel."

"May I, then, be certain that the Government will give me no further trouble?" asked Don Bosco. "Can you assure me that the Government is undeceived as to my conduct, and persuaded that in my institute there never has been and is nothing to justify a domiciliary visit?"

"Yes," repeated Farini, "Don Bosco may go home; you will have no further trouble from us. We are convinced of your personal integrity; and of the good work done by your institution, but I warn you to be on your guard against some who call themselves your friends, and at the same time are ready to betray you."

Then both rising and shaking hands, Cavour concluded: "Now we understand each other, we shall be friends in future, and we beg your prayers."

"Certainly, I will ask God to assist you in life and death," said Don Bosco, and then he left and returned to Valdocco, full of heartfelt gratitude to God for His help in this trial, which might have ended disastrously, not only for himself, but for all those boys gathered together under the wings of his charity.

CHAPTER LII.

Good out of evil. — The little Seminary of Giaveno. — Good conduct of the boys. — Holy artifices. — Fishers of souls. — The Month of Mary. — The Golden age.

“IT is an ill wind that blows nobody good,” says the proverb; and the Apostle St. Paul assures us that “to them that love God all things work together unto good.” The truth of these words was experienced in the Oratory, for the Government enquiries and the assaults of a hostile Press ended in doing it good, by bringing Don Bosco and his work into public notice. The authorities soon learnt that they had nothing to fear from his politics, and instead, began to send boys, so that in a short time the number increased from five hundred to six hundred, and afterwards to seven hundred. Not only parish priests, public officials, but also the king’s ministers themselves began to send Don Bosco many of the orphans from the families of officials and of others, who applied to the Government to be received in some charitable institution. Many letters from Farini and his secretaries are still extant, recommending to Don Bosco orphan and destitute boys, and at the same time praising his work and promising pecuniary assistance. Thus the very minister who, a few months before, had given orders for such a strict examination of Don Bosco and the Oratory, now esteemed them so highly, that he found no other person to whom he could so safely entrust his *protégés*. This support was most valuable at such a time when good institutions, if they aroused the suspicions of the Government, were immediately

exposed to bitter hostility and to the danger of being destroyed by the violence of those who wielded the sword or the pen. Thus Divine Goodness drew good out of evil and made amends for the troubles endured.

Another cause of consolation at this time was the re-organisation of the Ecclesiastical College at Giaveno, through the efforts of Don Bosco and of the staff sent there from the Oratory. This college, founded soon after the Council of Trent, and in conformity with its wise decrees, had been for nearly three centuries the training-ground of the clergy; first for the Abbey of San Michaela della Chiusa, to which it belonged, and then for the Archdiocese of Turin, to which it was handed over at the beginning of the nineteenth century. During these latter years, however, the number of pupils was so greatly diminished, that at last only one remained, and the seminary was on the point of being closed and appropriated by the Government. Archbishop Fransoni was much distressed, and he determined to entrust this institution to Don Bosco, hoping that his reputation and the labours of his sons would give it new life, and thus preserve it for the good of the Church.

From his place of exile he wrote therefore to Canon Celestino Fissore, his Vicar-General (afterwards Archbishop of Vercelli), asking him to make the offer in his name, and begging that it might be accepted. Don Bosco, to whom not only the command, but even the wishes of his ecclesiastical superiors were laws, accepted the offer willingly, rejoicing that he could work in this way for the good of the archdiocese. Nor were these favourable anticipations ill-founded, for no sooner was it known that Don Bosco had taken charge of the College of Giaveno, than applications for admission poured in from all parts, and many pupils were sent there from the Oratory.

As the scholastic year 1860-61 was about to begin, Don Bosco sent there those whom he had selected as professors. Not having at this time any priest at his disposal, except Don Victor Alasonatti, whose presence was indispensable at the Oratory, with the consent of

the Vicar-General, he appointed as Director Don Grassino, one of his best external helpers, giving him as assistants several clerics of outstanding ability. Under his direction and administration, and by the rules and methods of education employed in the Oratory, the college at Giaveno made such great progress, that both during the first year and at its close, Don Bosco received the most consoling accounts of the numbers, good conduct, and scholastic successes of the students.

Among those who had the greatest reason to rejoice at this happy result, was the theologian Arduino, Canon Provost of Giaveno, who for many years had greatly deplored the decay of this institution, once the pride and joy of the diocese. When he heard who had taken charge of it, he promised, if the number of students reached fifty, to place Don Bosco's portrait amongst the greatest benefactors of the college and of the parish. But the result surpassed his own expectations and that of others, for in the very beginning the number of boys reached one hundred, and later exceeded two hundred. Seeing all these boys, the Canon exclaimed: "Not only a portrait, but a statue is due to Don Bosco." But Don Bosco wished for neither; satisfied with his success in preserving to the archdiocese so promising an institution, he retired after two years from the administration, and recalled his teachers, who preferred to continue their work under the banner of St. Francis of Sales at the Oratory.

The year 1860 ended, and 1861 began auspiciously. The Festive Oratories in the three chief centres of the city were frequented by vast numbers, and the school at Valdocco was filled with boys remarkable for their piety and good conduct. Amongst the youths, both artisans and students, there were many imitators of Dominic Savio, recalling the supernatural wonders in the life of their angelic companion and friend. The boys were on excellent terms; there were no quarrels or disagreements among them; in all there seemed but one heart and one soul, to love God and to please Don Bosco.

Many extraordinary occurrences contributed to this satisfactory state of things, but it was in great part due to the zeal and labours of the assistants. Usually after dinner and supper Don Bosco came to recreation with the boys. Sometimes standing, sometimes seated at a table or on the ground, always surrounded by a large circle of boys, he enchanted them with interesting and edifying talks. Sometimes he would say a word of encouragement to one who needed it, or he would whisper something to another; so that as the boys continually changed places in their eagerness to get near him, it happened that all, or almost all, received, like chickens from the mother hen, a morsel of food for their spiritual life. At another time he would go in search of one whom he knew required to be urged to better things or to be withdrawn from evil, and then, with wonderful kindness, would say a few words, producing in the soul lasting effects and bringing about a thorough conversion.

Night prayers and the " Good-night " over, the boys gathered round him to say good-night or get a word of advice, and he gladly seized the opportunity to speak to one or other in confidence, and his words were treasured up and faithfully put in practice afterwards. Such were the means employed by Don Bosco in the first years of the Oratory. Seeing the good results, he made use of them more frequently afterwards, to the great advantage of the boys.

Don Alasonatti, prefect of the house, had not Don Bosco's gift of eloquence, but he contributed to the well-being of the boys in other ways.

He carefully watched against the introduction of evil habits, and took upon himself the task of giving reproofs and even slight punishments, when the milder methods of persuasion were not sufficient to keep in check a few turbulent and stubborn spirits. He exercised this part of his office with so much charity, calmness and discretion, as to make himself only the more respected, because he knew how to temper its bitterness and to join mildness to strength; justice and punish-

ment were sweetened by mercy and kindness. He always examined into the circumstances of the case with care and prudence; he questioned the culprit, and where a word of advice was enough he did not scold, and if a reproof was sufficient he did not threaten or punish, following the rule given by God Himself in these words: "The measure of punishment shall be according to the fault." In every case he showed clearly that he did not act through anger, but through regard for the boys' interests, nor through caprice or resentment, but through a sense of duty, and for the good of the offender.

But for the improvement and education of the boys, Don Bosco had other helpers, who laboured even in time of recreation; these were the clerics, masters, craft-masters, assistants, and not a few of the pupils themselves, who, following in the footsteps of Dominic Savio, became fishers of souls. Mingling in the various groups, they took the lead in all the games, showing as much eagerness as those devoted to these amusements.

Any one unaware of the pious and lofty aims of these youths and clerics, would have thought them over-free and wanting in due decorum; but it was far otherwise. They promoted a healthy interest in games in order to render them popular, and induce the indolent to shake off their idleness and melancholy, and develop bodily and mental activity. They took the lead in the games in order to control them and act as arbiters, so that in case of a dispute the boys might come to an amicable agreement and avoid quarrels, strife and angry words, and thus be kept from offending God; they frequently spent hours and hours in this way, a work of no little abnegation and self-sacrifice, but it was done gladly, for by these means they got to know the boys, their characters and defects, and they were able now and then to give them a word of advice. Whilst some joined in the games, others, scattered over the playground, addressed themselves to the boys who remained apart, and invited them to play or take a walk, and all this with the praiseworthy motive of promoting cheerfulness, and

to find a good opportunity for giving a word of counsel regarding study, work, or piety. After some pleasant conversation with the students or artisans, the cleric would seize the opportunity to make some personal enquiries, for instance: "Are you doing your best to please your parents, and do you pray for them? — What marks had you last week? — When did you go to confession last? — I want to obtain a grace from God: will you come with me to confession and communion to-morrow, for my intention? — Would you like to see Don Bosco? — Come with me and let us speak to him a little," and so on.

The masters and teachers in class, and the prefects of the dormitory and workshops had all the same object in view. Each one tried to lead his own pupils to the faithful fulfilment of their duties in their work, studies, practices of piety, and the good order of the house, more by love than by fear, more for the welfare of their souls than of their bodies, more for the sake of Heaven than of earth. Animated by Don Bosco's example and words, their efforts and desires all tended to seek, and to seize upon every possible occasion of leading the boys of the Oratory to God and saving their souls. One of the maxims most faithfully observed was that of preparing the way for God to enter the hearts of the boys, not only through the door of the church, but also through that of the school and the workshop. This they all tried to do, but with so much prudence and caution that the boys were not aware of it, and only felt how much more pleasant it was to be pious and virtuous than to be indifferent and troublesome. They looked upon the Oratory as a happy home, and loved their superiors as their truest friends.

During the year 1861, this apostolic work, or, as we may call it, this fishing for souls, was carried on in a special way during May, the month dedicated to our Blessed Lady, for whom Don Bosco cultivated a tender and solid devotion, teaching all to cherish her as a loving Mother, and to honour and invoke her as a powerful protectress.

The following were the principal exercises practised by the boys during this month which is so dear to Mary's clients. Every evening they met in the Church of St. Francis of Sales to sing a hymn in honour of Our Lady; then was read the chapter for the day from the little book composed and printed for this purpose by Don Bosco; and the service concluded with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Every morning the tribunal of Penance was surrounded by youths seeking absolution, and the Holy Table was so much frequented that it seemed as if there was general Communion daily. During the various recreations in the course of the day, there was a continual succession of groups of boys before the altar of Our Lady in the church; and many occupied a part of their playtime in praying or reading some book treating on the glories of Mary. The clerics also, and the more advanced scholars, having made a collection of edifying examples, took care to relate at least one every day to the different groups of boys, and to explain the prerogatives, the virtues and the kindness of the great Mother of God, thereby increasing the number of her children, and inflaming them with love of her.

After supper many of the boys gathered together in the playground or under the porticoes, passed a part of their recreation in singing hymns to Our Lady, thus emulating each other in honouring her who, after God, occupied their mind and heart during that month. All, both students and artisans, kept a guard over their conduct in every detail, in order to have the consolation and satisfaction of presenting to the Queen of Heaven a spiritual bouquet at the end of the month.

Besides all these pious practices, the boys manifested their love for Our Lady by adorning with flowers, lamps and candles, a little altar in each of the dormitories. They undertook to defray all expenses, the artisans giving a part of the wages they received at the end of each week, the students giving pocket-money, or other things they had at their disposal. In each dormitory, every evening after the usual prayers, before

the boys went to bed, the cleric in charge assembled them round the little altar and recited with them seven Hail Marys in honour of the Seven Joys and Sorrows of Our Lady; after which each one went quietly to rest. On feast days, and for the closing of the month of May, one of the clerics was appointed to give a discourse in honour of Mary, preparing himself in this way for his future labours; in the pulpit, under the protection of her who is called Queen of the Apostles.

The blessing of God rested upon these efforts and upon these pious and charitable devices which brought forth abundant fruit. In truth, there was scarcely any period in which piety and good conduct were more flourishing among the boys; never were the young artisans more diligent and fond of work, the students more devoted to their studies, or the teachers and assistants more lovingly seconded in their labours. This was a clear proof that religion is the foundation and most powerful auxiliary in education; that charity, zeal, and courtesy in those who direct and teach will always succeed in winning the hearts of their pupils, withdrawing them from evil, causing them to love virtue, and making them good Catholics and worthy citizens; and that in the training of the young, prevention is to be preferred to repression. This was indeed the golden age of the Oratory, and the successors of Don Bosco may well sigh for its return, that it may exist again in all Salesian Institutes, present and future.

CHAPTER LIII.

*A thunderbolt. — Divine protection. — A joke.
— Thanksgiving. — Journalistic lies and insults.—
The lightning conductor.*

IF, on the one hand, the good of the boys and the zeal of their superiors in promoting their moral well-being was most pleasing to Heaven, on the other, it exasperated the powers of hell, who, by God's permission, tried to revenge themselves in the way now to be related.

It was the evening of the 15th of May in the same year, 1861, and the exercises of the month of Mary were being made in the dormitory of St. Alloysius, on the top floor of the building, part of which was above Don Bosco's room. It was occupied by sixty young artisans, and the writer was himself in charge. After saying as usual seven Hail Marys in honour of the Blessed Virgin, impelled by some unknown motive, he asked the boys to add three more, saying: "Let us recite three more Aves, that our Blessed Lady may preserve us from all danger." Surprised at this novelty, the boys joined readily in the recitation, and then went to bed. Soon after midnight, when the whole community was sound asleep, a great storm arose, with frequent flashes of lightning and deafening peals of thunder. About one o'clock the dormitory seemed suddenly to be enveloped in flames and then followed a fall of masonry, mingled with cries, groans, and shrieks.

Through a chimney the lightning had struck the dormitory, destroying the roof and ceiling, and burying several of the boys in their beds under a heap of tiles, bricks and rubbish. It is impossible to describe the

general consternation; some were weeping, others groaning; some invoked Our Lady, others called Don Bosco; some fled, others lay prostrate; it was like the end of the world. Hearing the noise and disturbance, the assistant jumped out of bed in terror, and procuring a light, hastened to assist the injured. Seeing many boys amongst the bricks and mortar, and one amongst them apparently dead, he sent at once to Don Bosco to tell him of the mishap and to beg his assistance. The messenger, in his excitement, announced that the greater number of the boys were dead!

Whilst all this was going on above, poor Don Bosco below was having a terrible time. The chimney through which the lightning entered was the same as that of his bedroom. The lightning, finding no exit, struck his iron bed and lifted it up, surrounding him with a dazzling light, so that for a moment he resembled the prophet Elias in his fiery chariot. After a few seconds the light went out, and the bedstead, knocking against a prie-dieu, fell with such force as to throw Don Bosco on the floor already strewn with masonry. At first he thought he had been precipitated into the dormitory below amongst the boys. Then, rising, he groped about to find out where he was, fearing every moment to fall amid the ruins of the walls. Providentially, after a few steps, he touched a small picture and the holy water stoup which hung on the wall at the head of his bed. Being thus assured that he was still in his own room, and finding a cord which communicated with the next room, he called up the two boys who slept there. The following is the account of one of the boys from his own manuscript.

"A terrible crash was heard," he says, "and our room seemed to be on fire. Then, a deathlike silence, which lasted for a minute, followed by the ringing of Don Bosco's bell. 'Oh!' we both exclaimed, 'what a catastrophe!' Having kindled a light and dressed in haste, we hurried, anxious and trembling, into Don Bosco's room. When we were near his bed, he looked at us, smiling, and said with great calmness, 'See what

is in the middle of the room.' We saw a heap of bricks, blackened with smoke, which had fallen from the chimney.

"Don Bosco had hardly finished speaking, when a knock was heard at the door. I opened it, and found a young artisan almost speechless with fright. 'Please,' he said, 'tell Don Bosco to come at once to our dormitory; it has been struck by lightning, the ceiling has fallen upon the boys and a good number are dead.' Don Bosco, not hearing the message distinctly, called me and enquired what had happened. When I had told him, he exclaimed, in a voice that went to my heart, 'O my God; this is Thy Will, O Lord, and I adore Thy divine decrees.' Then turning to me, he said, 'Go at once, see what has happened, and let me know.' I ran upstairs, and had scarcely put my foot in the room when I perceived an intolerable smell of sulphur; then I heard voices crying and groaning. My heart sank within me, and my eyes filled with tears. The room was a very long one, with two rows of beds. More than two-thirds of the ceiling had fallen. On reaching the end of the dormitory I found matters worse; several beds had sunk under the weight of the fallen bricks; the faces of some of the boys were bleeding; one had his face scorched; others seemed to have lost their senses from the shock. A poor shoemaker, who had fainted, was supported in bed by two of his companions, who sprinkled him with water, trying in vain to rouse him; he seemed to be dying. Others, notwithstanding the uproar, did not move, and appeared to be dead. Then I returned to Don Bosco to let him know what had happened, and having dressed in the meantime, he hastened to the scene of the disaster."

When Don Bosco entered the dormitory the boys received him as an angel of consolation. Those who had already risen crowded round him with countenances so frightened, that Don Bosco could scarcely recognise them. Passing through the heaps of masonry and rubbish, he went to the bedside of those who apparently had suffered most, and soon recognised that the injuries

were not so serious as at first stated, for which he thanked God. Then sending for water and vinegar, he bathed the wounds and bruises of the sufferers with his own hands. Coming to the poor shoemaker, he called him two or three times in a loud voice, and the poor boy, who until then had not opened his eyes nor uttered a syllable, roused himself, gave a deep sigh, and in a weak but intelligible voice, called Don Bosco by name. Soon after, he recovered completely and joined his companions.

Finally, Don Bosco approached another boy who still remained motionless on his bed. It was thought that he had been struck by the lightning, so no one had attempted to touch him, fearing that he was dead. Having brought the light nearer, Don Bosco examined him and found that the boy had a wound on his face, and that a splinter of wood falling with the plaster from the ceiling had pierced his cheek. He tried unsuccessfully to draw it out with his fingers, so he asked for a pair of scissors, and using them like pincers, he succeeded in extracting it. At this moment the boy, who was thought to be dead, roused himself, and thinking one of his companions was waking him, he made an impatient gesture, and cried: "Let me sleep." On hearing this exclamation the joy of the bystanders may be easily imagined; all, including Don Bosco, burst out laughing, delighted with the assurance that this disaster had proved fatal to none. The protection of God had been clearly manifested in this occurrence.

Having ascertained that there had been no loss of life, the boys in this dormitory could not go back to bed, although it was only two o'clock in the morning, but going down to the church with Don Bosco, they all went to confession, heard Mass, which was celebrated by Don Rua, and received Holy Communion in thanksgiving to God and Our Lady for their preservation from death. Towards five o'clock in the morning, at the usual hour for rising, these *protégés* of Our Lady, having already poured forth their hearts in gratitude to God, narrated to their companions from the other

dormitories the events of this memorable night, praising the Divine Mercy and the protection of the Mother of God.

Don Bosco, relating the above occurrence and attributing it to the devil, used to say, jokingly: "That stupid fellow does not understand the rules of polite society: he jostles you about in such a way as to dislocate your bones; as a musician he is stupid: he cannot keep time and knows nothing of harmony, he makes an infernal clatter, enough to deafen even those who are asleep." But the enemy showed himself not only an ill-mannered and bad musician, but a murderer, for if God had allowed him, he would have burnt the boys alive that night, or buried them in the ruins of the house, as he did the children of Job.

The following Sunday, the Feast of Pentecost, after the Vespers and Sermon, a solemn *Te Deum* was sung, not only by all the boys of the Oratory, both boarders and externs, but also by many of our benefactors, rejoicing that a work aided by them with so much charity and self-sacrifice, showed ever-increasing marks of God's care and favour.

In those days several hostile newspapers, in relating the damage done to the house by the lightning, took pleasure in spreading the report of fatal accidents. The *People's Gazette*, amongst others, hardly concealing the resentment it nourished against the Oratory, the closing of which it had failed to obtain the previous year, published the following malicious and untrue statement:

"During the night between Monday and Tuesday, a thunderbolt fell, and guess where? In the very midst of that nursery of little wretches whom Don Bosco, well known for his *History of Italy* (written in the interests of Austria), has picked up in the provinces to train according to his methods, and thus fill the country with hypocrites.

"One of these unfortunate pupils perished, and others were injured.

"If this had happened in one of the liberal schools,

the priests would have exclaimed: 'Behold the Finger of God.'

"Having more respect for that Finger, we should never dream of accusing It of homicide."

On this subject, let it be observed that this *Liberal Gazette* published these lines in Turin six days after the occurrence, so that there had been hundreds of opportunities for ascertaining the truth. But to certain newspapers, falsehood is necessary for their existence, and blasphemy and calumny are their trade. As for the insults showered upon the Oratory boys at that time, subsequent events showed Don Bosco's so-called "wretches and hypocrites," having learnt a trade or given themselves to study, afterwards led honourable lives in the world, and were most grateful for the education they received. Some became lawyers, others professors; some entered the Army, others became devoted priests, whilst all worked for their own and for their neighbours' good. Many of them, generous and prodigal of their talent and even of their lives, went to the foreign missions, carrying the light of religion and the benefits of civilisation to barbarous and savage tribes, thus becoming true benefactors of the human race. There is therefore every reason for believing that, during that night and since, the Finger of God has been manifest at the Oratory and wrought many wonders there.

But to return to our subject. The fall of the thunderbolt made us all desire that Don Bosco should provide the house with a lightning conductor, and we spoke of it that very day. "Yes," he replied, "we shall put up a statue of Our Lady. During that night she so well turned aside the lightning, that we should be guilty of ingratitude if we had recourse to anyone else." Having procured a statue, a scaffolding was erected, and Don Bosco went up, vested in a cotta and stole, surrounded by a number of ecclesiastics, and solemnly blessed it; from that scaffolding, which was certainly the highest pulpit in the world, he addressed the boys assembled in the courtyard below, fervently

exhorting them always to love, honour and confide in the great Mother of God. Having finished the discourse, he intoned a hymn, and the boys took it up with the greatest fervour, accompanied by the band, filling the air with sounds of gratitude and praise to their heavenly Protectress. The statue, then placed on the top of the house near the spot struck by the lightning, remained there until that part of the building was enlarged, when it was removed to the front, where it still stands, a perpetual remembrance of the maternal love of Her who is never invoked in vain.

CHAPTER LJV.

Fresh annoyances.—Plan of campaign.—Petitions refused. — Don Bosco visits the Chief Educational Officer.—Biography of Dominic Savio.—History of Italy. — Duke of Parma. — A Petition.

ONE day Don Bosco was heard to make this very true remark: "The Oratory of St. Francis of Sales began with blows, it has flourished under blows, and amidst blows it will continue to live." In fact, the ill-treatment and blows a poor boy received from the Sacristan of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin, caused Don Bosco to begin the work of the Oratories, in order to rescue boys from dangerous surroundings. Whilst this same work, through the care and charity of benefactors prospered, the opposition of persons, both public and private, brought it within a hair's breadth of destruction, as we have seen; and since then, it has had to sustain, from time to time, the assaults of equally daring and powerful enemies.

Notwithstanding these attacks, the Oratory has not succumbed, but, like a flourishing tree, continues to gather under its shady branches thousands of youths; it has even spread its roots in hundreds of other places, and put forth new shoots, which, growing into large trees, shelter, feed and clothe thousands of children of other countries and nations. We may well hope that the past gives promise of the future; so that like man, of whom Job says, his "life on earth is a warfare," the Oratory may continue the fight against its enemies, and that by Divine assistance, this warfare may not cause its death, but give it fresh life and more victories.

An account has already been given of the dangers incurred by the calumnies of certain mischief-makers, who accused the Oratory of political opposition to the Government; and how, having made his defence in person before the Ministers concerned, Don Bosco saved his Institutes from imminent danger, to the great confusion and disgust of those who had plotted his ruin. But those who opposed him, partly through revolutionary motives, and partly to gain notoriety and improve their position, did not abandon the struggle, and therefore after a truce of some months, towards the end of 1862 and the beginning of the following year, they began to give Don Bosco fresh annoyance and trouble. It is regrettable to have to relate here several dishonourable actions, but to do so is necessary for the sake of completing this history. It is consoling to think, however, that in many cases their perpetrators acted in ignorance. Indeed, many of these people, when they came to know the Oratory better, from being enemies became friends, some even taking the part of Don Bosco and his boys.

Chief among his opponents were Cavaliere Stephen Gatti, one of the principal officials in the Ministry of Public Instruction, and Commendatore Selmi, Chief Educational Officer for the Province of Turin.

This time, the pretext brought forward was not that of politics, but of the legality of the teaching given in the Oratory schools. In their plan of campaign they reasoned thus: Don Bosco, in order to keep his schools open, employs professors who have no legal diploma; it would be impossible for him to provide and pay certificated teachers, because his Institute is supported by alms, and the scholastic year has already begun; therefore, let us require him to provide these professors, and then we shall succeed in making him close his schools.

These men, having the power in their hands, began at once to execute their plan. Signor Selmi required of Don Bosco that he should produce the certificates of his teachers. Don Bosco sent in a list of their names;

in regard to certificates, he said they were taking the means to obtain them, as for several years they had been attending classes of Italian literature, Greek, and Latin, at the Royal University of Turin. At the same time he remarked that, being schools for the benefit of poor boys, they had been praised and encouraged by the scholastic authorities, by the inspectors and by the Minister of Public Instruction himself, who had given the masters full liberty to teach without requiring certificates; he also quoted a letter from the Minister John Lanza, dated April 20th, 1857, which said: "This Ministry, desires to promote in every possible way the increase and development of these schools." With this defence, Don Bosco begged the chief officer to approve of his teachers, at least until they had passed the examinations for which they were preparing. But Signor Selmi would not listen to reason; petitions found him inflexible, and those who wished to act as mediators were repulsed with contempt. He insisted that Don Bosco should either provide at once certificated teachers, or close his schools.

Being in such a difficult position, Don Bosco tried to obtain an audience of the Minister of Public Instruction, Michael Amari, but he was unsuccessful; he sent a similar petition dated November 11th, and obtained no reply; then he spoke to Gatti, who, with feigned courtesy, suggested that he should at once present his masters for the examination as to their capacity for teaching. He made this proposal, because he thought that the teachers were very far from being ready to undergo an immediate and difficult examination; but when he found that they were quite ready and anxious to be put to the test, he racked his brains to discover pretexts why they should not be admitted, as will be seen further.

Don Bosco was now certain that the minister was determined at all costs to close his schools; so, full of confidence in God, and knowing that the chief officer had power to certify teachers provisionally, at least for that year, he decided to apply once more to him. "Let

us try to avert this deadly blow for one year," said Don Bosco, "afterwards, time and necessity will teach us a method of escape." Instead of writing or making use of an intermediary, he now made his application in person to Selmi. This was in the month of December, 1862. After spending many hours in the antechamber, Don Bosco was at last ushered into his presence.

Ostentatiously seated in an armchair, Signor Selmi ordered the priest to stand in front of him, and then began thus:

"So I have the honour to see before me a famous Jesuit, or rather the head of the Jesuits."*

After this preamble, he went on speaking for a long time against priests, religious, the Pope, Don Bosco, his schools and his books, and he spoke with so much bitterness, and made use of such expressions, that he would have exhausted anyone's patience. Don Bosco, remembering, no doubt, the words of Jesus Christ, exhorting His followers to rejoice in bearing insults for His sake, received this torrent of invectives with a tranquil mind and a smile on his lips. This dignified attitude of Don Bosco, so different from his own, affected Selmi's nerves, and staring at him, he said, angrily:

"How is this? You see me angry, yet you smile!"

"Sir," replied Don Bosco, "I am not smiling through contempt of you, but because you are speaking of what does not concern me."

"Indeed! Then, are you not Don Bosco?"

"Yes, I am."

"Are you not the Director of the Schools at Valdocco?"

"Certainly I am."

"Are you not Don Bosco, the famous Jesuit and the instructor of Jesuits?"

"I do not understand you."

"Have you lost your senses?"

"I leave your Honour to decide that matter. If I

* By this name he signified that Don Bosco was an enemy of modern institutions.

chose to make use of similar language, I should have sufficient cause and matter to inspire me; but my position as a good citizen, the respect due to authority, and the necessity of providing for several hundreds of poor boys keeps me silent, and even enables me to bear it with indifference, and I only beg of you to be so good as to give me a hearing."

These words, displaying an admirable patience and charity, had the effect of calming the disturbed mind of the chief officer, and, better sentiments prevailing, he said:

"What are these schools of yours, for which you ask favours?"

"They contain a number of poor children gathered together from all parts of Italy and from other countries, some of whom apply themselves to study, while others learn a trade, so that one day they may be able to earn an honest living."

"Have you many of them?"

"Including externs, more than a thousand."

"What! more than a thousand! And who pays for keeping so many boys?"

"I receive no payment whatever: I look for my reward to God alone, who is the just remunerator of all good works. However, I must provide for these children, hence I am busy from morning till night in search of the means to feed them."

On hearing this, Selmi not only calmed down, but became quite courteous; he made Don Bosco sit down, and said:

"Pardon me, I have been mistaken in you; such a work shows that you are anything but what I suggested. But why are you so hostile to the Government and to the present authorities?"

"I must protest," replied Don Bosco, "against this assertion of yours. I have lived in this town twenty years, and have always enjoyed the goodwill of my fellow-citizens of every class, and I have never been accused of any act against the authorities. In proof of this I bring forward my daily life, my teaching, my

sermons, my books. Before the Revolution had seized upon my compatriots, and public offices were in their hands, my work had won general esteem; now that many positions have been filled by strangers — I make no reference to yourself, — I appear to have fallen into disgrace. Not able themselves to provide for the children of the people, they interfere with those who attempt to do so, and would even go so far as to destroy institutions which many years of labour and great expense have built up."

At these words, too clear to be misunderstood, the chief officer, who was himself a stranger, interrupted Don Bosco, and said :

"Just a moment. Perhaps you think that because I am a newcomer I am consequently an enemy?"

"No, I do not; I had expressly excepted you. I referred to certain men who sacrifice their fellow-citizens for their own advancement and for the sake of office. These unworthy men are the ruin of society."

Selmi thought that Don Bosco was getting on to topics which concerned him a little too closely; he therefore quietly changed the conversation and said :

"You speak truly, and on that point I quite agree with you. On the other hand, I must tell you I do not like your books."

As the reader may see, the books of Don Bosco had nothing to do with the matter in hand, but, in the hope of throwing a little light on the subject and to get his questioner on safe ground, he agreed to a change of subject, and replied :

"I am sorry my poor writings have not been so fortunate as to please you, but if you will kindly point out the mistakes, I shall take note of them for future editions."

"Are you then the author of the *Biography of Dominic Savio*?"

"Certainly I am."

"Well, it is a book full of fanaticism; my son read it, and was so taken with it, that he is always asking

to be taken to Don Bosco, and I fear it will turn his brain."

"That only shows the history is related clearly and pleasantly, so as to be easily understood and appreciated by children; this was exactly my object. But, regarding its grammar and style, do you find any faults to be corrected?"

"In these matters I have nothing to correct; on the contrary, I recognize both purity and propriety of diction and an easy and popular style. But leaving aside this little book as of small account, I cannot approve of your *History of Italy*, which is in every boy's hand. What you have written about Ferdinand Charles III, Duke of Parma, is of itself enough to condemn this work. Of this wretch, who committed all sorts of crimes, you have made a hero, a martyr. I can tell you there were two thousand who had offered and bound themselves by oath to assassinate him if the first attempt failed."

"I was not aware of this; but even had I known it, I am not sure that I should have mentioned it, because I have written a compendium of History for the use of young people, and therefore had to keep within certain limits and choose those facts only which might be morally useful to my readers. Besides, I did not write a biography of this prince, but only narrated his tragic death, which I said was the death of a good Christian, since he died resigned to God's Will, fortified with the Rites of the Church and forgiving his murderer."

"Very good, but I should advise you to correct this History before it is reprinted."

"If you, sir, would have the kindness to point out, or have pointed out to me the modifications and corrections to be inserted, I can assure you I shall treasure them up for the next edition."

"Your affability pleases me; and I am glad to see you are not obstinate in your ideas. But now let us pass on, and tell me what is the trouble in your schools, and what are the difficulties you find in submitting to the scholastic authorities."

" I find no difficulty in it; I beg only that you will kindly permit the present masters to continue their teaching in the respective classes of which they have charge."

" Who are these masters? "

" They are Francesia, Durando, Cerruti and Anfossi."

" By whom are they paid? "

" No one pays them. They have themselves been pupils in the Institute, and are glad to give, now, their own labour for the good of others, as, in times past, others did for them."

" In that case I shall give my approval at once. You have only to send me a formal request, giving the names of the masters and the classes taught by them, and I shall send you immediately a certificate of approval."

" I thank you with all my heart, and for this favour my gratitude will be unceasing. But, before leaving, I wish to ask another favour, and that is, that you would deign to take my boys under your protection, and that one day you will come and honour us with your presence. I am certain that you, who are so devoted to the poor, will be much interested in seeing a thousand boys collected there."

At these words of Don Bosco, Selmi was touched to the heart, and, turning towards him with a kindly expression, he said:

" Dear Don Bosco, you are truly an angel upon earth. I assure you that, in future, I will do all in my power for your boys, and, as soon as possible, I will pay a friendly visit to your institute with my family. I trust that in future our conversations will have a different tone from that with which we began. I am pleased to have seen you and made your acquaintance. Now that we understand each other, I shall say *Au revoir*."

Thus, thanks to God, ended a visit which, at first, threatened to end disastrously. Ever after that the chief officer, convinced of the good done by the Oratory

to the children of the poor, treated it with great kindness and protected it as far as he could.

Returning home, Don Bosco sent at once a formal demand for the approbation of his teachers, as previously arranged. Before granting this, Signor Selmi, probably with a view to a clearer understanding, and to show that he was not acting in the dark, sent Dr. Camillus Vigna, his official secretary, to visit the Oratory. After that he issued the promised certificate, by which the schools were secured, for that year, from further annoyance.

CHAPTER LV.

*Gatti against Selmi. — When thieves fall out . . .
An historical document.*

ALTHOUGH Selmi's action had averted the threatened closing of Don Bosco's schools, still the latter would neglect no means which prudence suggested to render their position more secure. He therefore resumed the work already begun, by which he hoped to obtain the support of the Ministry and legal diplomas for the above-named teachers. Although he was aware of the ill-will of Cavaliere Gatti, who, in those days, arranged everything in the offices of the Ministry to his own liking, at the beginning of 1863 Don Bosco called upon him, and asked for a reply to the petition presented to the Minister of Public Instruction on the 11th November of the preceding year. Gatti answered abruptly :

" I am really sorry, Don Bosco; I have done all in my power to secure you favourable treatment, but we cannot go against the law. Your present masters cannot be approved nor admitted to the public examinations."

" May I know upon what grounds? " asked Don Bosco.

" Certainly. They have not attended regularly the classes at the Royal University."

" But they have attended them; the certificates of their attendance during the last four years exist in this very office."

" That may be so; but they attended as hearers only, without being entered on the books and paying the prescribed fees."

"Formerly, in order to be admitted to the examinations, it was sufficient to attend the University regularly; of this, there are many examples. If it is necessary, now, to pay the fee prescribed by the law, I am willing to do so, whatever it be."

"It is too late. The instances you mention were exceptional favours which cannot be alleged against the requirements of the law."

"What does it all mean? Some time ago the Ministry, through you, ordered my teachers to undergo the public examinations to obtain the necessary teaching certificates, and now you refuse them permission to attend these examinations. Excuse me, but this seems to involve a real contradiction."

"When the Ministry gave the order you mention, they had not thoroughly investigated the matter, but now they have decided that, in order to be admitted to the public examinations, it is necessary, not only to have assisted at the lectures of the various courses in the University, but to have done so after having been formally registered."

"If this be so, Cavaliere, be so good as to give me some friendly advice. What must I do now?"

"You must engage the services of certificated professors for four years, and have your present masters registered immediately at the University. This is the only way to provide for your schools."

"But it is impossible to find at once four certificated professors, and if I could find them, I should be unable to pay them."

"I am very sorry."

"What then?"

"Close the schools."

"For this year at least, I understand, I can keep them open; for next year, we shall provide."

"And by whose authority would you keep your schools open this year?"

"By the authority of the chief educational officer."

"Are this officer's powers, then, greater than those

of the Ministry? Signor Selmi cannot meddle in this business."

"And yet he has authorized my present teachers for the current scholastic year."

"But he cannot do so. Have you this authorization of his in writing?"

"Yes, here it is."

"But, he cannot," replied Gatti, several times whilst reading, "he cannot, he cannot; this is not within his province. I shall write to him at once and reprove him for this abuse of power. He is an ignoramus and must be kept in his place."

"I do not know the extent of his powers," concluded Don Bosco, "all I know is, that for the scholastic affairs of the Province of Turin, we have to apply to the chief officer. So, at present, I'll go home in peace; but in any case, if you should have any orders contrary to this decree, I beg you will give me due notice."

Seeing the indignation of Gatti, Don Bosco had every reason to fear some disagreeable results, so, on leaving the Ministry, he went to the chief officer, to whom he related all that had happened. On hearing the expressions used by Gatti in speaking of him, Selmi flew into a passion:

"I an ignoramus!" he said, "I an ignoramus indeed! It is he who is an ignoramus and an idiot! He was never able to pass his examinations, and he obtained his title of professor not because he deserved it, but through favour. He has obtained the post he now occupies by flattery and cunning, and he dares to call others ignorant! But this does not trouble me; you, Don Bosco, may go home in peace. In granting authorization to your teachers I have done my duty and what I had the power to do. If anyone sends orders contrary to my approbation, do not fear, I shall be able to put things right."

We see here just the contrary of what happened between Herod and Pilate, when Our Blessed Saviour was brought before them for judgment; through Him, from enemies they became friends. Here, on the con-

trary, Gatti and Selmi, who were formerly friends, became enemies; but this enmity, neither foreseen nor desired by Don Bosco, was, through the designs of Providence, turned to his great advantage. "When thieyes fall out, the honest man comes into his own."

Gatti wrote several angry letters to Selmi, who answered them in the same strain; but whilst these two Government officials were quarrelling, the Oratory was flourishing, and the decree of approval had its full effect.

With reference to the admission of the teachers to the examination for diplomas, Don Bosco, in the month of March, received from the Ministry a written refusal, based upon the futile reasons already verbally alleged by Gatti; which led one to suppose that the reply had been dictated by him, although it did not bear his signature. Far from losing courage at this rebuff, Don Bosco repeated his request, which he hoped would be attended to by one of the ministers who had formerly received him favourably. However, it fell into hostile hands, and shared the fate of the first. To render the case hopeless, Cavaliere Gatti alleged, in confirmation of his refusal, the opinion of the Superior Council of Public Instruction, a body entirely under his control.

The following is the text of one of these petitions of Don Bosco to the Minister of Public Instruction, dated March 9th, 1863:

"YOUR EXCELLENCY,

I respectfully beg that you will be so good as to read this petition, which asks for fair treatment for our poor scholars.

Desiring ardently to promote secondary education among the children of the poor and middle classes, I have begun a kind of seminary or school for the benefit of the boys living in the house called 'The Oratory of St. Francis of Sales.' For this purpose, besides instruction in manual work, I have introduced courses of secondary studies, as a further means of enabling the boys to earn their living.

The Ministry of Public Instruction has always shown a great interest in these schools, both by words of encouragement and by pecuniary aid; moreover, in a letter dated April 29th, 1857, No. 1,585, this same Ministry expressed the desire that our schools should flourish, being disposed to contribute to their development by all the means in its power.

Last year (1862), by the advice of this same Ministry, I sent in my demand for official approbation, and the chief officer kindly acceded to my request by a decree of the 21st of December last, approving these schools with their actual staff. These masters, for more than seven years, have given their services gratuitously to teaching our boys, with most satisfactory results, so much so, that many of the boys, on leaving school, have succeeded well as teachers, craftsmen, or officers in the Army; others have become priests, while some have been promoted to public offices. But whilst the masters of the Oratory schools have been teaching, they have also attended for five years the lectures at the University, as shown by the accompanying certificate.

Now, as the approbation of Signor Selmi was only provisional, on account of the deficiency of certificated teachers, it is absolutely necessary that these teachers should pass the regular examination, for which, in the opinion of their respective professors, they are quite prepared.

For this end I applied for the necessary facilities. But by a letter dated March 2nd of this year, I received the reply that these teachers could not be admitted to the desired examination, because they had attended the University lectures in Greek, Latin and Italian simply as hearers, without the necessary registration. They had not applied for registration because, working and living in a house supported by charity, they could not pay the required fee.

After this explanation, I hope your Excellency will kindly take into consideration :

1. The support, both moral and pecuniary, which

the Minister of Public Instruction has always given to these schools;

2. The recognition by Signor Selmi of the capable and successful teaching of the masters in their respective classes;

3. The declarations of their respective professors at the University, testifying to their regular attendance and proficiency;

4. Their charitable labours devoted for more than seven years to the benefit of poor boys.

For these reasons, and still more on account of your Excellency's goodwill towards those persons and institutions dedicated to public education, I humbly beg that the attendance of these young men at the University may be regularised, even though they have not been formally registered, and that thus they may be admitted to the public examinations.

If, however, your Excellency judges that the desired favour is too great, at least I would beg you to permit these teachers, as is allowed by the law in the case of the Naples University, to repair their failure to register by paying a sum equal to the usual registration fee, and thus by this payment to avoid the waste of time involved in a second attendance at the courses of lectures they have already attended.

Trusting that your Excellency will give my petition your favourable consideration, I promise you the undying gratitude of the students who will benefit by your kindness.

Cordially wishing you all heavenly blessings,

I remain,

Your Excellency's obedient servant,

"JOHN BOSCO, Priest."

This same petition was strengthened by the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior, to whom Don Bosco also had recourse; therefore, if it had been fortunate enough to reach the minister's hands, a more favourable result might have been expected; but it was

probably intercepted and dealt with by one of the permanent officials, and most likely by Cavaliere Gatti himself. The refusal was displeasing to the above-named minister, who wrote as follows to Don Bosco, on the 23rd of March :

“ The Ministry are much annoyed at not obtaining the desired result from the cordial recommendations which they hastened to send to the Council of Public Instruction, at the time when you presented your petition, in which you asked that the young priests and clerics teaching in your institute might be admitted to the University examinations to obtain certificates for secondary education.”

In the following chapter are related some further activities of Cavaliere Gatti, and the unenviable reward meted out to him by Divine Justice.

CHAPTER LVI.

Further inquiries ordered by Cavaliere Gatti. — The schools visited. — Dante, Guelphs and Ghibelines. — The temporal power of the Pope. — Fine words and evil deeds.—Don Bosco and the Minister of Public Instruction. — Misfortunes and death of Gatti.

IT would seem that the victory gained by Don Bosco, through the decree of approbation obtained from Signor Selmi in favour of his schools, interfered with the slumbers of Cavaliere Gatti, for, in the hope of getting the better of the situation, he incited the Ministry to order a fresh visit of inspection. It was towards the end of May, in the same year 1863, that one morning, about nine o'clock, a gentleman, smartly dressed, presented himself at the Oratory, and asked for Don Bosco. He was a professor of Philosophy. After the usual greetings, the professor announced that he was charged by the Minister of Public Instruction to make an inspection of the schools of the Institute, and he showed the written order.

Don Bosco did not fail to point out the impropriety of these repeated inquisitions in the house of a free citizen, where several hundred children were fed, lodged, and taught gratuitously, "but," he added, "bowing to the authority you represent, I shall make no further observation, but allow you to carry out your orders. I beg only that you will not frighten the boys, nor ask inopportune questions." To this the kindly professor consented.

It would take too long to narrate the questions of the inspector and the answers of the pupils, in each of the five classes of the school; here, therefore is given just

a sample of the examination which made a profound impression on the boys' minds, and left an indelible record. It should also be noted that, although the professor's manners were polite and agreeable in dealing with Don Bosco, the teachers, and the pupils, still, it was evident that his visit was made on a pre-concerted plan: not to inspect, but to spy; not to see if the boys were well taught, but to lay snares for them; not to examine the efficiency of the teaching, but the political ideas and opinions of the teachers. Leaving on one side the Latin Authors, he chose subjects more in accordance with the end in view.

For the upper classes he chose Dante's *Divina Comedia*, discussing especially the conduct of the Popes and the temporal power of the Papacy. It would thus appear that his aim was to draw out some unguarded reply, which would serve as a pretext to report that the teaching at the Oratory was contrary to the present institutions; but, by God's protecting care, and the discretion of the pupils and teachers, he was quite baffled in this direction.

In examining the lower classes, however, he at last elicited something which pleased him better. A boy in the lowest class, when asked to recite the divisions of Northern Italy, thoughtlessly repeated the old political division to which schoolboys had long been accustomed, thus making a part still subject to Austrian rule. On hearing this, the inspector showed much displeasure, and said:

"What? Do you not know that, since 1859, Lombardy and Venice have belonged to the kingdom of Italy? Is it of such little importance to know the triumphs of our country?"

The teacher here pointed out that it was a slip, arising rather from customary association than from ignorance. The inspector seemed to be satisfied with the excuse, but in his report, having nothing else to find fault with, he did not pass over this innocent remark of the boy, and aggravated its importance before the Ministry.

But one thing really surprised him, though he might

have wished it otherwise, and that was the quiet behaviour, the discipline everywhere displayed. One of the classes, numbering a hundred and thirty, plainly showed him that such order was not a passing effect, but real and lasting. When he had finished his questioning the teacher offered to accompany him to another section, but the inspector thanked him, saying that his absence would give opportunity for a disturbance amongst his boys.

"Oh! don't mind them," replied the teacher, "not one will open his mouth or move about while I am away."

"I should hardly believe that a hundred and thirty boys could keep silent without any teacher," replied the visitor.

They went out, nevertheless; but as the inspector had his doubts, he said afterwards: "Let us go back and see if your words have proved true," and, at the same time, they went back quietly to the classroom door, to listen. There they found all the boys at work, and not a sound was heard; all were as silent and still as though the master had been at his desk. On seeing this, the inspector went away, saying: "I should never have believed it! It does credit to you and to your pupils." That teacher was the cleric Durando.

What seemed extraordinary to the Government inspector was an ordinary thing at the Oratory, for there the boys had learned to avoid evil-doing, not because of the presence of a master, but because of the continual presence of God; not for the sake of reward or punishment, but for the sake of duty and conscience.

The inspection conducted by the professor lasted two days, and on leaving the institute, this gentleman stated that he was well satisfied with what he saw, using such expressions as would lead one to understand that his report would be a favourable one. Apart from his apparent friendliness, Don Bosco had reason to expect such a report, both because the boys had answered without fault, and because the inspector enjoyed the reputation of being an honest man, incapable of doing

anyone an intentional injury. But how often are fair words belied by malicious acts! For, indeed, some days after, Don Bosco was surprised and grieved to learn that the Government inspector had presented to his minister a report very unfavourable to the institute. According to this document, everything there was confusion and reaction.

"I noted, your Excellency," the author wrote, "that in the whole of that large institute, such a morbid spirit is manifested, that there is not even a portrait of his august majesty, the King."

When this became known, someone immediately said: "If the report has been made in such terms, it is evident that Cavaliere Gatti has had a part in it."

Nor was this wholly a rash judgment, seeing that, despite what he had already done against the Oratory, he gave grounds for the belief to one of his officials, who reproached him and sought to bring him to a right state of mind.

This news showed that if he were able to do something to prejudice the institutes directed by priests and religious, Cavaliere Gatti could boast of his prowess and rejoice as at a victory. But whoever was the author of such a false assertion, Don Bosco, as soon as he heard it, sought to ward off the evil consequences, by destroying the bomb (as he expressed it), before the explosion should occur. With this purpose in view, he betook himself to the minister to whom the misrepresentations had been made. It was a day in the month of June. Having with difficulty obtained admission, after remaining till evening, he had the following conversation with Amari, the Minister of Public Instruction:

"What can I do for you, Father?" asked the minister.

"I am being continually plagued by vexatious inquisitions," replied Don Bosco. "Why, I know not. I have come to you to know the reason of it. I have always been loyal to my Sovereign, or if I have ever

erred against him, I have sought to know my fault and correct it."

"Well, first of all, let me have your name."

"I am the priest John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales, which endeavours to shelter poor boys to educate and train them, so that they may be able to have some honest means of livelihood."

"I am glad to know you and to hear of your pursuing such a noble work. But you must take care that your activities do not overstep the proper bounds. It is said that your philanthropic institute has degenerated into a school of reactionaries, refusing obedience to lawful authority. Hence, the visit of inspection to your House. And I understand that the inspector has made himself acquainted with you and your pupils, as I desired him to do."

"I know not what your Excellency's orders were, but I know that the inspector extended his inquiries into the very thoughts of the boys: questions were asked them concerning their political opinions rather than what had been taught them; and some pupils were even prompted to disclose the matter of their confessions. Cavaliere Gatti has been doing this for three years, and has already drawn upon himself the disapprobation of the Ministry."

"This certainly was not the business of Signor Gatti nor of the inspector sent to you. He was to forward a report on certain matters, and, from it, I shall be able to obtain such information as I require."

Then the minister rang his bell and asked the attendant to summon the two gentlemen. Entering the room one behind the other, they did not notice Don Bosco, as it was almost twilight. Being requested by Amari to be seated, they took chairs beside him.

Turning to the inspector, the Minister asked: "What was the result of your visit to Don Bosco's school?"

"As was to be expected, sir. From the report which I shall present to you, your Excellency will have a clear idea of the evil influence which reigns in that House."

"With the assistance of Gatti, you were to examine

into the nature of the teaching in that school and to ascertain the attitude of the Staff towards us. Now, what have you to report about them?"

"Little that is satisfactory to your Excellency. Just imagine! In that institute we did not come across a single portrait of the king."

"But what about the teaching and the teachers?" interrupted the minister, impatiently, being irritated by this wandering from the point on the part of the inspector.

"With regard to this, Don Bosco has managed to obtain from the Royal Commission a decree of approbation, which allows the school to remain open this year."

"Then concerning the legality of the teaching you have nothing to say?"

"We are in communication with the Royal Commission," said Cavaliere Gatti, "for it appears that the approbation granted to Don Bosco will turn out to be illegal."

"If it only appears not to be legal, that is a sign that it has not yet been proved to be illegal, and while a decision on that question is pending, we must be careful not to condemn anyone. But on the other hand, Don Bosco complains that ill-advised questions are put to his pupils, and I am sorry to hear this."

"Your Excellency will be good enough to believe that this complaint is unfounded," replied the inspector.

"Let us hear what Don Bosco himself says," added the minister, "and thus we shall learn the truth. For the truth and nothing but the truth we must have, and woe to liars and impostors who seek to deceive us."

It is easy to understand the astonishment of the inspector and Gatti when they discovered that Don Bosco was in the room and heard the decided words of the minister. It is no exaggeration to say that the former blushed crimson at being convicted of duplicity out of his own mouth, praising to the skies in Don Bosco's presence the institutions he afterwards loaded with infamy in his report to the Government. The

other gentleman was greatly concerned lest his unfair treatment of schools should be publicly known, since Don Bosco's was not the only school he had treated in the same manner. In fact, Cavaliere Gatti not being able to bear his confusion, sought to be allowed to retire, letting the odium of the business fall on the inspector.

Then occurred an amusing incident, which illustrates what a slight thing can humble a proud though powerful man. So abashed was Gatti, that in his retreat from Don Bosco's presence he mistook the ordinary exit and opened the door of a cupboard instead. "Come, come," said the minister, "that is not the way out. Come this way," and rising, the minister showed him out. The inspector, wishing to change his position and get away from Don Bosco, tripped over the carpet and nearly fell headlong on the floor.

Cavaliere Gatti having left, the inspector again seated himself, and Don Bosco, at the request of the minister, spoke thus :

"Your Excellency, I am very pleased to have this opportunity of speaking to you on this matter. It is not my intention to accuse anyone, but solely to make a statement in defence of myself and in the cause of the boys whose welfare is threatened by this action on the part of the Government. These boys were indiscreetly questioned on irrelevant matters, some being even prompted to falsehood by unworthy reflections on their superiors. About details it is best to be silent, but such an inquisition at all is contrary to the law and opposed to natural honesty, and were it known, would be publicly condemned. Moreover, the inspector, in my own presence and that of several of the teachers at the institute, stated that our classes might be held up as models for study and good conduct, and that he found nothing to complain of. He even remarked that he would recommend that the other public schools be conducted in the same way. But to you he has made an entirely contrary report. He mentions that in our

institute there is not a portrait of the king, whereas there are portraits in three of the rooms."

"Yes, but all very ugly ones," cried the inspector.

"If they are ugly," answered Don Bosco, "that is not my fault, but the artist's. If they were more handsome I should be more pleased. But there is one thing pleasing to no one, and that is to hide the truth and distort facts before the authorities, and by so doing to injure one who devotes his life to relieving human misery, and above all protecting youth. This is a conspiracy against the truth; this is oppressing the innocent; this is deceiving the Government."

From the openness with which Don Bosco spoke, and from the contradictions and ludicrous charges of his subordinates, the minister was not slow to see where the truth lay.

"Enough, enough," he said, "I understand all. I see my orders have been exceeded, and that I have been purposely misinformed. No more of this. You, sir," he added, bowing to the inspector, "may go to your office, we shall discuss the matter at another time."

When they were once more alone, the minister thus continued his conversation with Don Bosco:

"I little thought of being the victim of such underhand dealing, but it will at any rate serve to warn me to be cautious in the choice of my subordinates. But now, Don Bosco, putting those matters aside, tell me how it is that so many unfavourable reports have got about concerning you and your institute. If you have any secret circumstances which may be somewhat compromising, you may confide them to me as to a friend, and I assure you they will not bring any discredit upon you, but perchance I may be able to advise you in their regard."

"I am extremely grateful for the courtesy and sympathy you have extended to me. Confidence begets confidence. Well now, from what you have learnt by the conduct of these two officials you may judge of all the other imputations. Malice and ignorance have heaped up falsehood upon falsehood; some of them

were taken from malicious inventions concerning the clergy and religious institutes in general, and certain officers of the Government had them collected and disseminated as accounts of the actual state of affairs. They thus succeeded in creating and maintaining the prejudicial opinions against me, or rather against the boys of the Oratory, whom they seek to disperse and entice away from me. Therein lies the only foundation for those damaging reports; from the very outset the only weapon used against me has been calumny, and I affirm without the least hesitation that the reports have been utterly false.

“ I have been in Turin now for over twenty years, and the greater part of that time I have spent in the streets and squares with the children, in the prisons visiting the unfortunate men confined there, or in the hospitals by the bedside of the sick. My work has brought me into contact with every class of persons: I have preached, catechised, written and published books. Now I defy anyone to detect one word, one line or one act which our rulers could condemn as blameworthy, or as contrary to the laws, and if anything could be so proved I should willingly undergo the severest penalties. I must on the contrary add, and that with regret, that I have been very badly treated for all this by those from whom I should have expected gratitude, or at least respect and consideration. I do not refer to the ministers of the State, or to your Excellency, but to certain subordinates, who on account of their assumed importance, or to appear zealous and deserving of promotion, for no excuse whatever or for some sordid gain, make use of their position as a menace to honest citizens, and compromise the actual and responsible ministers of State affairs.”

“ This frankness of yours is what I like to see in a man, and I repeat my former assurance that what help may be in my power shall not be withheld; but have you not published a certain *History of Italy*, which by all reports contains principles and maxims incompatible with our times? ”

" That *History of Italy* to which your Excellency refers was written with the loyalty of a good citizen. As soon as it was printed, I sent a copy of it to the Minister of Public Instruction, who examined it and finding it preferable to any school text-book then in use, praised it highly, sent a gift of a thousand francs to its humble compiler, and shortly afterwards placed it on the list of public prize-books. It was also examined by other eminent authorities, among others by Nicholas Tommaséo, whose principles are well known to you. In speaking of the book, he said among other things: ' Here is a modest publication which the erudite and grave historians would hardly deign to notice, but which would be a more suitable text in the schools than many celebrated works ! ' Now I fail to see how a book held in such esteem by ministers and eminent writers could be dangerous to the State."

" I have read some pages of it, and I must confess that I see nothing whatever to take exception to. But, since the first edition was published a great change has come over the world and people's ways of thinking; ideas have assumed new forms, and it has struck me, that as meat is brought to table cooked in various ways and taken with different vegetables and condiments, so you might do with your book. What do you think? "

" I quite agree with you about the meat, but I hardly think we could apply the process to historical facts. Historical facts remain as they occurred, the truth cannot be made false just as white cannot be made black. Historical events having once taken place, cannot change with the change of times; they must accordingly be presented to the public as they happened and not touched up to suit times and circumstances, which would make them appear in a false light; if history were to change with the tastes and fancies of writers; instead of being a truthful and reliable teacher of nations, it would be nothing but a masquerade and a conspiracy against the truth."

" That is true, of course; the ideas of men vary, while bygone events handed down by history must

remain fixed. Still, on second thoughts you may think of re-editing your book, and you would then have an opportunity of reconstructing reflections or expressions which may irritate the temper of our days. Do you see what I mean?"

"I understand you entirely, and if your Excellency will be good enough to note the parts which are objectionable, I shall give them every consideration in the first reprint of my little book."

"We are then in entire agreement, and we shall part with all your fears dispersed and assured of no further molestation. If any difficulty should present itself concerning your school, come direct to me. As long as I am Minister of Public Instruction you shall have my support and protection."

"I am deeply indebted to you," replied Don Bosco, "and having no other return to make, I assure you of the prayers of my boys, that God may grant you a long and happy life and the grace of a holy death."

This conversation allayed the storm which threatened the Oratory and brought to Don Bosco the peaceful control of his schools. The minister, seeing that Don Bosco had no other intent than to benefit poor boys, was persuaded that the Government had nothing to fear from him, and so silenced his calumniators. Cavaliere Gatti realized from this set-back that it was good policy to be honest, and fearing perhaps that any further attempt against the Oratory might suffice to bring about his downfall, he ceased thenceforth his vile and unjust persecution. The Chief Officer, finding that no further comment was forthcoming concerning his legalising the teachers, was glad that his favour to Don Bosco had caused no trouble, and continued his support.

Besides these good results others also followed worthy of insertion here. Don Bosco speaking afterwards on these events was heard to say: "God is good, and great, and omnipotent. He purposely allows tribulation, but only to draw greater good from it and to show His goodness and power. These visitations caused us great in-

convenience, but they turned out to our advantage and from bitterness there came forth sweetness." And this was really the case. The Government was finally convinced that the supposed compromising relations with the Jesuits, with Archbishop Frasoni, and with the Pope were all fictitious, as it was also fictitious that these persons were guilty of anything unbecoming their sacred characters. Besides, the Government and local officials also learned that notwithstanding the changes of times and political views, Don Bosco and those about him knew how to combine the duties of good Catholics with those of upright citizens, and so they dropped all suspicion, and if they did not actually favour Don Bosco, they left him free to accomplish his work in his own way. These troublesome investigations made him thoroughly conversant with the revised regulations of the newly constituted Boards of Public Instruction. Previously religious Houses, or those under the administration of religious bodies, had been allowed to regulate their own educational affairs, but now the law was to be applied to all without exception.

Don Bosco was thus enabled to arm himself against many dangers which afterwards befell similar institutes. From that time it was not only the safest plan, but absolutely indispensable, that those teaching in primary or secondary schools should be qualified by university examinations, if they were not to be prohibited from teaching, to the great loss of religion and society. Don Bosco was thus the first to send in his clerics and priests for public examinations, an example followed by the bishops, and afterwards enforced by the Supreme Pontiff in Rome itself. It also proved the wisdom of not taking any part whatever in the politics of the day, both because to do so would have brought no possible advantage, and also because it would have been easy by an unguarded word to bring the odium of public authority upon the whole Institute. Besides the office of Superior, teacher or master of trades would suffer by any party-spirit and would not be nearly so efficacious in training the young.

Another advantage the Oratory gained by the happy termination of these troubles was the favourable opinion it continued to bear henceforth in the public mind. Moreover, those who were well disposed towards the Oratory, seeing that it was treated on the same footing as many long-standing institutes of excellent name, were confirmed in their good opinion or even became more friendly; while the evil-minded or hostile, seeing that with all the calumny from their newspapers, and the minute investigations of Government officials, nothing unworthy could be discovered, began by degrees to abandon their hostility, and even to appreciate and sympathize with the good work being accomplished.

And in this way the words of that servant of God, Canon Aloysius Anglesio, successor of the saintly Cottolengo in the Little House of Divine Providence, began to be verified. The day after the first visitation of the police he came round to congratulate Don Bosco on the violence he had suffered. "Rejoice now, dear Don Bosco," he said, "your work has been tried and has stood the test. When the persecution commenced against the Apostles, they left Jerusalem and taught the Gospel in other towns and countries, and so it will be with you."

Thus it turned out that a period of prosperity set in for the Oratory when the time of persecution was over, but the same cannot be said for those who had conspired against it. Perhaps this is the most convenient place to bring to light one fact which shows clearly the just judgments of God, and how heavily the divine vengeance fell on him who had taken the leading part in persecuting the Oratory. Neither Don Bosco nor any of his subjects wished that evil might befall or rejoiced at the misfortunes which actually overtook its enemies; on the contrary, when troubles were thickest, Don Bosco recommended the boys to pray for these men that their eyes might be opened to the truth, and their hatred give place to sentiments of humanity. Moreover the account of the sad lot which befell one of

them, is given with feelings of profound pity, and with the single purpose that it may be a useful lesson to those who read, and to persons, whether public or private who have dealings with the work of the servants of God.

Besides the Minister Farini, who having styled Don Bosco a madman, only a few years afterwards ended his own life in a fit of melancholy; the one who displayed against the Oratory a zeal worthy of a better cause was Cavaliere Gatti. He commenced to give proofs of his hatred as far back as 1860, and the Oratory was certainly not indebted to his kindness, if at that time or in the following year the schools were not closed and hundreds of poor boys left homeless. He had persuaded himself that he could ruin Don Bosco's work as he certainly had ruined other similar institutions; but his hopes were vain. From the day when, covered with confusion, he mistook the door leading from the minister's apartment, the wheel of Fortune seems to have changed. His troubles began with the illness of his wife, who injured her spine through a fall.

When the capital was changed from Turin to Florence and thence to Rome, Gatti hoped to improve his position, and indeed his great activity would have secured advancement, but he had an open account to settle with Divine Providence. For having fallen somehow into disrepute with his superiors and his fellow officials, instead of rising he lost ground, and found himself superseded by a rival and relegated to an inferior position. This unexpected downfall and painful undoing acted upon his mental faculties, and the fallen man became disconsolate and melancholy; then he became infirm and finally lost his mental powers entirely. In this state he at times wept like a child, and at times raved like one possessed, moving everyone to compassion.

Having the image of his rival always before his mind he continually cried out: "Ah! you have ruined me."

He was taken to his native place, where the country air had formerly been beneficial to him. But there he

became furious and raving. In a moment of extraordinary frenzy he seized his wife by the hair and dashed her head against the wall, causing her death, and shortly after he himself died without any human comfort.

The tale of misfortunes which overtook other persecutors might here be related, but it will suffice to express again the conviction that Almighty God had made a promise to Don Bosco similar to that which He made to Abraham: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee." (Gen. xii, 3).

CHAPTER LVII.

A flower of paradise. — Don Bosco's brother. — The Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians. — The school of Mirabello. — The first examinations at the University of Turin. — Sunshine after a great storm. — Episcopal commendations.

AS a relief from the stormy times related in the preceding chapter, a few words are devoted here to the story of the saintly youth, Francis Besucco, a student at the Oratory. The few short years he passed there, the brilliant example of virtue that he gave, and his holy death, were the motives which induced Don Bosco to publish a short biographical account. This admirable youth, along with Dominic Savio and Michael Magone, made a beautiful triple crown of merit for him who had educated them, and converted the Oratory into a kind of garden where all the virtues flourished.

When Don Bosco, soon after the boy's death, related a part of his life's history, he pronounced, with tears in his eyes, the lad's dying words: "I die with one regret, that I have not loved God as He deserves to be loved." It would be impossible to make one realise the effect of this simple and paternal description by Don Bosco. While the boy was dying a somewhat extraordinary event happened. Don Bosco was assisting him, priests and boys were standing round, and the dying lad was uttering a few words of thanks, when suddenly he stopped . . . he fixed his gaze upward upon something above him, and then with a countenance beaming with a heavenly smile, and with a voice clear, and limpid, such as had never been heard before, one

of the favourite hymns to Our Lady burst from his lips. Everyone stood amazed at the sight, an extraordinary brightness shone round about, and the sick boy, raising himself in the bed, seemed to be entering into the joys of Paradise. Then he lay back and was silent. The bystanders approached and found that he was dead. Happy he who had spent his short life in the service of God, so that he was regarded as an example of virtue. Don Bosco called him "a flower of Paradise," and his edifying life long continued to be a guiding star to the boys of the Oratory.

And here a page or two must be reserved for Don Bosco's elder brother, Joseph. Although his occupation made him reside at a good distance from Turin, he frequently came over to enjoy a few hours in his brother's company, and to stay with the boys of the Oratory, whom he regarded as his sons. When Don Bosco took over to Becchi every year a party of thirty or fifty boys, or even more, for a few days' holiday, Joseph would put himself to all kinds of inconvenience to accommodate the party and provide for all. In fact he rather enjoyed the excitement of these occasions, and came to regard them as a pleasant holiday time. The boys who were brought into contact with him for the first time, were so taken by his obliging homeliness, that they were soon numbered among his friends.

A little incident that happened during one of his visits to the Oratory must not be passed over here. He had come one day to see Don Bosco, with the intention also of buying two calves at a neighbouring market. After some little time at the Oratory, he perceived that Don Bosco was in great straits and that he had many pressing debts.

"Look here," said Joseph to his brother, taking out his purse, "I had come with the intention of spending three hundred lire at the market, but I see that your need is far greater than mine. You must take this money from me."

"But what will you do?" asked Don Bosco, as he gratefully took the money.

" My purchases can wait till some other time."

" I shall accept them as a loan. As soon as I get the amount I shall pay it back to you."

" And when will you get that much to spare? You who are always in debt? No! no! I give it you, that is enough: I know how to manage, I have all I want, so think no more about it."

Besides this, however, Joseph Bosco was known in all his neighbourhood as a man of singular talent, generosity and virtue. Questions and disputes were frequently brought to him for settlement, and his decision was invariably satisfactory. If it was a matter of debt, whenever he was able he satisfied the creditors; no wonder he was regarded as a sort of consoling angel and guardian by the neighbouring families. The Christian education received from his mother had made him a model of virtue; his heart was not set on the goods of earth but he looked for his reward in Heaven. We might almost say that he had foreseen the time of his death. One day he arrived suddenly at the Oratory, having had some money accounts to settle in Turin. He had that day put matters in order and now wished to go to Confession.

" But how is it," enquired Don Bosco, " that you have come such a long distance at this time of the year, when you do not generally go far from home? "

" Because I had a great desire to put a few debts right, and to go to Confession. Something seemed to warn me not to lose time about it."

Don Bosco wanted him to remain for a few days, but nothing would detain him. After a short time, however, he came to Turin again.

" Here so soon!" exclaimed his brother. " Anything gone wrong at home? "

" Oh, no; but I wanted your advice on something. You know that I have made myself responsible for the money owed by such a one. If I live long enough, I shall not draw back, but if I die, what then? "

" If you die there is an end to the matter; he who lives the longer must pay."

"But I should not like the creditor to be at a loss, after having trusted my word."

"As to that, never mind," replied Don Bosco. "If you cannot pay, I shall be the guarantee."

"Thank you, that will do; now I have nothing to trouble me." He went home and put his affairs in order, as though he was about to depart from this world. After a few weeks he fell ill; and was soon at death's door. His brother hastened over to Becchi, and Joseph passed peacefully away in Don Bosco's arms on December 12th, 1862.

If these and other dispositions of Divine Providence were sore trials to Don Bosco, they served, on the other hand, to make his work better known and appreciated, and many requests were made to him to accept more boys. But, how was it possible to do this; for on one side the premises were closed in, and on the other it was impossible to make any kind of extension. Providence, however, at last took the case in hand.

To the right of the older portion of the present Oratory, there was a large building used as a silk factory. Don Bosco had, previously, made several offers for the purchase of the place, chiefly because the number of people continually coming and going was, for many reasons, a source of disturbance; but there seemed no hope of ever acquiring it; when, quite unexpectedly, the owner came forward, and inquired if Don Bosco was still desirous to purchase. Don Bosco said that he was, but that he had then no means of doing so. "That need make no difference," said the proprietor, "I am in no hurry for the money."

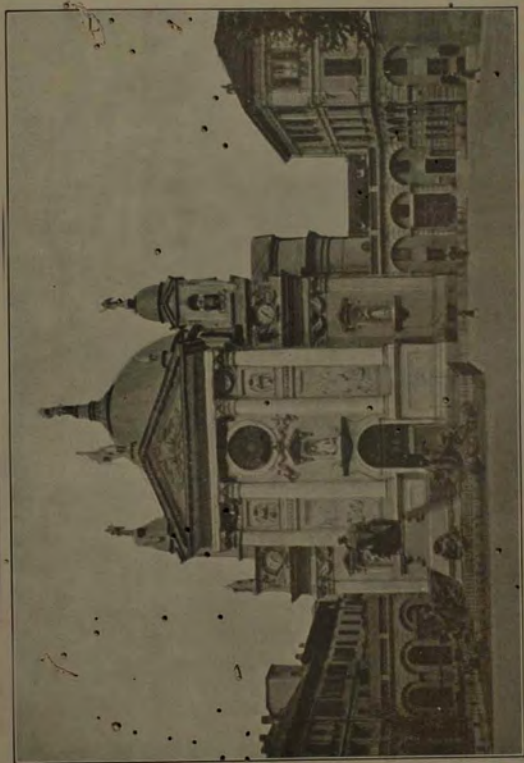
The contract was accordingly signed, and in that same year the building was occupied by a section of the boarders; there was some little distance between the two houses, which were joined up at a later date, and on that account the new school was somewhat humorously known as Sicily, being separated from the continent. This addition to the premises made it possible to accept a greater number of boys, and made the general working more convenient. The increase,

however, soon made its effects felt in other quarters. It was now found that the Church of St. Francis of Sales was too small to contain even the whole of one section, artisans or students. Moreover, it had been decided to extend the printing department, which required more room and light, and extra equipment. At that time, the church was used not only by the Oratory boys, but also by the boys who lived in the neighbourhood, and by many adults who were at some distance from their parish church. Most of them could not now be admitted on account of want of room. Having long had the idea of erecting a grand temple in honour of Our Lady Help of Christians, Don Bosco now began to cast around for a place, and for the means to carry out his idea. He was often heard to say that he had already seen the church as in a vision, and had seen the place where it was to be built; but, how could it be raised, with no means to pay for it? One day, in answer to a person who was dissuading him from risking too much, he said: "Your reasons are familiar to me, I know them quite well, but I also know that the time demands it, that God wishes it, and wishes that I should do it."

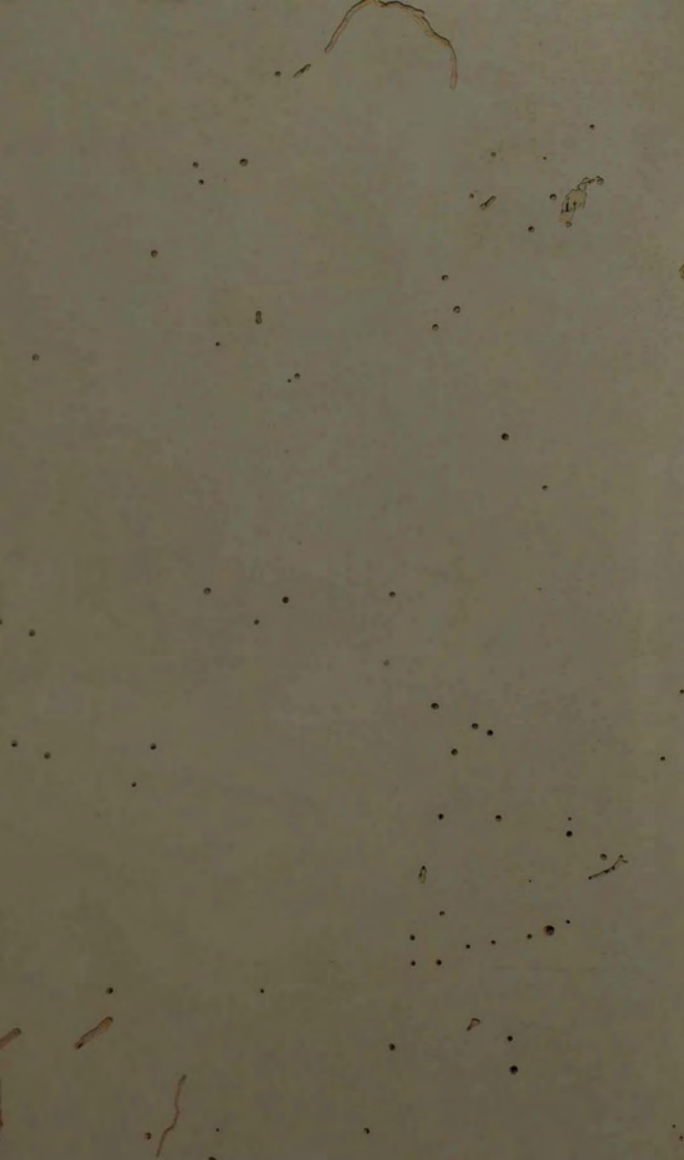
In the year 1863, he set himself resolutely to make a beginning. He opened proceedings by getting the necessary authorization from the Government, and writing circulars and letters. He fixed on the site, and had plans drawn up, which revealed the project of a vast church in honour of Our Lady, capable of seating several hundreds of the faithful. Cavaliere Anthony Spezia drew up a design in accordance with the views proposed to him by Don Bosco, but it was not long before the enemy bethought himself of overthrowing this new project.

The chief difficulties came from the Municipal Council. The architect of the Council seemed to have made up his mind not to approve the plans, and he objected strongly to the title, which, he said, was unpopular and inopportune.

But Don Bosco replied:



BASILICA OF OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS.



how can you, who have no means, think of undertaking it?"

"Ceave that to me," replied Don Bosco; "I do not ask you for the money, but only for the approbation." This being finally given, the work was commenced. Inquisitive people came from all quarters to see the excavations, and many different views were expressed. Various queries were made and left unanswered.

"However will Don Bosco manage to carry it through?" asked one.

"He will be loaded with debts," said another.

"Pius IX will give him the money," suggested others.

"He must have found a treasure," was the opinion of some, while others again foretold a case of bankruptcy.

"It is rashness, it is madness," was the considered verdict of other prudent minds.

All had something to say on the point, and Don Bosco's name was in everybody's mouth. He, however, proceeded with the work, taking no notice of critics or prophets; but it may be best to add here, for the instruction of some who may be disposed to condemn a seeming rashness, that Don Bosco used to say: "Before taking any enterprise in hand, we should first of all examine whether it will be for the greater glory of God; when we have found that it is, we may go forward with it, notwithstanding apparent difficulties and the work will succeed."

To his own immediate followers he said: "The Mother of God will look after the building of her church; I shall be nothing more than an instrument in the work." And it was indeed seen how everything happened exactly as he had said, and Our Lady caused help to come in from all quarters by means of the wonderful favours, both spiritual and temporal, with which she rewarded her devout clients.

When the site was prepared, and the excavations made for the foundations of the new church, the contractor proposed that the ceremony of laying the

foundation stone should be performed. Don Bosco invited some of the neighbouring clergy to officiate, and many Co-operators to assist at it. When the ceremony was over, he turned to the builder and said: "I had better give you something to pay for the commencement of the work. I am afraid it will not be much, but it will be all that I am worth." He then drew out his purse, and, carefully opening it, emptied the contents into the hand of the builder, who, naturally, expected a considerable sum to make its appearance. He was mistaken, however, for no amount of shaking could bring forth more than forty centesimi. Don Bosco then smiled, and said: "Never mind; Our Lady will provide for her own house."

Without attaching more than human importance to it, it is proper to touch here on a subject which was much discussed at the Oratory at this period. Don Bosco had often hinted that he had not much more time in which to work, and on one occasion he said: "There are not more than two years of life remaining to me." To those who were intimate with him, this was no new topic, and they urged him, for the sake of his boys, to pray for at least another twenty years of life. They even asked him what they should do so as to obtain it. He replied that they should unite with him in the warfare that he was continually waging against the enemy of souls. "If I am left to myself, my life will very soon be worn out, for I have resolved not to give way, even if I fall on the battlefield. Help me then in the warfare against sin; when I see the devil hiding away in some corner of the house to bring ruin to souls, I am often so completely depressed, that I doubt if any martyrdom is more painful. I'm made like that; even if I had a whole army against me, I would not yield."

Then he noticed the troubled looks of many who stood around, and speaking to the clerics, some of whom were already in holy orders, he said: "Well, pray to God, and I hope to be able to assist all of you when you say your First Mass." The impression made

on the Oratory by these events was lasting, and with one accord the boys united in asking for the preservation of the life of their father and master. It was at the same time a striking proof of the moral force which Don Bosco wielded over the hearts of the boys.

His work now became more complex than ever. Besides the direction of the House and the building of the new church, for which he had just organised a very successful lottery, he did not leave the school-work aside. The education authorities had temporarily given their approbation, as has been pointed out, but on condition that the specified qualifications should be quickly obtained. Don Bosco accordingly chose some of his teachers who had formerly been pupils under him, and proposed them for authorization. They had completed a course of philosophy and theology in a State seminary, and this course was at that time recognised as a qualification for admission to University lectures, especially to the literary course. As a matter of fact, there was actually, at the time, studying at the University, a number of priests who had been admitted solely on the above title. But not one of the University Senate would agree to recognise this title in those whom Don Bosco presented, and this only because he could not quote the exact law which made the provision referred to. When, afterwards he did find it, he was told he must regard it as abrogated.

These proposed teachers had already attended various courses of University lectures, but not as internal students, and had done the exercises set every week; notwithstanding this, the entrance examination was insisted upon. These difficulties arose one after the other, and it appeared as though everything was being done to wear out Don Bosco's perseverance, so that he would be too late for the coming scholastic year.

At any rate, the authorities could not deny admission to the entrance examination, which took place in July; and for the Oratory candidates it was a brilliant success in every way. Four were presented, and as they were pioneers in public University examinations, their names

should be recorded. They were the two clerical students Cerruti and Durando, and the two priests Don Anfossi and Don Francesca. These were the four who had to be sacrificed to the whims of the University authorities. The latter seemed to think that Don Bosco exaggerated their talents, but the special Commission appointed for the examination soon altered its opinion. The very first one questioned quite took the examiners by surprise, and the writer well remembers seeing the famous Professor Rayneri, who was presiding over one examining body, leave his place and go over to Professor Vallauri. Rayneri, evidently quite at a loss, said to the professor: "Tell me, professor, what vote shall I give to Don Bosco's teachers?" "Oh," replied the professor, "have you not examined them?" "Yes indeed, there is nothing they do not know." "There is no need to tell me that," replied the great latinist, "they are the best students attending my course."

The four candidates secured full marks and general praise. It was learned afterwards that Professor Vallauri had not been allowed to take his rightful place on the examining Commission, because of his loyalty to Don Bosco. The other University students gave a regular ovation to these four of their companions and heartily congratulated them. It was a comfort to Don Bosco, who had of late been somewhat anxious over the result of all these difficulties with the education authorities, and had shared the misgivings of this little band of teachers who were taking part in the labours of his mission.

The examination made no slight stir even outside the University, and all the professors shared the admiration of the examiners. Professor Prieri, Greek lecturer and member of the examining body, spoke enthusiastically of it when leaving the examination room with one of the candidates, and said: "You people from the Oratory must have studied very hard; you can take it from me that your enemies were not all within the University; you have them elsewhere, and very powerful ones." Just then a certain well-known writer passed by. The

professor called him and said: "It is a pity you were not at the University this morning; you would have been present at the brilliant success of this young candidate." There is no doubt they must study very hard at Don Bosco's Institute."

This happy termination of the difficulties which prevented the recognition of his teachers, was a source of great satisfaction to Don Bosco, for he thus secured adequate staff for the classes at the Oratory; but soon there arose new and pressing needs. In that year, the first Salesian House outside Turin was to be opened, and teachers would have to be provided for it. In reply to many requests, and with the co-operation of several influential persons, a college at Mirabello had been equipped, and all were looking forward to the day on which the new experiment was to be tried. Don Bosco had first gone to this town in 1860, and had convinced himself that there were good prospects of success for one of his Houses in that town. He spoke to the Bishop of the diocese and to some influential residents, the result of the arrangements being that a site was chosen and a building commenced in 1861, which, after two years, was brought to completion. The next step was to select the staff for the new institute. Everything seemed to point to Don Rua as the Superior, and no one, in fact, was believed so capable and so well suited as he, to reproduce Don Bosco's ideals at Mirabello, and be another Don Bosco to the boys who should enter the new school. This opinion is substantiated by a letter, since found in the archives, in which Don Bosco communicated to Don Rua the choice he had made of him as the new Superior at Mirabello; part of it runs as follows:

"As Divine Providence has called us to open a House for the benefit of the youth of Mirabello, I have thought it most conducive to the glory of Almighty God, to entrust its welfare to you.

"But as I shall not be near you, either to advise or remind you of what you have already seen in practice, I have thought it best to write a few things here which

will serve you as a guide in your future labours. I speak to you as a father when he opens his heart to the dearest of his sons. Receive my words, therefore, as a pledge of my affection and as an assurance of my ardent desire that you should gain many souls to God."

Then followed some words of wisdom which have since been the guiding rule of the Superiors of Salesian Houses. The news of this choice was not a surprise to anyone; but it was a matter of great consideration to Don Bosco. Just at that time they were both at Montemagno, with others, for their retreat, and the grace of God was working almost visibly in the hearts of those first Salesians. The question of teachers was still unsolved and seemed to forebode a repetition of the old difficulties; for although the new House was to be a preparatory Seminary, and in complete dependence on the bishop, it was stipulated that the teachers were to have the recognised teaching certificates. It would have been useless to apply for the approbation of the institute without at least two having the recognised certificates, or their equivalent. There were several among the priests and clerics who were quite prepared for the examination as far as knowledge went, and who had also spent some years in teaching, but they had no academic qualifications. There seemed no way out of the difficulty. It had formerly been customary to hold extra examinations at different times for the purpose of conferring teaching diplomas, but none had been held for some years back; there was apparently nothing to do but go through the four years' course of studies, and postpone the opening of the school. At any rate it was God's work and He would provide for it.

In the month of July a quite unexpected announcement was made to the effect that, on account of the dearth of teachers, an extraordinary session would be held in the month of September, in that and the following years, for those who were studying for a teacher's certificate. Don Bosco saw in this announcement the hand of Providence and immediately told some of his subjects to prepare themselves. The time

was short; there were hardly two months in, which to attempt to cover part of the work prescribed, and to some it seemed at first altogether too short a time. But those were truly the heroic times, and no sacrifice was reckoned too great. Don Bosco, therefore found several who devoted all their energies to the work, although they had only just finished the scholastic year with the boys. The syllabus for the examination was studied, and by September the candidates were calmly confident and prepared to stand the test.

Don Bosco wished to make use of this opportunity to settle a similar question. All these candidates had already obtained certificates in philosophy from the Seminary of Turin, and these certificates were as a rule recognised by the University authorities. But the Principal had some prejudice or other against Don Bosco's work and he made difficulties about recognising them. However, Don Bosco recommended the matter to God, and a few days afterwards he heard that the Principal had gone away for a time, leaving a Vice-Principal in his place, who made no difficulty about admitting the candidates. In fact, this examiner remarked at the time, that he had reasons for knowing that the Seminary studies were more thorough than the courses at many Government schools.

All were admitted. The examination was very successful, one candidate obtaining full marks, the others passing very creditably. Here were plenty of teachers to supply the new House, and on the 23rd of October, 1863, the school at Mirabello was opened.

That year has always been regarded as marking a new period in the history of Don Bosco's work, for it was the commencement of the wonderful development of the Salesian Society, to the foundation of which Don Bosco had put his hand and consecrated his talents and energy.

The suffragan bishops of the archdiocese of Turin had spoken very highly of the new Society to His Holiness Pope Pius IX in order that he might bestow upon it his blessing and approbation. In one of these

letters of recommendation we read an appreciation of these early followers of Don Bosco, "These new priests," the words run, "live according to certain rules, and with such exemplary conduct, that they are a source of edification."

The Bishop of Cuneo wrote: "The Salesian Society has already produced such good results among the youth of Piedmont, that it is a source of consolation and admiration to all. It deserves to flourish and expand."

The following are the words of the Bishop of Mondovi: "The Congregation of Don Bosco is destined to do much good both for the Church and for society, especially in these unfortunate times when both are assailed in their dearest hopes, namely, the young, who are in so many ways exposed to corruption."

Thus, after a period of cloud and storm, the sun shone out once more. The short time which now remains to be described in this history of Don Bosco's early work, is entirely one of consolation and gratitude, for now it was no longer the time of trial and promise, but a period in which Don Bosco commenced to gather in some of the fruits of his labours.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Removal of the Capital. — The school at Lanzo. — Blessing of the foundation stone. — Christian charity. — Death of Don Alasonatti. — Don Bosco at Florence. — Consultation with the Minister. — The Bishop of Guastalla at the Oratory. — Cardinal De-Angelis. — Conclusion.

IN the different phases of human affairs the action of the Providence of God is often unmistakable.

He turns the sufferings of the afflicted to their spiritual advantage and their greater reward in Heaven, and directs everything towards the fulfilment of His holy Will. There is ample proof of this in the case of the Oratory.

Attracted by the name of Don Bosco, boys had come from all parts of Italy, filling every corner of the Oratory, and bringing with them, moreover, the best of goodwill and good resolutions. Like the hermits of old, who forsook the world to practise Christian perfection in the Thebaid desert, these boys came to live at the Oratory, determined to preserve themselves from the corruption which then prevailed to such an extent in the schools.

Nearly all the seminaries were closed, and their peaceful inhabitants, whom the bishops regarded as the brightest hope of the Church, were scattered far and wide. Moreover, these boys were constrained to attend other schools, from which all ideas of God had been banished, where the boast was freedom from all belief, and where all iniquity flourished. In such times it is no exaggeration to state that the Oratory was, to a great many, what the ark of Noah was in the days of the flood: a place of refuge and of salvation. The

Oratory at Valdocco, under Don Bosco's wise direction and by his holiness and wonderful power of attraction, came to resemble a garden where the flowers of every virtue flourished.

About this time the city of Turin witnessed many important occurrences, which, on account of after-events, should not be omitted in this narrative.

In the month of September, 1864, the first rumours were spread about, which brought to light the political movement having as its object the removal of the Capital from Turin to Florence, and which gave rise to considerable disturbance in Turin, and even to bloodshed. At the Oratory they could not see the trend of events, nor did they expect such serious developments; but it may be well believed that it was impossible to be without misgiving for the safety of friends and relations.

It was on the 21st of September that, as Don Bosco spoke to the boys after the night prayers, according to his custom, he recommended them to pray for their native town, for its people, and particularly for the benefactors of the Oratory, and to seek the protection of our heavenly Patroness, the Help of Christians. During that very night, several rifle shots were heard from the direction of the Square of San Carlo, while the confused sounds of the murmurs of the crowd were audible enough from time to time. It was a night of anxiety and even of alarm and consternation, heightened yet more by the presence of the cavalry stationed in the Corso San Massimo, now called the Corso Regina Margherita, to be ready to suppress all attempts at revolt. In the Oratory they had grave fears for the future welfare of the institute, as the change of Capital would probably mean the removal of many distinguished families, among whom were Don Bosco's chief benefactors. But the Oratory had even then assumed more than a local importance and character, for boys came from as far as Sicily to take either the scholastic course or to learn some art or trade; the numbers had already exceeded six hundred, and soon grew to eight hundred.

On the other hand, those who had most to fear from the political disturbances were the very men who had given Don Bosco such anxiety in past days, and who had attempted to destroy the work of God.

It should be mentioned, in passing, that in the same year Don Bosco opened the college of Lanzo, at the request of the municipal authorities, and at the urgent desire of the Rev. Don Albert, who was quite an apostle in that period of disturbance. It was a continual source of grief to him to see the young being snatched from the influence of the Church, and he was convinced that the one means to preserve the faith in their young hearts was religious instruction. That zealous pastor of souls at last succeeded in arranging that Don Bosco should re-open the boarding-school; but there the matter stood for some time while difficulties of various kinds were being met. A good deal of correspondence had passed between Turin and Lanzo, but the matter was at last settled in July, 1864, when Don Bosco went for his retreat to the Sanctuary of St. Ignatius, which lies among the neighbouring wooded hills. He then concluded the agreement, proposing to open the school that very year, as in fact he did. While staying at the Sanctuary of St. Ignatius, Don Bosco did not lose sight of his work at the Oratory. In this connection there is inserted here a letter he wrote from his place of retreat, showing some incidents of his travels, for it seldom happened that Don Bosco went on a journey without adventures more or less fortunate.

The letter is as follows :

“ TO MY DEAR CHILDREN OF THE ORATORY OF
St. FRANCIS OF SALES.

Knowing that you would be pleased to receive some news from me that might interest and amuse you. I have thought of giving you a short account of my journey from Turin to St. Ignatius, where I am now staying.

On Monday the 18th, at four o'clock, I made my way to where the coach starts, and as I feel sick when

travelling inside, I paid for a seat outside. But, on returning a little later, I found that somebody else had already got my place. For a moment I was at a loss. One gentleman pointed out to the occupant my claim to the place, but unsuccessfully. Then another person, very seriously, addressed himself to me, and said: 'I don't mind changing, on condition that you pay for my inconvenience.' 'Very good,' I replied. I then gave him a coin and he descended.

Being settled in my place I enjoyed the sunlight, then a little wind and some dust; and just as I was recounting to my fellow-passengers how, on that very day two years before, a great storm had raged as we were travelling between Caselle and Lanzo, the weather immediately changed for the worse; it lightened and thundered and commenced to rain just as we entered Caselle. Of the eight who had seats on the top of the omnibus, I was the only one who had an umbrella, so the others all clustered around me, just as you do when we take our recreation together or when I have some little present to give away. But if we were disposed to be communicative before, the storm put us on quite familiar terms.

There were two doctors, two lawyers, a literary man and two others. We discoursed on Egyptian, Persian, Greek and Italian history, but their aim always seemed to be to get Don Bosco at variance with Sacred Scripture. To tell the truth, when they were put to the test, I was convinced that though they were informed on matters of a light and trivial nature, of Bible History they knew nothing; therefore, after a certain amount of discussion we changed the subject.

The topic then came round to philosophy and theology; some tried to sustain various erroneous systems, but their propositions did not need much confuting; they then became so hot on the question of the existence of God, that I thought it better to keep silence a little, till I could say something to the point and have some chance of an audience. When they were calmed a little I jokingly put forward the story of the hen, and then

asked: 'Now, doctor, what is your opinion: which was made first, the egg or the hen?'

'It was certainly the hen, who afterwards laid the egg.'

'Where did the hen come from, then?'

'From the egg.'

'Who then made the first egg from which the hen was hatched?'

The doctor was going to reply, but hesitated about his answer, and turning to the others, said: 'Some of you give an answer?' But no one ventured an opinion.

'Tell me, then,' I said, 'what is your definite opinion, was the egg first, or the hen?'

The poor doctor then got in a rage, and jumping up, said: 'The hen and the egg may go to the devil. I know nothing about it.'

The whole party laughed aloud and gave him a clap, and then another said: 'I should consign the egg and the hen to better hands than those of the devil; if a good cook had them now they would be welcome after this rain; as for you, doctor, you may go from the egg to the hen as long as you like, but you must finally conclude that one of them was made by God; similarly we may go back from son to father, but we come finally to a first man created by God.'

At this point the discussion ceased; we told our names, and then the conversation turned on the Oratory and its doings, till we reached Lanzo.

I had thought of passing the night in the town, but as two others were going on, and the rain had ceased, I joined them on the walk to St. Ignatius. It was eight o'clock when we got into the hilly country. After a short time the sky became cloudy, and as it was a dark night we missed our way and got among rocks and crags. While we stood still, hesitating, the clouds passed over and the moon shone out, showing us the path. We pursued it as well as we could, and after treading our way among the rocks and heaps of stones, we finally got to the top; we had only one misgiving,

the loss of one of the company, who disappeared in the dark, but he rejoined us at the summit. We were tired and bruised, and it was already ten o'clock, so we were not quite pleased at discovering that the whole place was locked up and not a living soul could be found. By dint of knocking and calling we at last aroused someone, who prepared us an excellent supper just suited to our appetite; as it was then midnight we sought some repose.

Now I must also bid you good-night. I hope to be able to tell you something more important when I write to-morrow. Pray for me, my dear children, as I do for you. May Our Blessed Lady have you in her keeping. In your communions pray for my intention.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

JOHN BOSCO.

St. Ignatius, July 22nd, 1864 "

A letter from Don Bosco could not be otherwise than most welcome, but this one was especially pleasing to the boys, while it formed a delightful variation of the ordinary short discourse after night prayers. Whilst they were striving to carry out his advice, so as to give him some pleasure on his return, there arrived from Rome a rescript bearing the date of July 23rd, 1864. This was none other than the decree of approbation granted to the Pious Society founded by him for the preservation of his work and spirit. It was the first approbation granted to the Institute in general, and by it he himself was appointed Superior for life, while the period of twelve years was assigned as the duration of the period of office given to his successor.

As the blessing of Isaac was to his son Jacob an inexhaustible fountain of heavenly and earthly blessings, so did that of the Holy Father have its salutary effects on the Oratory. The Festive Oratories which were intended to supply the spiritual wants of so many boys, had increased to three in the city of Turin alone. In like manner there was an increase in the number of Houses and schools, where, along with a Christian

education, the boys were given a solid training in the elementary and upper courses. As was the custom, during the vacation of this year, some of the priests and clerics sat for the University examination in order that they might obtain recognition as classical masters, and to the great satisfaction of Don Bosco, they were all approved.

The problem of arranging the personnel at the Oratory, at Mirabello, and at Lanzo, and how to accommodate the ever increasing number of boys, one would have thought sufficient to keep Don Bosco and the members of his staff fully occupied. However, while the Sanctuary of Mary, Help of Christians, was being built he also commenced extensions at the Oratory itself, in the shape of large schoolrooms which were constructed on the eastern part of the site lately acquired. Shortly afterwards, however, they were adapted to other purposes, for they proved quite insufficient to supply the demand. This continual increase, if on the one hand it gave not a little consolation to the Oratory and to Don Bosco, on the other hand it multiplied his labours to an extraordinary extent. Nor must it be thought that everyone corresponded fully with Don Bosco's solicitude for them. Almost without limit was the holy zeal with which he sought to destroy evil, to promote the good of souls and the glory of God.

He scarcely ever failed to speak to the boys after prayers before they retired to rest, and on these occasions he always gave those brief but golden rules of conduct which, if put into practice, were quite sufficient to make a boy a saint. On one occasion he revealed his inner self, and unfolded his programme of education with the following simple words:

"Don Bosco is the easiest man on earth to please; you may romp and shout and play and get up to as many tricks as you like; he can put up with all that; but take care to do no harm to souls, or you will find him inexorable."

"When a boy enters the House, my very heart is glad, because I see in him a soul to be saved. When

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"When a boy enters the House, my very heart is glad, because I see in him a soul to be saved. When

he is numbered among my children, then he becomes my crown. But there are crowns of two kinds; if a boy corresponds to the care I take of him, if he makes every effort in his power to save his soul, then that boy makes my crown one of roses. But if he refuses to put my words into practice, if I see that he is careless about his soul's welfare, then I assure you he is for me a most painful crown of thorns. If bad boys, besides doing evil, seek to harm others, I can no longer tolerate them, and I shall be obliged to send them away from the Oratory."

This is the way he addressed his boys after their evening prayers, but the few who did not correspond with his desires, who did not wish to yield to the charity of so wise a master, seldom waited to be constrained by force; they either turned over a new leaf, and truly wonderful and sudden conversions were often witnessed, or they asked to leave of their own accord. This course they found necessary because it was not possible to live in the midst of boys who were formal though tacit judges of their wickedness. Such a large number of boys as Don Bosco had under his charge, obedient to the word of one man, was the wonder and admiration of some, but a subject of incredulity to others.

This was the reason why various personages, under one pretext or another, came to visit the Oratory, their real object being to study the system practised there. Perhaps it would not be indiscreet to mention here, in proof of what has already been said, certain facts regarding an audience he is reported to have had with the Minister of War at the time. Don Bosco had gone to the minister to thank him for what he had done for those of his boys who served in the Army, and who, it may be added, had succeeded in gaining the esteem of their superiors and had earned promotion. He had occasion several times to apply to the minister in order to arrange matters concerning military conscription, and it is a duty to state that he always met with a favourable reception.

The character of his institution, and still more his calm way of discussing his affairs and of describing the noisy recreations of his boys, won him the good wishes of all classes, not even excepting military men. During his interview with the minister he said, among other things :

"Your Excellency, I have come to thank you for all you have done for my Oratory, and at the same time to ask another favour."

The minister smiled, and then asked how many boys there were in the Oratory.

"Eight hundred," replied Don Bosco.

"Then there must be a good number of assistants?"

"On the contrary, there are very few."

"Anyhow, the discipline must be very strict?"

"There are no fixed punishments for faults committed, but if on rare occasions there is a question of punishment, a boy is given that which is considered suitable."

"But are not those who break the rules expelled from the House?"

"Not at all. If anyone is really bad, he generally goes of his own accord. This is only natural; for he perceives that his conduct is not compatible with the life of the school."

On another occasion, a certain professor came to visit the Oratory. He was a great admirer of Don Bosco's work, and sought to make it known and to advance its interests as much as it lay in his power. With him was a very serious and grave gentleman; he seemed one of those wise men described by the poet, who "speak seldom, and then only in subdued tones." Gifts, such as these, qualified him in an eminent degree for the office he held of Superintendent of State Prisons. After having spoken some few words of greeting, the professor, turning to his companion, said: "Up to the present we have tried what force can do, now let us see the effect of Christian charity." Without more ado they rose from their seats and proceeded to inspect the various parts of the Oratory.

But while Don Bosco was mainly occupied with the interests of the boys of the Oratory, who readily corresponded with his endeavours, he found time now and then to visit the schools at Mirabello and Lanzo, verifying in his own case what was said of our Divine Saviour, that He went about doing good; nor did he neglect any means which might promote the object he had so much at heart, the completion of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. The difficulties which had to be contended with were not light, and one after another seemed to retard its progress. When the usual trenches and excavations were finished and the foundations were on the point of being laid, it was discovered that the soil was very damp and even muddy, quite unsafe for a building of such a nature. It was necessary to continue the excavations to a greater depth and to drive a large number of piles into the subsoil; and all this, implying more labour and material, seriously increased the cost. But by patience and perseverance, the works were ready for the ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone on April 27th, 1865. The son of King Victor Emmanuel II, Prince Amadeus, Duke of Aosta, graciously accepted the invitation to take part in the ceremony. The great preparations which had been made to worthily commemorate the occasion were very successful. All the floor space was covered with planks and matting; a small wooden altar was placed on the spot where the high altar would subsequently be erected.

Fixed in this wooden altar was the Cross, surrounded by lights and flowers, and in front of it a fine carpet had been laid. A kind of large tent was raised above and around all this, forming three sides of a rectangle, open in the front. On the side behind the altar was spread the national flag with the Savoy Coat of Arms in the centre. On the right was the covering of the foundation stone, the trowel, the silver hammer, and the small case for the acts of the notary. The centre of the space was occupied by a large awning supported by four long, decorated poles. A raised platform on

the Gospel side provided accommodation for the singers, in front of whom stood the band of the Oratory. On the Epistle side was a special stand with a reserved, covered seat for Prince Amadeus, while at the entrance a grand triumphal arch bearing a suitable inscription was raised over the wooden flight of steps which led up to the flooring of the church. About one o'clock a violent wind raged, threatening to carry away the whole improvised structure, but after about half-an-hour it ceased. It seemed like an angry attempt of Satan to impede the progress of the function, but it was unsuccessful. The officiating prelate was the Bishop of Susa, Mgr. Odone.

An immense multitude of citizens and visitors thronged to the place of the ceremony. Overcoming many difficulties, it had been finally arranged that all the boys from the school at Mirabello should come to Turin to join their companions at the Oratory, so that the boys themselves made quite a small army. The parchment record of the proceedings was read, and, having been signed by the dignitaries present, it was enclosed with other documents in a glass prepared for it. This was hermetically sealed and fixed in its place. The blessing being then given by the bishop, according to the rubrics, another stone was placed on the top, and Prince Amadeus smoothed down the first trowel of mortar. The bricklayers then continued their work to the height of about three feet.

When the religious function was over, the visitors went over the whole building, and afterwards assisted at an entertainment given by the boys. Some musical and literary pieces were first performed, and then a dialogue recited, explaining briefly the circumstances which had led up to and brought about the day's celebration. Solemn Benediction concluded the whole proceedings, after which the prince and his escort left, declaring that his experience that afternoon had given him great satisfaction and pleasure. Among other proofs of his interest in the work was a gift to Don Bosco of five hundred lire, and knowing that the boys

were greatly interested in gymnastics, he provided some apparatus taken from his own gymnasium. The presence of these appliances in the playgrounds was a constant reminder of the generosity of the prince.

As a finishing touch to the account of these celebrations, may be mentioned that near the enclosure of the building, in a corner of the yard, there grew a small apple-tree which was already in bud. Don Bosco was surprised to see it so flourishing, and told the boys not to touch it, but to let the apples grow, as he intended to send them, when ripe, as a present to Prince Amadeus.

The boys in all their boisterous games never touched the little fruit-tree, so that the apples not only ripened, but grew to an extraordinary size. The thought of the tree and its fruit had quite passed out of Don Bosco's mind, when one of the apples, being quite ripe, fell to the ground. Putting it on a leaf, one of the boys bore it to the refectory and placed it before Don Bosco. The latter then had the five others gathered and sent them to the prince, relating the circumstances to him. The young duke thanked Don Bosco and sent him a handsome sum of money, telling him to get some fruit for his boys in return for the splendid apples they had sent him.

The good results of the Oratory now began to be more apparent. For the last four years, at each of the various ordinations, some clerics from the Oratory had been presented, and the ever increasing number of priests at his disposal allowed Don Bosco to think of putting some of his plans into execution for the extension of his work. Priests and clerics were assigned by him to the work of the Festive Oratories of St. Francis, St. Aloysius, and of the Guardian Angels. He also sent priests to give missions in the neighbouring villages.

At this same time the Oratory suffered a great trial in the loss of one of its most zealous workers.

For the last twelve years Don Alasonatti had laboured indefatigably by the side of Don Bosco. A firm friend of his, he chose the Oratory as the field of his labours

and carried out Don Bosco's wishes in the minutest detail. But in this year he found it impossible to bear his burden any longer, and after trying the change to his native place, he returned to the Oratory, going thence to the more bracing air of the hills around Lanzo. But soon afterwards he died a most holy and happy death.

The following is part of a letter which relates the sad news to Don Bosco :

" Don Alasonatti, our former Prefect, passed away last night exactly at twelve o'clock. Our Lady evidently wished him to keep the feast of her Maternity with her devout clients in Heaven. I cannot give you now the details of his holy death, but must send on to you his last wishes. Just after he had received Extreme Unction he made a sign for me to approach, and taking my hand, he said : ' I shall very soon be gone ; perhaps by to-morrow I shall be dead, do not forget to pray for me. Tell Don Bosco to make a *memento* in his Mass for the next month, for the repose of my soul. Say goodbye for me to all the priests and clerics of the House. I have nothing to leave, as I have already given everything to the House.' And here he stopped for a little while, as breathing was so difficult ; then he went on : ' Get the boys at the Oratory to pray for me ; tell them to excuse my occasional severity with them, and also my omitting to punish them when I ought.' Then turning to me, and pressing my hand, he said : ' May God bless you, so that you may persevere in the work you have begun ; there is such great need of priests to work among the young, for we seldom meet any boys nowadays who have preserved their innocence.' "

" Having said this, he went on with some pious ejaculations of his own, thanking God for His great mercy. ' I am about to die, and then at least I shall be able to love Thee without fear of offending Thee. I shall soon go in *domum æternitatis meæ*. I belong wholly to Thee, I make a willing offering of all that I have ; all my hope is in Thee, *Exurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici ejus*.' Then he seemed to have some

misgiving about his want of entire obedience to Don Bosco, and on my reassuring him, he again went on with his pious ejaculations."

His loss had already been preceded by that of Don Dominic Ruffino, first Director of the college at Lanzo. Only twenty-five years of age, he was a young man of splendid promise who had already accomplished much in his important position; but half-way through the year he had to come back to the Oratory, where he died on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Yet one more priest had to be sacrificed; quite young, of great promise, but illness carried him off too.

Although these were sore trials to Don Bosco, it was apparent to all that in other ways the Oratory was visibly blessed by God. Having been invited to go to Florence, which town had recently been constituted the Capital, he readily accepted the invitation, hoping to obtain means for the extension of his work. It was the first time that he had visited Florence, and although he relied with confidence on Divine Providence, he was not very sanguine about the outcome of his visit. Before going, he recommended himself to the prayers of the boys at the Oratory, and told them that he placed his proposed journey and its happy issue in their hands.

It is quite a well-known fact, and so there can be no fear of exaggerating, that Don Bosco's visit to Florence was a real triumph. From notes written at the time and from the daily papers, the fact is ascertained that he stayed at the Archiepiscopal Palace, where every mark of honour was paid him. The Metropolitan Chapter, wishing to show their esteem, invited him to visit their magnificent cathedral. The archbishop conveyed the message to Don Bosco and accompanied him to the church about ten o'clock. All the canons, in their robes, were awaiting him in the sacristy with the Bishop of Fiesole and the Vicar-General of Prato. At his entrance each advanced and welcomed him, and when all were seated, some addresses and verses were read. Don Bosco was asked to reply, and although such a recep-

tion and invitation came as a complete surprise, he rose to speak.

He recalled to their minds that, in that place where they were then gathered together, the Council of Florence had been begun, that in those very stalls had once sat the Fathers of the Church, and in that hall had sounded the voice of the Legates of the Holy See; he then referred to the words of praise and encouragement which the Pope had addressed to the assembly, concluding by saying that he could have no better sentiments than those to express, in the presence of so many reverend prelates, and to the illustrious Chapter of the Cathedral of Florence.

All were in wonder at these words, for his reference to the historical circumstances was at once surprising and complimentary.

But Don Bosco's object in going to Florence had been to obtain aid for the works he had set on foot, and the hand of Providence was not closed against him. Seemingly, it was just as he left the above-mentioned church that he met several distinguished ladies and gentlemen, and hearing that he was soon to leave the town, one of their number said to him :

"Why are you going back so soon to Turin? Could you not stay some few days with us?"

"My boys are awaiting my return," he said.

"What does that matter? Let them wait. They will see you when you go back."

"What does it matter! I have to provide them with their daily food. If I do not go back, who will pay for their bread?"

"How many are there?"

"About a thousand."

"But if you consented to remain, your boys would be all right for a few days."

"For my own part I would remain here willingly enough; and if you agree to provide my boys with bread, I shall stay till the end of the week."

"And how much would it cost to keep your boys for these few days?"

"Ten thousand lire."

"And if that sum is found, will you stay here?"

"There is nothing else to prevent my stopping."

"Well, I shall provide the ten thousand lire."

"Very well, then I shall stay."

"Do you want me to bring you the money now? I have not so large a sum with me. If you like, it shall be sent to the Archbishop's House, this evening."

"That will do very well, and may God reward your generosity."

In the evening Don Bosco received the sum promised by this benefactress, and he stayed at Florence.

In speaking of Don Bosco's visit to that town, and of his efforts on behalf of his new church, there are some other facts relating to this period which call for mention here.

It happened not a few times, as history will some day make known, that he was called to the Government Offices on affairs of the greatest importance. It thus happened that Don Bosco made the acquaintance of the ministers, and as he was once talking to a group of them, one of their number said:

"How do you manage to cover all those expenses for your Oratory and for so many other Houses? It seems quite a secret, or, I should say, a mystery."

"Oh, I am always going forward like a steam engine," said Don Bosco.

"I don't quite understand. How do you keep the engine going?"

"It must have plenty of fire inside and something to feed the fire."

"I quite understand the necessity of that, but to what fire do you refer?"

"The fire of faith and confidence in Almighty God," Don Bosco then replied, "and without that, empires fall, kingdoms are shattered, and the work of man is useless."

These words, pronounced in the solemn manner that only Don Bosco could use, made a great impression on

the speakers, and convinced them that Don Bosco was indeed a man of God.

On his part, Don Bosco was grateful to God for choosing him, a poor shepherd boy, as he styled himself, to accomplish something for the glory of God, for the benefit of His Church, and for his country's welfare.

Don Bosco found his days very full during his visit to Florence, and it is wonderful how in the midst of so many occupations, he allowed no details, however minute, to escape him, when they were in connection with his work on behalf of youth. In a letter of those times are to be found the very counsels which he sent to the boys at the Oratory to enable them to prepare well for the approaching Christmas festival, for he did not return to Turin till the opening days of the following year, 1866.

He was occupied during this year in another direction, and this work did a great deal towards making his name known far and wide. It has already been related how, in 1854, he opened his door to large numbers of boys who were left homeless by the cholera which raged in Turin and its neighbourhood. In the year 1865 the town of Ancona was visited by the same epidemic, and Don Bosco offered to receive a hundred boys. When they arrived, ill-clad and ill-mannered, having been neglected during the plague, Don Bosco saw the necessity of Festive Oratories in that part of Italy, and later on he had an opportunity of carrying out his plans.

To complete the history of the first twenty-five years of the Oratory, a few things of importance remain to be told. The works within the building area of the new church went on apace; the walls were already a good height, and the advance of the structure placed Don Bosco under the necessity of devising new means for raising money. In May of that year also, there arrived at Turin an exiled prelate, Mgr. Rota, Bishop of Guastalla; he sought hospitality at several places without avail; he went to the Cottolengo, but they had no

suitable apartments and directed him to the Oratory. Don Bosco was at a loss what to do. His own rooms were then, as always, very small and poorly furnished; how could he offer them to a bishop? This difficulty was overcome by the gracious prelate himself. "They tell me that you receive the poor and homeless," he said to Don Bosco. "Now, who is more abandoned than I? Consider me as one of your boys and give me just the lodging you would give one of them."

Don Bosco's fears being thus allayed, he received him very gladly. When it became generally known throughout the Oratory who this mysterious person was, and why he had come to dwell there, everyone regarded his coming as a great privilege. "It is a sign of God's blessing," Don Bosco said in the evening, and later on a crowd of boys gathered around the bishop's window and welcomed him with cheers. He went out very little, spending most of his time in the two small rooms allotted to him. What surprised the boys most of all was to see him going every week to confession, and waiting his turn just as one of themselves. When he came into the sacristy the first time for confession, the boys all got up to make way for him, but he retired to another part of the room and waited for the others to go before him.

He stayed at the Oratory till October, when all those bishops and cardinals who had been exiled for fear of their hostility to the new regime were allowed to return. Cardinal De-Angelis, who had lived at the *Casa delle Missioni* since 1861, where he had been frequently visited by Don Bosco, had promised to call at the Oratory as soon as he was at liberty, for he had heard a good deal about Don Bosco's work and always enquired about it whenever he had an opportunity. Don Bosco related that on a certain day, when an audacious proposal was being made at the Senate against the clergy, and one of the senators had proposed a plan of persecution, one of the Oratory boys came and asked him to go to Cardinal De-Angelis and tell him to prepare to depart. As a reply, the cardinal took up a

paper and showed him what was being discussed in the Senate.

"In spite of that," replied Don Bosco, "your Eminence had better get ready."

"Well, when I am finally set at liberty I shall not forget to visit the Oratory."

"You will always be welcome, whenever you come."

"Will you show me your young prophet?"

"Certainly. I have to keep a watchful eye on him, in case he begins to think too much of himself; but on that occasion I shall bring him forward for you to see."*

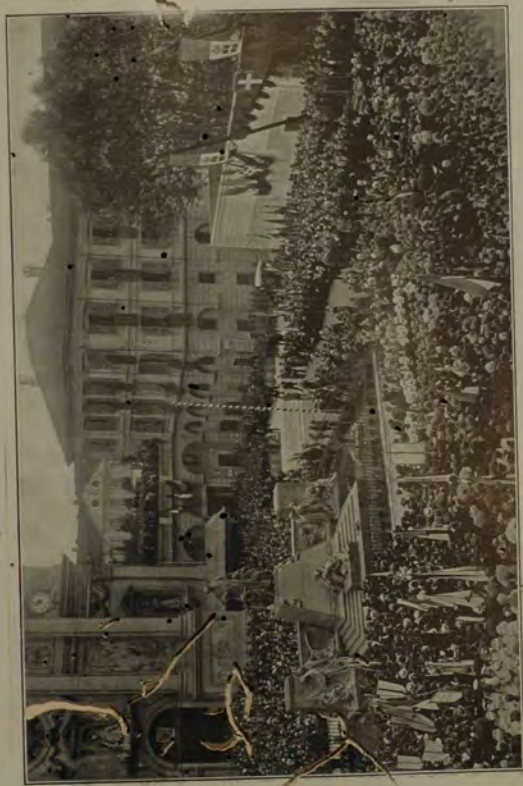
One day at last the cardinal did come, and the boys had an opportunity of knowing the illustrious prelate who had borne so many hardships with admirable constancy.

The kindness and gentleness which characterised his dealings with all were a proof that if the princes of the Church were its only enemies, then the country should enjoy unlimited peace and prosperity. He assured the boys that when he reached Rome, whither he was going, he would have many things to tell the Holy Father about the Oratory, which he would help to the best of his power. Everyone regarded that as a happy day when the House was honoured by the presence of a faithful apostle who had spent more than six years in prison for Christ's sake.

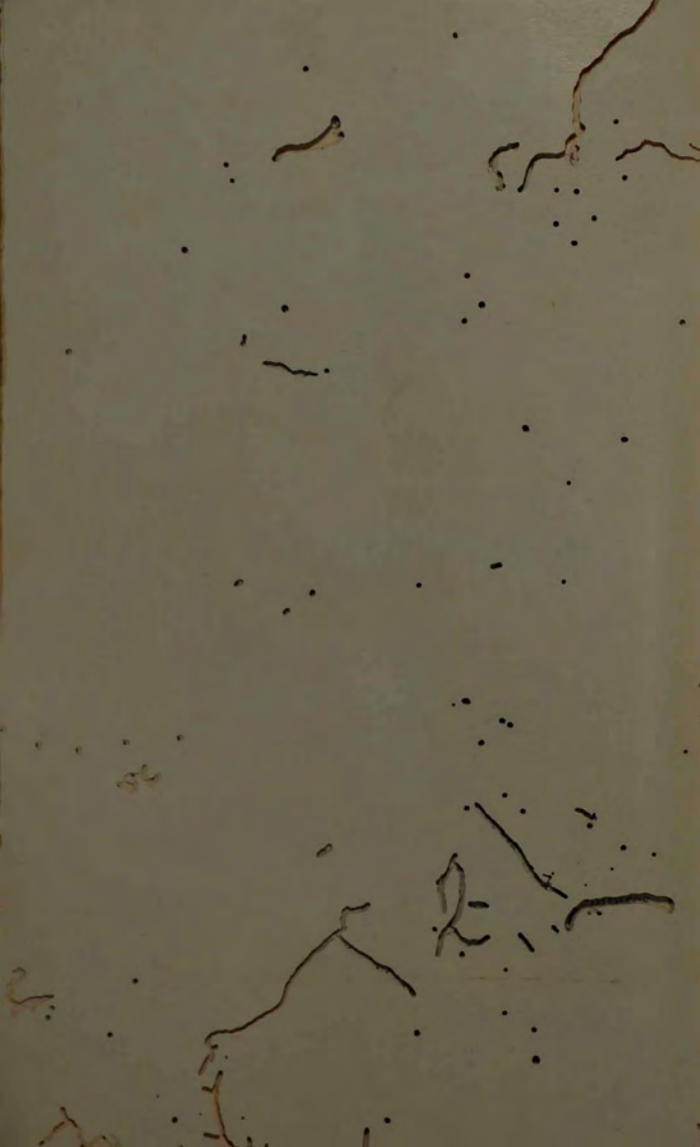
Writing to one of his friends, he said: "I always remember with pleasure my visit to the Oratory placed under the patronage of St. Francis of Sales and Our Lady Help of Christians, which, with the help of Providence, was brought into existence and is kept up by the zeal of a humble priest."

Bishop Noya also returned to his diocese after his stay at the Oratory. He had been always occupied, always busy in some work for the good of souls. Count

* It has never been discovered who was the boy here referred to. It was a custom of Don Bosco to change his usual benignity when dealing with boys who were given extraordinary favours, and even to treat them somewhat severely.



MONUMENT TO ST. JOHN BOSCO IN TURIN.



Radicati and the family of the Appiani were of great service to the exiled prelate in many ways, and it was principally through them that, when he returned to his diocese, he succeeded in regaining possession of his episcopal palace. The bishop afterwards sent a long letter to the Press, in which he referred to the Oratory in the highest terms, and especially thanked its holy Founder.

This narrative has brought us to the close of the year 1866, just twenty-five years after that eventful year 1841, when Don Bosco met young Garelli in the Sacristy of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin, and made a beginning of his famous "Oratory." Don Bosco's last act in 1866 in connection with his Oratory was to visit Rome for the second time to receive further encouragement and approval from the Vicar of Christ.

The work therefore of this book is now complete, the foundation of the Oratory and its development for twenty-five years has been described.

Therefore the writer now in wishing his readers *adieu* expresses the hope that his account has given satisfaction and pleasure? It has been a labour of love, for all these scenes, — simple, direct, wonderful, have been witnessed and described by one who owes his education and training to Don Bosco. It is his fondest wish that God will allow him to remain in the place to which He has called him. "One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after, that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life." (Ps. xxvii, 4).

THE END.

APPENDICES,
STATISTICS and DOCUMENTS.

The Salesians come to England.

From the first years of his apostolate Don Bosco had his eyes turned towards England. We find in the diary of one of the earliest Salesian pupils, John Bonetti (the author of this work), an entry which goes back as far as 1856. "To-day Don Bosco said to me: 'John, I want you to hear Mass to-morrow for the conversion of England.'" Bonetti was one of those boys at the Oratory who, in Don Bosco's words, "reproduced in their lives the angelic fervour of St. Aloysius Gonzaga." This apostolic zeal, once infused into the souls of his pupils, was to react upon the Apostle himself. It was another boy, Dominic Savio, who one day presented himself to Don Bosco urging him to convey to the Holy Father "a message of great importance" (see Chapter XL).

This little apostle died at the early age of fifteen, leaving his unfulfilled desires as a legacy to Don Bosco, who from that day seemed to have a love of predilection for England. He rejoiced when in his frequent visits to Rome he could meet English and Irish Church students, who returning to their country did not fail to spread the fame of the man of God. Hence it came about that young men and even boys from England and Ireland began to find their way to Turin, where they asked Don Bosco to enlist them among his Salesians. There are a few names at least, that must be mentioned: Father James McKiernan, who as a boy at the Oratory spread the sweet odour of virtue, and later on as a priest was entrusted by Don Bosco with the responsible position of Prefect of the Mother House; Father Charles Macey, who, sent back to England as Superior of the first English House, reproduced in London the zeal and gentleness of his spiritual father; Fathers Patrick Diamond and Patrick O'Grady, still living after many years of strenuous work in Patagonia and the Falkland Islands.

The first Salesian foundation in England is due to the initiative of Countess de Stackpoole, who offered a small iron church with the site attached to it in Battersea, London. Don Bosco did not undertake the work until it had the

sanction of Leo XIII. The Holy Father not only gave the required permission, but expressed a wish that the Salesians should go to London. They came on November 23rd, 1887, and were met at the station by Father Francis Bourne, now Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, who spent some time with them and gave them invaluable assistance in starting their work. Don Bosco when dying in Turin sent a special blessing to the new foundation.

The beginnings were beset with difficulties; the little church on week-days was used as a school; but later on a new church was erected — the fine parish church of the Sacred Heart — as well as the present College; the work spread to other places in the capital, in the Empire and the Colonies.

To-day the Anglo-Irish Province has thirteen Houses. *Boarding and Day Schools*: Battersea (1887), Farnborough (1901), Chertsey (1919), Burwash, Sussex (1920), Bolton (1924). *Schools of Arts and Trades*: Capetown (1896), Sliema, Malta (1903). *Agricultural Schools*: Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick, Ireland (1920), Warrenstown, Co. Meath, Ireland (1922), Lansdownè, Claremont, South Africa (1923). *Missionary College*: Shrigley, nr. Macclesfield, Cheshire (1929). *House of Studies and Novitiate*: Salesian House, Cowley, Oxford (1920). *Polish Mission*: 2 Devonshire Street, London N.1. The Very Rev. Provincial resides at the Salesian College, Battersea, London, S.W.11.

The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians have nine Houses: *To aid the Salesian works* — Battersea (1902); *Boarding School and Postulancy* — The Convent, Chertsey, Surrey (1903); *To aid the Salesian works, Elementary School* — Farnborough (1905); *Private School and Postulancy* — The Convent, Fernbank, Limerick, Ireland (1920); *To aid the Salesian works* — Chertsey (1921); *Elementary School and Novitiate* — The Convent, Elmthorpe, Cowley, Oxford (1924); *To aid the Salesian works* — Cowley, Oxford (1928); *Italian Classes, Club for ladies in domestic work, Hostel* — 12 Greek Street, London, W.1 (1930); *Boarding School* — The Convent, Dovercourt, Essex (1933). The Rev. Mother Provincial resides at the Convent, Chertsey, Surrey.

2.

The Three Salesian Families in 1934.

1. THE SALESIAN SOCIETY OF ST. FRANCIS OF SALES.

Cardinal, 1; Archbishops and Bishops, 19; Vicars Apostolic, 3; Prefects Apostolic, 3; Administrators Apostolic, 3.

Salesians : Priests, Scholastics, Laybrothers, belonging to 42 nationalities, 10,406.

Missionary Students, 1,212.

Provinces and Houses.

Europe	...	24	...	362
America	...	17	...	258
Other Continents	...	5	...	98
		46		718

WORKS.

Homes and Orphanages	...	101
Colleges	...	196
Hostels	...	41
Novitiates	...	37
Studentates of Philosophy and Theology	...	61
Juniorates in Europe	...	54
Missionary Colleges	...	16
Seminaries	...	40
Festive Oratories	...	17
Hospitals and Lepet Colonies	...	9
Public Churches	...	206
Parishes	...	192
Elementary Schools	...	338
Secondary Schools	...	181

Professional Schools	...	...	...	127
Agricultural Schools	...	...	...	58
Evening Schools	...	...	...	46
Institutes for Emigrants	...	...	...	57
Foreign Missions specially confided to the Salesians	...	...	...	17
Other Foreign Missions	...	...	...	32

2. THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS.

Personnel : 7,763 Religious.

Provinces and Houses.

Europe	...	...	16	...	469
America	...	...	13	...	213
Other Continents	...	...	5	...	30
			34		712

WORKS.

Festive Oratories	...	...	...	488
Kindergartens	...	...	...	309
Municipal Schools	...	...	...	88
Orphanages	...	...	...	105
Colleges	...	...	...	128
Secondary Schools	...	...	...	60
Domestic Economy Schools	...	...	...	337
Professional Schools	...	...	...	93
Study Circles	...	...	...	28
Advanced Schools of Apologetics	...	...	...	28
Hostels	...	...	...	46
Parish Catechisms	...	...	...	329
Ladies' Boarding Houses	...	...	...	7
Domestic Work in Colleges	...	...	...	94
Hospitals and Leper Colonies	...	...	...	39
Novitiates	...	...	...	26
Juniorates in Europe	...	...	...	31
Foreign Missions in which they work with Salesians or others	...	...	...	20
Dispensaries	...	...	...	31

3. THE ASSOCIATION OF SALESIAN CO-OPERATORS.

Membership : over 500,000.

Provincial Centres : 81.

Salesian Bulletin printed in 17 languages, with circulation of 300,000 copies.

Other Salesian publications : 376.

International Congresses of Salesian Co-operators held : 11.

National Congresses of Salesian Oratories and of Religious Instruction held : 8.

Centres of Association of Past Pupils of the Salesians and Sisters : 304.

3.

The Salesian Co-operators.

The aid which St. John Bosco received from all quarters and which rendered his great enterprises possible, gave him the idea of forming a permanent organization, which would ensure for them the material and moral support of those who would form the volunteer force of the regular Salesian Society.

In addition to the Salesian Congregation and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, he had a great many zealous assistants (lay persons) whom he bound together to form a large army, now known as the "Pious Union of Salesian Co-operators."

To Don Bosco his Co-operators were everything after God, and he often said: "Without your charity little or nothing could have been accomplished."

He wrote in his Last Testament: "With your charity, joined to the grace of God, we have been able to wipe away many a tear and save many a soul."

PRIVILEGES OF SALESIAN CO-OPERATORS.

Salesian Co-operators regularly inscribed on the register of the Union

- (1) Participate in the merits of the works of charity which are performed by the Salesians throughout the world.
- (2) They share in a daily Mass celebrated for their intention and in special prayers said every day in the Sanctuary of Our Lady, Help of Christians in Turin.
- (3) They gain many Indulgences and enjoy other spiritual favours specially granted to them; chief among them being the Indulgence of Sanctified labour.
- (4) After death they share in the perpetual suffrages in all the Salesian Houses.

CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP.

- (1) Members must be at least 16 years of age and be good practising Catholics.
- (2) Be inscribed in the register of the Association kept at the Salesian Oratory, Turin.
- (3) Assist personally, or through others, the Works of the Salesian Society by prayers, offerings, alms or work.
- (4) Say daily once the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary" with the invocation, "St. Francis of Sales, Pray for us," for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.

The Union does not bind in conscience. Therefore, secular and Religious Families, Institutes or Colleges can join through their respective superiors or parents.

THE "SALESIAN BULLETIN."

The *Salesian Bulletin* is the periodical founded by St. John Bosco and written by him for several years; it is the Organ of the Third Order of the Salesian Society.

It may be obtained through the Very Rev. Father Provincial, S.C., Salesian College, Battersea, S.W.11, or from Superiors of Salesian Houses in England or Ireland, who will be pleased to enrol Members in the Association.

The Indulgence of Sanctified Labour.

His Holiness Pope Pius XI, in an audience granted to our Superior General, the Very Rev. Father Philip Rinaldi, on 1st June, 1922, graciously conceded this very singular favour. This very great Indulgence was granted by the Holy Father to urge us to imitate St. John Bosco in sanctifying our daily work and in living habitually united with God.

"As often as the Salesian Co-operators raise up their minds to God during the day, by means of any invocation whatsoever (no special form of words is required), they gain an Indulgence of 400 days; further, they may gain once a day a Plenary Indulgence, applicable to the Souls in Purgatory, the only condition for both Indulgences being that they are in a state of grace."

4.

Don Bosco's Last Testament to his Co-operators.

I FEEL my life is coming to an end, and the day is not far off when I must pay the common tribute to death and to my grave.

But before I leave you for ever I want to pay my debts to you, thereby fulfilling my heart's desire.

The debt I owe you is that of gratitude, for you have given me powerful help in my task of giving a Christian education to a host of poor children, thus helping them to become virtuous, hard-working men, capable of supporting their families, useful to society, and above all able to save their souls and gain a happy eternity. Without your help none of this would have been possible to me. Your charity, blessed by the grace of God, has dried many tears and saved many souls. Your charity has created many homes where thousands of orphans have found shelter. Lifted out of destitution, snatched from the dangers in which they would have lost both faith and morals, they now, thanks to a good education, to study, and to apprenticeship to a trade, have been made into good Christians and honest citizens.

It is your charity that has established our Missions in the farthest ends of the world, and has sent hundreds of missionaries abroad even to the heart of Patagonia and Terra del Fuego, where they will cultivate and spread the vineyard of the Lord.

It is your charity which has founded in many towns of many countries printing presses which spread books and popular literature amongst the working people, publications which are devoted to defending truth, arousing piety and encouraging morality.

It is your charity, finally, which has raised a crowd of churches and chapels, where century after century, to the end of the world praises will be sent up to God and the Blessed Virgin and where innumerable souls will meet their salvation.

Convinced as I am that, after God, it is your charity which has made all these benefits possible, and even greater things than these, before my life draws to its close, with all my heart I offer you my deepest gratitude. But in the name of this persevering kindness with which you have come to my help I now beg you to continue your support to my successor.

The charitable works I began with your help have no more need of me, but they will not cease to have need of you and of all those who like you love to do good on this earth. So I confide and entrust them all to you.

For your encouragement and the comfort of your souls I enjoin upon my successor that he always include our benefactors in all public and private prayers in the Salesian Houses; he should always include the intention that God should reward them, even in this life, a hundredfold for their charity, in giving them health, concord in their families, prosperity in their business, and finally deliverance and protection from all evil.

Also for your encouragement and the comfort of your souls, I would like to tell you that the most efficacious means of obtaining pardon for sins and security in the future life is charity shewn to little children: *Uni ex minimis*, to "one of the most destitute," as we have been told by our Divine Master, Jesus. Besides that I would have you notice that in these latter days, by reason of our great lack of means and resources by which to bring up the children of the poor and the destitute in faith and good morals, the most holy Virgin has made herself their Protectress; for this reason she obtains for their benefactors numerous and extraordinary graces, not only spiritual but temporal as well.

He who writes to you and, besides him, all Salesians can witness to the fact that many of our benefactors, whose

means were small, have found greater ease since they set themselves, with generous charity, to help our orphans.

Many of them have written to me telling me of their experience in this matter, saying: "I do not want you to thank me when I give alms to your poor children; it is I who ought to thank you when you ask me for help, for since I began to help your orphans my fortune has been doubled."

Another of our benefactors used to come and bring me his offering, saying: "The more money I bring to your good works the more success I have in my business. I am confident that the Lord gives back to me in this world a hundredfold what I give for love of Him."

Feeble and exhausted though I am, I feel I could never cease speaking to you and recommend to you my children whom I am so soon to leave; but now I must end and lay down my pen.

Farewell, my generous benefactors! my dear co-operators, farewell! Amongst you there are many whom in this life I have never been able to see. Let such find their consolation in the thought that in Paradise we shall all of us know each other, and that throughout all eternity we shall rejoice together over the good which, with the assistance of God's grace, we have been able to accomplish in this world, in behalf more especially of poor children.

If after my death divine mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the protection of Mary, Help of Christians, judges me worthy to be admitted to Paradise, I will always pray for you, for your families, and for all dear to you that they may all one day come to praise the Majesty of the Creator, to enjoy His divine delights and sing His infinite mercy for all eternity. Amen.

• For ever I remain your grateful servant,

JOHN BOSCO,
Priest.

Short Chronology of St. John Bosco's Life and Canonization.

1815. 16th Aug. Birth at Castelnuovo d'Asti.
1835. 30th Oct. Seminary Course begun at Chieri (Philosophy).
1841. 5th June Ordination to the Priesthood.
1841. 8th Dec. Beginning of the Oratory.
1852. 20th June Dedication of St. John Bosco's first Church of St. Francis of Sales.
1855. 8th Dec. First beginnings of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.
1865. 27th April Laying of Foundation Stone of Church of Mary, Help of Christians.
1868. 9th June Consecration of the said Church.
1872. 29th May First House of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.
1873. 3rd April The Salesian Society definitely approved by the Holy See.
1875. 11th Nov. First Missionaries leave for S. America.
1873. 9th May Association of Salesian Co-operators and the work for Late Vocations approved by the Holy See.
1882. 28th Oct. Consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin.
1887. 14th May. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart consecrated in Rome.
1887. 23rd Nov. The first Salesians arrive in London.
1888. 31st Jan. Death at the Oratory in Turin.
1907. 24th July Declared Venerable.
1929. 2nd June Beatified.
1934. 1st April Canonized.

