

SELECTED SHORT STORIES AND
ANECDOTES BY VARIOUS
AUTHORS, FOR THE USE OF YOUNG
PEOPLE IN TURIN.

St Francis de Sales Oratory Press, 1867

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A Word to the Good Reader

We believe we can do something to make our readers happy by publishing a small collection of short stories selected from various authors. The purity of their language and their clarity of style makes them even better. Some have been taken from the excellent book by Silvio Pellico entitled: *I doveri degli Uomini* (*On the Duties of Men*): it is a wonderful book and we would like to see many have a copy for the good that would come of it. We did have in mind presenting his life first of all, but the reader can find that in the *Letture Cattoliche* published in December 1862, or in the *Storia d'Italia* by Fr John Bosco.¹

Some instructive and pleasant yarns by Cesare Cantù follow, along with others by Giuseppe Manzoni who has produced some excellent short stories. We know from experience that young people like short things that engage and instruct them. We hope we have interpreted and understood this wish in this collection.

At the end there are a number of anecdotes referring to the venerable person of the Head of the Church. What you find first is a healthy moral, then you can see how to apply that later. Hoping to one day write a complete life of the one whom the Catholic World venerates as Supreme Pontiff and Pastor, we begin by preparing the reader through some devout and particular details that his glorious life is full of.

We trust that everyone, and especially young people, will be happy with our feeble effort. Let it all be to God's greater glory. Be happy!

THE ADMINISTRATION.

¹ *Storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù del Sac. Bosco Giovanni*, quinta edizione, tip. dell' Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales.

1. Respect for the elderly.

"There is none worse than the person who acts shamelessly towards the elderly, women and the unfortunate", Parini used say. Parini took advantage of the authority he had over his disciples to make sure they were respectful to old age. Once he was angry with a young man who had been sent to him for some serious misdeed. It happened that he met him on the road just as the young man, who was helping an elderly monk, began shouting, and rightly so, at some villains who had been pushing the old man around. Parini too began shouting at them and throwing his arms around the young man's neck, he said to him: "A moment ago I thought you were a wicked young man; now that I have seen your kindness to the elderly I believe you are capable of being very virtuous."

2. The whims of a 'Little Lord'.

An overly-protective mother ruined her young son by satisfying whatever whim the day would bring him. One evening the lad was playing in the garden with the maid and began to put on a tantrum. He had hardly begun when the mother went to the window and ordered the maid to give the child whatever he wanted.

"But Madam," the maid replied, "it is impossible for me to please him this time."

"Why not? Don't be so insolent! You can leave my house immediately."

"For heaven's sake, calm down madam; your son saw the moon in the fountain and wants me to give it to him." The mother went red in the face - and the lesson was not lost on her.

3. It is better to save your honour than save your life.

An official had been ordered to go on a very dangerous expedition; one of his friends, who was very much afraid for him, went to him to suggest all kinds of pretexts he could use to avoid carrying out the order.

"You are right," the official said, "that way I could certainly save my life, but my honour would be lost."

4. The detractor.

To put himself in a good light, a man before the judge told him that his adversary was making fun of the judge wherever he went.

"And of what concern is it to you if the man is making fun of me?" replied the honest judge. "Just tell me what he has done wrong to you, since I have to judge how he has offended you, not me."

5. Three great doctors.

A famous doctor was in his final agony; many of his colleagues surrounded him and were deploring such a great loss. "Gentlemen," the dying man said, "don't look so worried; I am leaving behind three great doctors." His colleagues asked him to name them, since each thought he might happen to be amongst the three. "Diet, water and exercise," he answered.

6. Honour your parents.

We read an outstanding example of filial respect in the life of Lorenzo Celso, Doge of the Venetian Republic. He knew that his father, who was a senator, was not dispensed from the requirement to genuflect to him, since all senators were obliged to do so. He put a cross on his ducal hat so that his father could consider this act of obeisance as done not to his own son but to the august religious symbol. All of Celso's successors, from that time on, added a gold cross to the dignity of their attire.

7. Providence.

A poor sick widow was in desperation thinking of her children and how they could grow up and survive without their parents. Homobonus told her:

"One day I saw a sparrow brooding over her chicks who were still without their feathers. A kite flew down and plucked her up and I cried: 'Poor little chicks! They will die of cold and hunger'. I went back the following day and wanted to see how they were going and lo and behold there was another sparrow feeding them. Will God, who has taught the animals to love and help one another, abandon his children?"

The poor widow understood and was consoled.

8. Think before you act.

I remember when I was a young boy my mother sent me to get the eggs from the chicken coop. As I was going out I forgot the hatch and hit it with my head so hard I carried the mark for days. Homobonus told me: "Always think first so you will know what you have to lift up or let down."

Another day, wanting to cross a wide ditch, I fell in. After he had pulled me out, dried me and consoled me, he said: "From now on, always remember to only step out as far as your legs can take you."

My brother was given a citrus tree, and seeing it in full bloom he picked the flowers and made a bouquet which he got everything to sniff. But summer came and my brother's citrus tree bore no fruit. He began to complain. Homobonus told him: "My son, whoever wants to have fruits should not pick all the flowers".

9. Idleness.

There was a certain individual who did not want to do anything for fear of ruining his health. Homobonus showed him two keys, one bright and shiny, the other black and rusty, and he told him: "This bright and shiny one is the one I use every day; the other one I keep in reserve." And so it is with our strength: idleness corrodes it, exercise keeps it fresh and increases it.

10. Cravings.

For those who always say: "Oh how happy I would be if I could have this!" "I just need this to be happy!" "If I could have that job I wouldn't want anything else," Homobonus points to a mountain and says: "I used to think that there was no other mountain higher than it, and that I could touch the sky with my finger if I were up there. So I climbed to the top, and... and then I saw other, higher mountains around it, and I was as far from the sky as I had been down on the plain. Such are our cravings; the more you give in to them, the more you seem to see still better things but they are just as far from happiness".

11. Drowning.

Homobonus was swimming one day with some friends when one turned over, sank to the bottom and began to drown. His companions were distraught. Homobonus thought it might be better to run to his aid than to weep: he dived into the river, dragged him out, put him over his knee so he could vomit out all the water, but without hitting him too hard or turning him upside down. Then he took him to a nearby inn, put him in a warm bed, laid him on his side but with his head up. Then he rubbed his body with wool and mulled wine, put a few drops of vinegar in his mouth, cleaned out his nostrils and throat with a feather dipped in brandy, and kept his feet warm. The others meanwhile had run for the doctor who revived the poor unfortunate with his skills.

12. The charitable child.

I know a dear child who brings wine to an old sick man every Saturday, and every feast day brought him what was left over from the table. I know another one who, instead of having pottage every day for breakfast, received three coins from his mother. This way, every Sunday he brought her 21 coins with which she could put a pound of meat on their poor table that day.

13. The modest citizen.

Rome was full of major turmoil. The people, who were languishing in poverty, did not want to obey the Senate; all this did was to aggravate the unfortunate situation of the plebs who were weighed down by debt, and very often, the two factions - the people and the Senate - were close to coming to blows.

To put an end to this endless turmoil they thought of electing a certain Quinctius Cincinnatus as Consul, an easy-going man but one known for his modesty, wisdom and bravery.

A deputation of senators was sent to the newly elected Consul who lived in a villa where he lived a simple, rustic life. He was there in his field wearing a woolen cap and tilling the soil when the senators approached him. Seeing them, Cincinnatus stayed the oxen pulling the plough so he could welcome them properly. The senators explained to him the reason they had come, and invested the virtuous farmer with the insignia of his new honour.

The great man did not swell up with pride; turning an affectionate eye on his field, he recommended its care to his wife and was very sorry to have to leave it behind. He only did so out of love for his fellow citizens who needed his wisdom and strength in service of the Republic.

Quinctius Cincinnatus settled the differences between the opposing parties and dealt with everything to everyone's satisfaction. When his term of office had come to an end the citizens wanted him to continue but Quinctius refused the offer, telling the Senate that they must never allow any violation of the law. So they did not allow him to exercise his consulate any longer. Quinctius immediately went back to his plow and simple country customs.

14. Harmony.

When Federico Barbarossa returned to Germany, his greedy ministers treated his subjects cruelly. So, representatives from many of the Lombard towns gathered at the monastery in Pontida, a village in Bergamo province, and swore themselves to arms to come to Milan's aid and put an end to common woes. Bergamo, Brescia, Cremona, Mantova, Verona, Ferrara, Treviso and other cities made an alliance called the Lombard League. The first obligation of the allies was to rebuild Milan. So they sent people there immediately to rebuild the walls of this rich and populous city which had been destroyed.

As you can imagine, the citizens who had taken refuge nearby flocked in to reconstruct their homes; in a short time Milan had risen again from its ruins. As soon as Federico Barbarossa received news that the League had been formed he gathered an army and hurried back to Italy. Before he set about crushing the rebellious cities into obedience, he went to Rome to force the Pope to take his side. But the Supreme Pontiff fled, frustrating the Emperor's violent efforts.

Barbarossa fought for five years in vain and was wearied by trying to subjugate the courageous Lombards who had refused to recognise him as their Sovereign. His adversaries were too many and too obstinate and he came across them in various places. One day he might vanquish his enemy but it was not unusual for him to be defeated when he encountered the next group. Finally in 1176 he took a fatal route to Legnano on the River Olòna. The Milanese performed wonders of valour in that battle. It was a total rout that included the capture of the Emperor. Only then was Federico convinced of the bravery and determination of the Italians: thus he decided to finish the war and draw up a peace treaty on equal terms. This was signed seven years later in the city of Konstanz, Germany. ²

²Cf. *Storia d'Italia* by Fr. J. Bosco p. 224.

15. The Painter.

In 1179 a child was born in a villa at Vespignano, fourteen miles from Florence to a farmer. They gave him the name Giotto. The good man raised his son well. His son was eager to learn and very dear to his parents, but loved also by all who knew him.

As soon as Giotto turned ten his father sent him out to pasture the sheep. The good child led them here and there in the fields, and rather than lying down lazily like many young shepherds do unfortunately, he took delight in sketching the many shapes of natural objects that took his fancy in the sand, or on rocks.

One day he was drawing one of his sheep with a stone on a clean, smooth slate. An artist called Cimabue passed by, and was amazed to see how a child, without any study, could draw a sheep so well. Charmed by his obvious skill, and by Giotto's ready response, he asked him if he wanted to come with him. Giotto, who respected his family above all, replied: "I would gladly come sir, but I must first see that my father is in agreement, since in no way would I disobey him."

Cimabue then went to Bondone and asked if he could take his son and his father agreed. He then took him to Florence where he lovingly taught him art. The young man was so attentive and obedient to Cimabue's teaching that he soon progressed and became the greatest artist of his day.³

³The most respected men of the city, amongst whom was the poet Dante Alighieri, made Giotto feel at home, and he was universally admired for his sharp intelligence and agreeable disposition. Once when Cimabue left the studio, Giotto painted a fly so naturally on one of the master's paintings, that when he returned Cimabue, seeing the fly, tried to brush it away with his hand, so convinced was he that it was really alive, much to the laughter of the boys and others who were in the studio at the time. It happened at that time that the Pope, wanting to adorn the church of St Peter's with magnificent paintings, sent an intelligent person to all the best artists, to consider their worth and bring back his best choices of examples. The envoy gathered the best paintings he could find from painters he visited; they had all worked on their expertise in the hope of being chosen to do the paintings at St Peter's in Rome. When the gentleman arrived in Florence he went one morning to Giotto's studio and explained the Pope's idea, and finally asked him if he had a painting he could send to His Holiness. Giotto, who was so very polite, took a sheet of paper, and with a brush dipped in red drew a perfect circle without a compass. It seemed that he wanted to offer this simple circle so the gentleman, who thought he might be being made fun of, asked him: "Do you not have any other painting than this?" To which Giotto replied: "This is already too good. Send it to Rome with the others and see which is recognised." And so it was; because the Supreme Pontiff and many great artists knew how difficult it was to draw a perfect circle without any instruments, judged that Giotto was better than all the other artists of his time. And so the Pope called him and gave him honour and a good stipend to paint the Loggia and the Sacristy at St Peter's. From this came the saying in use today for slow-witted types: You are rounder than the O of Giotto ['tondo', as well as meaning 'round', also means 'slow-witted' in Tuscan dialect!]. When Clement V ascended to the papacy he became very fond of Giotto, whom he invited to follow him when the papal see moved to Avignon, in France. Giotto went to France with the Holy Father and left many beautiful paintings in the cities of that kingdom.

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In 1316 Giotto returned to his home village loaded with precious gifts and honours; but he was unable to stay long in Florence because of all the invitations he was receiving from people who wanted his work at any price. The King of Naples called him to St Clares and the royal church. The king was so pleased with this excellent artist that he often chatted with him while he was painting.

But in 1336 shortly after he came to Florence from Lombardy, and comforted by the sacraments, he went to a better life. His passing was lamented by people of every status, and he was buried in a church dedicated to Our lady, which had many of his painting; he had indicated before he died that he very much wanted to be buried there.

Giotto was born a peasant, and through study and a virtuous life gained many honours in life and immortal fame.

(Storia d'Italia del Sac. Giovanni Bosco).

16. The artists' courage.

In 1527, when the Medici were forced out of Florence, the city was in uproar. A crowd of citizens had taken up arms and had gone to the Signoria but the guards had locked the gates. A pitched battle took place, and those within threw a bench from on high down on their adversaries, but instead it struck an arm on Michelangelo's David (the statue stood in front of the Palace), and broke it into three pieces. The pieces lay there for three days and nobody thought to collect them, but as soon as the young artist Checchino De-Rossi saw them, he went to the Ponte Vecchio where his fellow artist Giorgio Vasari was, and told him the sad story of the mutilated statue. Soon afterwards Giorgio and Checchino were seen going to the square, and amidst the soldiers, heedless of the danger, they picked up the pieces of the arm and took them home. This way the two young artists preserved the damaged pieces which, in time and by the Duke's command, were eventually reunited with the statue.

17. Eat less.

Louis Cornaro, from Venice, had become a drunkard in his youth, and suffered the usual consequences: upset stomach, gout, and a fever that at the young age of 35 had brought him to the brink of the grave. The doctors had got him to understand that the only way to lengthen his days was by a sober life and one completely opposite to what he had been living.

He listened, and adopting a strict diet in eating and drinking, he had recovered within a year. And then, far from returning to his earlier debauchery, he took up a regulated life that he never again abandoned. Knowing well that the proverb 'what pleases the mouth is good for the stomach' was a lie, he only ate what he could easily digest, and always left some room for his appetite. Excesses of heat and cold, sleep disturbances, and other problems we meet in life do much less harm to those who control their eating. "Whoever wishes to eat well," he told his friends, "should eat less." "What we leave after a hearty meal does us more good than what we have just eaten."

"The best medicine," he went on, "is a regular life." And this he proved himself. At 86 years of age he was still hale and hearty, used to go for long walks in the hills, ride a horse, and cheerfully studied and conversed.

He lived till he was 98 and died as he had lived, peacefully and temperate, in 1565. "This wonderful old man," one of his friends tells us, "was not afraid seeing his life was coming to an end; it was like moving from one house to another. Lying in his bed, with his wife Veronica with him who was not much younger than himself, and with a clear and voice loud voice said he was leaving life strong in spirit: he wrote letters of advice and comfort to one of our friends".

18. The very poor.

It was March. Although the fields were not yet showing fruit or grain of any kind, violets had sprung up on the hills, the fields and trees were green, the air was not as cold, and skies were clear. That was when little Johnny, with the greatest pleasure in the world, left the house to enjoy the springtime, and went skipping off to school happier than usual. That was a time when some of the more poorly-dressed children came to school, those who lived in distant hamlets spread around the district.

The teacher would usually give them an hour to play. Then each pupil would bring out his lunch which his mother had put in a box, and many children would happily munch away without even considering that amongst them were some very poor children who had nothing to satisfy their hunger with.

The teacher, who knew well which of his pupils was well off and which was not, would persuade them to share their rolls, honey, pears with the poorest of their companions. The teacher had barely finished speaking when Faustino, one of those who had most food, looked around and saw Tonietto in a corner. He was ragged and barefooted, and Faustino said to himself: this one is very poor! And he ran to offer him some of his lunch. This example was soon followed by other children: so Tonietto not only satisfied his hunger but he had some left over and he took that home so they too could satisfy their hunger.

The following days the teacher said nothing, and many pupils no longer thought about Tonietto. But not Anselmuccio, Faustino, and five or six other good children who spared some fruit, a sweet, a piece of bread every morning to give to Tonietto; and he was so happy with his benefactors that it was as if they were his brothers. Faustino and his schoolmates, for their part were so happy to help someone with such a small gift; everyone was pleased to see the poor child satisfy his hunger with small sharings of their own and they felt better for it than if they had eaten it themselves.

Summer arrived. One fine day when the school was filled the children, in came Tonietto accompanied by a bent old man with a stick. The poor man was thin, mostly bald though with a shock of white hair; but he was so neat and bore himself so well that he commanded respect. He came forward, bowed to the teacher and began speaking: "Sir, here you have a poor farmer who owes his life to your charity and your pupils' kind hearts. They not only helped my beloved grandson for two months, but me too. Did you know that? You are a virtuous man! Thank you. And children - blessings on you and may Heaven give you a long and honourable life!"

He asked Tonietto to point out who had been the most generous of them; he pointed to Faustino, and the old man went up to him saying:

"You are such a kind child! I am unable to express my gratitude but I can embrace you tenderly, call you my child, and ask you to take me to your parents so I can tell them

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about your great kindness."

The old man's trembling, sympathetic voice had struck home for these children; when they saw him leave with Faustino, and the teacher shedding a tear, they were very moved and all decided to remain forever charitable.

19. Others' stuff.

Faustino and Giannetto went into a garden where they saw some plum trees that needed propping up so that the weight of the fruit would have the branches collapse.

Seeing this, Giannetto exclaimed:

"Here we can quench our thirst with the sweetest juice in the world. Nobody is looking so let's break off a full branch and run off with it."

"Hey," Faustino replied, "that's not allowed. The tree is not ours."

"What does that matter?" Giannetto replied. "Even if we ate a hundred plums the owner wouldn't know. Look how many there are! Who would be able to count them?"

"Just the same we shouldn't be taking other's stuff," Faustino shot back, "not even a little bit of it. Don't you remember what the teacher told us? 'Children, be careful not to lay your hands on things that are not yours; don't take fruit that is not yours because whoever starts with small things ends up with bigger ones' and then read out the seventh commandment for us?"

Giannetto thought a moment then said: "You are right, dear Faustino; so let's go empty-handed. Had we taken just one plum we could rightly be called thieves."

He had come very close to doing wrong, wanting to satisfy his thirst and greed with fruit that wasn't his.

20. Honour your teachers.

Theodosius the Great, Roman Emperor, knowing that stately birth and wealth were of little value without a good education, went searching throughout the empire for the wisest man. He was found to be the philosopher Arsenius, to whom Theodosius entrusted his son Arcadius to raise him in virtue and wisdom. The youth, who was very proud because he was the Emperor's son, would sit during class and make the philosopher always stand in front of him. When Theodosius saw this he told him in no uncertain manner: "Stand up, and let the teacher sit there. Riches and birth are one thing and you deserved neither. God could take them from you tomorrow. But the philosopher's knowledge is something he has deserved and he will be revered and venerated for it everywhere. So get up and let your teacher take your place." I have seen some pupils who have little regard for their teacher, because he is a poor man while they are children of well-to-do people, a doctor or a judge!

21. Soap bubbles.

Once Newton ⁴ saw a child who had thrown some soap into water, then with a straw, sucked up a drop and blew it out making lots of bubbles. The child was not taking a great amount of notice at what he was doing, but Newton was thinking about the beautiful colours in the bubbles, colours of a rainbow, and imagined that light (such a subtle thing!) could probably be broken down like that. He experimented and re-experimented, and in fact he discovered seven primary colours: violet, blue, turquoise, green, yellow, orange, red. If you look through a many-sided crystal like a bottle stopper, or a gem stone, you can find each of those colours. And depending which way you turn it, it might be green, indigo, orange or other. Things that reflect all the rays to the eye are called white; those that absorb them all are called black.

Newton, a young man only 22 years of age, made many important discoveries, and when someone asked him how he had made so many fine discoveries he answered: "By thinking, day and night."

And this, my good young man, is the only way to succeed in doing something well; pay attention to everything you see.

⁴English philosopher. Galileo and Newton are the two greatest astronomers of modern civilisation.

22. The hard-working young man.

Federico and Leopoldo had been sent to help with the harvest by their father. When they returned, the father asked Federico:

"Have you finished reaping?"

"I don't know."

"Was the wheat fully ripe?"

"I didn't take much notice."

"Has the old farmer recovered from his fever?"

"I didn't notice who came!"

"Will the good weather continue?"

"I don't understand."

Instead, Leopoldo had taken note of who all the workers were, saw that the wheat was not yet fully ripe but that it was worth either selling it or grinding it: had understood from the neighbours that the crop was poor so he might get a good price, had gathered the harvest to sell it at the market and from the best wheat had made a bread roll for the sick farmer who had blessed him a thousand times over.

An uncle of the two boys was there and he said: "Leopoldo has got eyes in his head, I want him to come with me." And he set him up in his prosperous business: he mastered everything and became the overall boss; in fact within a few years his uncle handed the business over to him. Now Leopoldo is one of the better-off merchants.

Federico always just used to go off skating on a frozen lake. One day he didn't notice that the ice had begun to melt and there were cracks: he went off just the same without thinking and the ice gave way under him. Poor boy!

23. The two loonies.

Two loonies wrapped up in cloaks and trembling from the cold entered a certain inn and asked the innkeeper to light a fire to warm them up. The innkeeper went over and lit a huge fire, then went off. Meanwhile one of the men got so close to the fire that had he been made of straw he would immediately have been incinerated. The other stood at the entrance to the room, pulled his hands out of his cloak and held them out to the fire to warm himself.

Meanwhile the one who was standing right up close to the fire shouted: "Curse the fire! It's burning me!"

The one who was standing right back said: "Oh! I'm just as cold as I was before," and they called the innkeeper.

He came and asked both of them what kind of fire or what kind of wood it was if one said he was just about on fire while the other said he felt no warmth at all. And then, noticing that they weren't quite right in the head, he said to them:

"The problem is not the fire, it's you. If you back there would just take four steps further forward, you would be able to warm yourself, and if you here would just take two steps back you would not be so hot for sure."

They did as he said, then after warming themselves for a while they left, praising the fire, the wood, and the innkeeper's advice.

The two loonies are an image of people who don't know how to use things properly and complain about them, thinking they are bad while instead they are excellent. It doesn't matter how good something is if you don't know how to use it. Wealth good, but it is bad in the hands of someone who is either extravagant, squanders it in vice and gluttony, or is greedy and keeps it locked up in a steel box.

24. The three friends.

Fronimo was close friends with two people born to wealth but very different in their ways. Imagine one who had grown up in court, all gracious and kind; while another had grown up in the city without learning too much etiquette, no refinements in life; there you have Fronimo's two friends.

When the first one was with him, he seemed like another person because when Fronimo was in pain he could change the colour of his face, his voice was softer, and he could show how he was even more affected by his pain than Fronimo. And when things were going well, then you would have said that he was the happier one. And it was often the case that Fronimo would thank God that he had him as a friend, would often send him greetings. Coming or going from his friend he would bow profoundly, doff his cap, shake his hand, would jest with him politely; good Fronimo only had an eye for him, regarded him as a jewel to be looked after carefully.

On the contrary he would barely greet the other, and he hid within more than show outside whatever cheer or sorrow he felt for him. Fronimo, blinded by the first one's artificial manners, would treat the other more out of courtesy than love.

One day it happened that for some reason he had to pay a great sum of money; he had little money in his purse. He was hopeful that the well-mannered friend might have given him the money, and set off for his house. When he knocked at the door the door was opened with a kind word and he was warmly received; but when he told him why he was there, the young man refused, although politely, and sent him away without comfort. What could he do? He went to the other friend's house, but without any real confidence, to venture a question that only someone desperate would ask. Having got there, he made his need clear to his friend, and asked for his help. See what friendship is like! Without further ado the man took him to his money box and gave him the key: "Here you are", he said, "It is only right that it is yours".

It is not nice words and good manners that make for true friendship, but the heart. A good man might think that a friend is someone refined in the art of nice conversation. Where friendship is concerned I prefer a careless farewell [*alla carlona*], as we say, to an infinite number of nice compliments [*alla francese!*].

25. The doctor and the sick child.

A child had been very sick, and the doctor who visited him ordered a very bitter drink as medicine. The mother went to the apothecary to obtain it then brought it to her child saying that it would make him feel better; but he didn't want it. The poor mother told him that the medicine would do him good; she promised him money, other things, and also tried to frighten him saying that he would never leave his bed if he didn't drink it and would certainly die. She then begged him not to cause his dear mother so much grief, and kissing and caressing him, she did her best to move him to obedience; but they were words in the wind, since the obstinate lad did not even want to taste it.

So, what to do? What not to do? She decided to wait for the doctor and there he was, already knocking at the door. The poor mother met him at the head of the stairs, explained her son's obstinacy and begged him to find a way to get the child to drink the medicine. The doctor said he would do so, if she would give him some honey. No sooner said than there was the honey.

He went into the sick boy's bedroom and put honey around the edge of the glass then with all the eloquence of Tullius he convinced him to at least put his mouth to the glass. Because of the doctor's tone of voice, his way of speaking and approach, and because he was asked to do so little, he took the glass and gingerly put his lips to it; but as soon as he noticed the sweet taste he gulped the bitter liquid down and only after he had drunk it all did he notice the trick: spitting and coughing he showed he had noticed how bitter it was. "What the...?" And from such deception he received life.

The moral of the story is that without the sweetness all would be anger and spite, but thanks to sweetness one can accept things.

26. The peasant and the mice.

A poor farmer had some fresh cheese in his little house to sell and to feed his family with. But it happened that attracted by the smell some mice in the house began eating it and without realising the harm they were causing to the poor man, mostly at night time, they ate to their heart's content all night long. The old farmer noticed, and enraged at the cheeky mice he sprinkled arsenic here and there around the cheese. Would that he had not done so! For the mice, biting into the cheese with their poisoned teeth, besides their own death also prepared death for someone else. Because by chance the farmer ate a piece of the poisoned cheese and died. When trying to remedy ills, when the need arises be careful to avoid things that stop the lesser evils but give rise to something greater.

27. A Christian family.

His Holiness Pius IX happily reigning was, as a younger man, Vicar Apostolic in Chile, that vast province of America. During one of his apostolic journeys inland, far from populated areas, he came across a poor hut where the fifty year old father of a large family was about to breathe his last. Here was a poor unfortunate to help, a soul to save; it did not take much for the minister of Jesus Christ to decide to halt his journey. So he set up his tent at the threshold of the hut and thus put it under the protection of the cross.

But the man was suffering from the kind of illness that no human remedy can cure; his body already belonged to the earth. The priest of God thought only of preparing this man for Heaven. He used all the powers of his being to this end, so that when death approached, time would pass quickly. The sick man was touched by his keen, warm words, and the tears that the charitable priest wept, warmed his already cold brow even before they touched his heart; he was so touched by the sight of the heavenly effigy nailed to the cross to save mankind, that he asked and lovingly received baptism. His wife and children also immediately received it. What a spectacle that religious ceremony was, celebrated as it was under the vault of Heaven with no other witness than God himself! There was a man stretched out on the skin of a wild beast and on the edge of his grave, a woman in tears and his weeping children; one pausing on his way to eternity, the others calling a truce with their desperation to calmly listen to the voice of God promising them heavenly joys. It was beautiful to see them bent for a moment beneath the hand that poured regenerating waters; they were consoled, repeating these magnificent words with the priest: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty who created heaven and earth, the sea and the stars. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, only Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father through him all things were made, and who descended from heaven; I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. I believe in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I await the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

Some hours later, the head of the family expired in the arms of the Catholic priest who had wanted to assist him in his final moments and console the ferocity of his nature by speaking to him of heaven and God, of a God who is greater than man, of a heaven more delightful than the earth. He closed his eyes, buried him with his own hands in his own shirt, and carried him to the grave that he had himself dug with his own hands under an oak. Before leaving he also planted a wooden cross over the grave, and next to the cross a wild rose. "If hurricanes and wind should tear down this cross," he told the distraught family, "erect another since it is a sign of salvation. If the hurricanes of

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passion blow in your hearts, come to it to pray to God who will replace hurricanes and storms with calm and rest. Pray, love this good God, never forget him, and may sweet thoughts spring up in your heart like these wild roses will grow over the tomb of the deceased man. Goodbye." And he left, his load lightened but carrying the blessings of the widow and the children he had helped and consoled.

28. A fine horse.

An inhabitant of Monti in Rome had an old horse and cart which he had the misfortune to lose. The horse gave sustenance to him and his mother, an old lady whom he looked after well. His filial piety encouraged him to go to the Quirinale, the ancient Papal residence, to put his misfortune to the Pope himself and ask him for the oldest and worst horse from his stables.

"If I give you a worn out horse," the good Pope told him, "how can you get it to work?"

"I will help it, Holy Father! I am young and strong, and I will take on the heaviest load."

"But your mother is old, so you should not abuse your strength, nor your youth; you should keep these for her."

"This is why I came to ask you for a horse, Holy Father."

"And thank you for thinking of me rather than someone else."

The Pope then gave him a good strong horse with two gold 20 franc coins: "The horse is for you, the 40 francs for your mother".

If happiness does not kill us, it can sometimes make us mad. The poor man was almost beside himself. He jumped on his horse as proud as a Roman Emperor, galloped all day around Monti with the two gold coins in his hand, shouting as loud as he could: "Long live Pius IX! Long live Pius IX!"

29. Cross of gold.

One day one of his secret agents was crossing through the ghetto, when he saw a young girl dart mysteriously into a Jew's shop, and he could watch what she was doing without being noticed. She sold a cross made of gold for which undoubtedly she received a huge sum because her hand was shaking as she received the money and her eyes were filled with tears. She must have been truly in dire straits to get rid of something so sacred for Roman women in such a way.

The secret agent felt he was on the trail of a great adventure for his august master and determined to bring it to a good conclusion. The girl came out of the Jew's shop and ran straight to a bakery where she bought a huge loaf of bread that she hid under her apron, then she returned, still running, to the deserted street where she lived.

The agent had not lost sight of her, and hid behind a dark, circular staircase that she was climbing without knowing she was being spied upon. She arrived at a landing and opened a door which, in her haste, she forgot to close. And there, in a bare room, lay an old sick woman dying of hunger.

"Take this my dear mother," her daughter said, coming in, "Here is some bread. Eat it."

"And you, my daughter?," the old woman replied, devouring the piece of bread she had received, "Why are you not eating?"

"Oh! nothing; I have eaten at one of my friend's homes, and I am not hungry."

Content with her ingenious lie the poor girl, who was also dying of hunger, added: "Courage mother, they say work will become more plentiful; Pius IX, our good father, has given orders to that effect.... You will no longer be hungry; so be consoled; the good God will not abandon us, Pius IX will look after us."

No sooner had she had finished these words than a gold coin with the image of Pius IX on it fell at her feet; she looked towards the door, but the agent had disappeared.

"Do you see, mother, that God has had pity on us?," she said, seeing the shiny coin; "And they say there are no longer any miracles!"

This adventure amused Pius IX so much that he wanted to bring it to conclusion himself. He had the cross bought back that had been sold the evening before, and sent it to the girl with five gold coins and a letter which read:

My dear daughter,

You are right to hope in God. He never abandons filial piety. and you are right to hope in Pius IX; he will look after your mother and you will not die of hunger.

30. A famous grave.

The Supreme Pontiff had gone one day to the Vatican and was alone in his carriage in the city; he was without the noble guards at the gate, and without a guard of honour when he encountered a funeral cortège in the street. The bier was alone, isolated, there were no relatives, no friends. A single priest was following, reciting the psalms.

"This poor man must have been alone in the world," said the Pope, "since he is being taken to his final resting place without tears and condolences." And saying this he ordered his coachman to stop, got down from the carriage and joining in as the lone mourner for the poor dead man, accompanied him to the cemetery. When they arrived he blessed him with holy water and sprinkled the first soil on his coffin; he placed the funeral cross there himself, and did not retire until he had recited the *De profundis* over the simple grave, which from today was more famous than a king's.

31. The broken flask.

Another time, going unrecognised to *Madonna degli Angeli*, (Our lady of the Angels) he saw a young distressed girl running along the street. The poor girl was crying her eyes out. The Pope got down from his carriage and asked her why she was so distraught.

"Ah Father" she said, "I have had a terrible misfortune."

"What is it my girl? Can it be fixed?"

"Oh no! Father."

"So what is it?"

"My mother gave me five coins to buy wine, and I fell over and the flask broke and the wine spilt out; look Father! Only God could fix my flask and give me back my wine."

"No need to cry so much over five coins, my dear girl. It is merely an accident, not a misfortune."

"It is not the money I am crying over; it is because of the blows I expect to receive when I get home if I return without the flask full. Instead of hugging me my mother will hit me."

"Well, let's change that then; here, take this. Buy a larger flask that is not broken, fill it with wine from Orvieto, and instead of hitting you your mother will hug you twice."

"And saying this the good Pope gave her a shiny new large coin.

"Oh my God! Thank you, Father!" the girl cried. Never before had she had such a large fortune in her hands. "Thank you! Thank you!" and while the Pope was climbing back into his simple carriage, the girl clung onto his black soutane, saying:

"The good God and my mother would not want me to lie, because lying is a terrible sin that makes Jesus cry. So I will tell my mother exactly what happened. What can I tell her if she asks the name of the person who gave me this beautiful silver coin?"

"You tell her it is a poor priest who lives at the Quirinale. Goodbye my child."

"Goodbye Father. This evening I will pray to Jesus for you."

32. A poor orphan and four coins.

There is another fact that shows the splendid charity of our Sovereign Pontiff. A poor child, all tearful and held back by the Swiss Guards, was trying in vain to reach him. In his hand he held a petition and he was crying out:

"Please, good soldiers, in my mother's name let me speak to the Pope; they tell me he is a father to poor children."

Pius IX stopped and had the petition given him. He read:

"Most Holy Father,"

"My mother is old and sick; I... I am too young to support her and myself, and our landlord, a bad man, will throw us out tomorrow if we do not pay four scudi which we owe him. Four scudi would be a fortune for us. Please lend them to us; I will pay them back when I am older.

The childlike boldness of the petition pleased Pius IX.

"What is your name, my child, and how old are you?" he asked.

"I am Paul and I am ten years old."

"What does your father do?"

"He was been awaiting us in Heaven for the past ten years."

"And your mother?"

"She sews, and prays morning till night."

"Where do you live?"

"Via de' Carbonari."

"Well then, my child! Come back at three tomorrow afternoon; I will give you the four scudi for your mother needs."

"If you lend them to us we will pay you back."

The Holy Father himself sought further information. The little supplicant had told the truth; and when he came back at the designated hour on the morrow, Pius IX gave him ten instead of four scudi.

"I did not ask for ten scudi," the boy said, giving back six.

"Take them back," the good Pope said, "Take them to your mother, and tell her not to worry about the future; I will look after her."

33. Old Guidi.

On 28 March 1847 when the police were enforcing the laws put in place by the pontifical government to rid the Capital of the more or less dangerous vagabonds and beggars, the Carabinieri had arrested an old man near the Papal palace all covered in dirt and in rags. He was immediately brought to the police station.

"I am no thief," he said, "My name is Guidi, and I came from Fano to see the Holy Father, the Pope. Please do not put me in jail before I see him; but afterwards you can do as you wish because there is nothing else in my poor life that I want. So please, gentlemen, go and tell Pius IX that old Guidi wants to see him".

In Paris the police had taken the old man as an idiot and had taken him to Charenton or at least to the police. But here in Rome the Carabinieri did what they could to satisfy his wish; he was allowed to attend the Pope's public audience. His face white and drawn from the long walk, he was very emotional; his legs were shaking under a bent old body that had survived eighty winters. When he arrived in the antechamber, his strength no longer matched his courage, perhaps overcome as he was by emotion, and he collapsed at the feet of prelates and pontifical officials, who carried him into a nearby room.

Told of what had happened, Pius IX, not wanting to deprive the old man of the wish he had put such a high price on, ordered that he be brought to him as soon as he was in a fit state. At four o'clock he was brought to the Holy Father.

"What would you like?," the Holy Father asked him after he had got him to his feet, which he had kissed and bathed in tears, "What would you like my friend?"

"I would like to tell you a story."

"Go on, I am listening."

The peasant began:

"Very many years ago, a noble and grand family from the Roman States was taken, as was the custom at the beginning of October, to a beautiful villa they owned six miles from Sinigaglia. The head of the family had a handsome child, a lively and cheerful boy called John. The child became very fond of a young twenty year old peasant lad assigned as a servant to the family and who would always be there with him when he was playing. One day when the two of them were walking through the fields chasing a butterfly or picking flowers, they stopped at the edge of a small but deep lake filled with stagnant water. There were some red-coloured fish swimming towards the surface of the lake. The child saw them, and attracted by their playfulness, wanted to catch them with his tiny hands. He got closer and closer to the edge and was about to reach out when all of a sudden the bank beneath him crumbled and he fell into the water and disappeared. But fortunately Providence and the young peasant boy were watching over him. The young man did not hesitate a moment, and without considering the danger, jumped fully clothed into the lake, dived twice, grabbed hold of the child and brought him safe and

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sound back to the edge of the lake. You were that child".

"And the peasant boy?"

"That was me. I have never forgotten that occasion."

"What is your name?"

"Guidi."

"Then it is true! After God, it is you that I owe my life and the throne to. I want to and must reward you. What would you like?"

"Nothing for myself, Holy Father, because right at the moment I am the wealthiest peasant in your States; I have seen my little Johnny once more, I have discovered the great Pope, I am happy."

Good Pius IX, moved to tears by this show of love, doubled his happiness by giving him and his family a considerable sum to live, even more than they needed.

Three days earlier, the sovereign Pontiff had written an encyclical addressed to patriarchs, archbishops and bishops. It was written with great warmth exhorting them to pray and get others to pray a devout Triduum to the merciful God asking him to cast a kindly eye on troubles in Ireland. Furthermore he had invited them to collect charity, gifts from the faithful, to help the Irish who were suffering famine and typhoid.

34. My portrait.

In the early days of Pius IX's pontificate, a venerable French priest was given the honour of visiting him; he was deeply moved by the holy and inspiring life of Pius IX and fell at his feet unable to utter a word. The pope lifted him to his feet and comforted him. As soon as he could speak he said: "Holy Father, may I have the gift of your portrait?." Pius IX took his cross, and lifting his eyes to Heaven, said: "Here is my portrait! I carry Christ's crown on me." ⁵

With ecclesiastical permission.

⁵It was truly prophetic. How many painful thorns were then planted on that venerable brow! Only God could count them to one day turn them into rays of glory in Paradise.