

Smiling Don Bosco

*Anecdotes and Episodes
from the life of St John Bosco*

Compiled by **Fr J L Chiavarino**

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ST. PAULS

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Bishop of Youngstown

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PREFACE

This little book, humbly written by a faithful contemporary of the Saint, in the *"idioma gentile"* of Don Bosco, well deserves to be presented to the English speaking world. Each language has its own soul and Saints so typically Italian as Francis of Assisi and John Bosco can be understood perfectly only through their sacred tongue. Much light of thought and warmth of love which are found in the language of the *"bel canto"* do not appear in other languages and yet they will be revealed to the reader who cares to meditate.

Introducing Smiling Don Bosco to the world is a privilege; knowing Smiling Don Bosco is an inspiration, following Smiling Don Bosco is walking serenely and surely towards our encounter with God. That God Whom the egotistic lord wishes to destroy so that he will not have to obey Him, Whom the presumptuous wiseacre denies so that he will not have to admit His truth, Whom the guilty coward does not wish to see so that he will not feel fulminated by remorse, that God "is in Heaven, on earth and everywhere."

Little John had learned these words from the Catechism and had believed them. Little John who in his home did not have the luxury of superfluous furniture, had a little picture which all the good families of Italy had: it was a perforated board or canvas on which the grandmother or the great grandmother had embroidered in gothic style the words: "God sees all, God knows all, God can do all." Little John, his sparkling eyes often fixed on those great words, believed. One day from the pulpit of the little church in Becchi, the good curate had preached the words of Christ: "He who is not with me is against me." John had understood and believed. How many people are there who are unhappy to the point of desperation, and who find themselves in guilt and shame only because they did not want, did not learn, did not know the joy, the wisdom and power of believing:

believing in our mother and father, believing in our teacher, believing in the physician and in the priest and when we find ourselves in doubt, believing ingenuously in the pure voice of our conscience. He who has done these things, let us not deny, has often found himself facing injustice, deceit, treason, human persecution, but certainly he did not lack the illuminating vision, the inspirations the faith in another word, which

perhaps was not embroidered on his great grandmother's picture but became gradually woven by the heart and the voice into all the events of life: "God provides!"

I did not know Don Bosco because I was too young but my father knew him. Don Bosco wrote him a letter and my father answered. My father died when I was still a child but I heard mother repeat thousands of times long before Don Bosco was canonized: "Your father did his best to please Don Bosco. Don Bosco was a saint. Remember, Vittorio, if you ever need a friend during your life, go to the Salesian Fathers." I did that — my mother was right.

I wish that this book might reach everyone: the child or the man who reads it will derive the greatest benefit from it; but the girl who reads it will know how to present it graciously to the young man who would not receive it from anyone else, and the grandmother who might be reading it for the first time will pass it on with love to her own child even if he is a man already past forty. Above all, however, this book should reach the hands of those angered lords, of the confused wiseacres, of the abashed criminal. Any page opened under the eyes of one whose heart is so heavily laden that it is about to tear, of one whose throat is choking with the bitterest imprecations, of one whose eyes are dry because he has cried too much and does not want to shed another tear and wants to become calloused before men and the world — these people, these readers will find in these little pages the word that heals, the answer that comforts, the, light and love of a new life and that smile which had long since been lost and which when re-found is so much more brilliant, so much sweeter, dearer and more precious.

Whoever is a father and reads about the youth of smiling Don Bosco will exclaim: "What a boy!" and will wish that his own son might become another John Bosco. No, do not become saddened or worried. Don Bosco convinces us that the ways of God are so many and so varied! As long as one can smile with himself at peace with his own conscience, some day he may have a saint's life written on his own name. The youngster who reads these pages cannot but feel that he is learning how to live and that even he can be artful and shrewd, vivacious and smart, sincerely good, no longer desiring to be bad, wise without the oppression of learning from difficult books, and a saint, why not! Not a saint influenced by the fear of hell, but one with those virtues that are the only behaviour that body and mind, heart and soul can sincerely and enthusiastically approve, and which alone give even to the humblest man the feeling of superiority and to the most desperate person the comfort that can come only from the Comforter.

I shall say nothing here about the life of Don Bosco: that you will find in

ample measure in the book itself. I shall make no comment on its various pages: that comment must be made in private by each reader in his/her intimacy with Don Bosco himself. I can see that a great benefit of friendship and serenity in the world will be derived from this book because of the maxim:

“Smile! And the world smiles with you!” Honestly and sincerely, what we need more for the peace of the world today, more than “U.N.O.s”, yes, more than conferences and even treaties among big men, is friendship and serenity among all the small men of the world. After all, God has not created merely the big or the small! Rather, He has created *all* men, His dear and precious children, to “know Him, love Him and serve Him in this life, and to go and enjoy Him eternally in the next.”

Vittorio Ceroni

The Broken Head

Little John Bosco had always been fond of fun even at the tender age of four or five. One of his favourite games was called “galla”, which was played by striking with a bat a small wooden ball thrown by another boy. On various occasions, however, when this ball was thrown by a careless player or by an inexperienced hand, it would hit him on the head or face, and on those occasions John would run to his mother. Seeing his bleeding head or his bruised face his mother would reprove him saying that he should not play with those boys.

John would proceed to explain that he must associate with them, that when he is with them they are better boys and do not use bad language. In spite of this explanation his mother would remonstrate: “Nevertheless you come home with a broken head!” John insisted that it had been an accident but his mother repeated that he was not to play with them anymore. Little John, seeing that it was useless to insist because her mind was made up, finally said: “Very well, if such is your wish, I shall not play with them; but remember, when I am with them they do as I say and do not quarrel, nor do they indulge in harmful conversation.”

By this time his mother was a bit perplexed and fearing that she might be preventing John from doing good, granted him permission to return to them.

Even at this early age John foresaw the noble mission which he was to fulfil in later years among young boys and he ran out joyfully (and with his head bandaged!) to complete the interrupted game. Everyone welcomed him back, for they loved him dearly for his cheerfulness and cleverness. As he approached them he said jokingly: “Please be careful of my head at least my head!”

He Laughs — ‘cause He Was a Bit Touchy!

One day John, who was four or five years old, entered the house with his older brother, Joseph. They were both extremely thirsty and asked their mother for a glass of water. After she had drawn the water, the mother handed the first glassful to Joseph. John was hurt because of this preference and when his mother handed him a glass of water he refused it.

The mother, without saying a word, took the glass of water away. For a while John was silent, then, addressing his mother rather timidly, said: “Mother, may I have a glass of water too?”

‘I thought you were not thirsty,” said his mother. John threw his arms about his mother’s neck saying: “Forgive me, mother!”

The Commanding Rod

On another day John had been carried away by his overabundance of energy. His mother called him and pointing to a rod in a corner said to him: “John, do you see that rod?”

Backing away frightened, John answered that he did see it.

“Take it and bring it to me,” said his mother.

John asked what she was going to do with it and his mother answered: “Bring it to me and you will see.”

John said, “You want to use it on me.”

His mother answered, “Why not if you play such pranks.”

Tightly embracing her, he asked forgiveness, promising never to do it again. His mother smiled at his repentance and was completely won over by his pleasant manner.

The Jug of Oil

One day when John was seven or eight years old his mother went to a neighbouring town. Little John decided that he wanted to get something which he had hidden at the top of a closet. He climbed up on a chair and as he reached for his toy he accidentally threw over a jug of oil which fell to the floor and broke into pieces.

The poor child was terribly confused and deeply saddened about what had happened. To the best of his ability he attempted to remedy the situation by picking up the pieces and sweeping the oil away. Realizing that he could not hide the evidence and that his mother must be told, he decided to diminish her sorrow and perhaps escape a spanking.

He went outdoors and broke off a branch of a near-by hedge, cleaned it, and ran down the road to meet his mother whom he greeted lovingly.

First he asked her how she was feeling and whether she had had a pleasant trip. Mother answered that everything was fine and asked him if he had been happy and whether he had been a good boy.

Upon hearing these words the child handed his mother the whip he had made. The mother imagined that he must have been up to one of his usual pranks.

“Yes, mother,” he said, “and this time I really deserve to be punished.” He proceeded to explain how he had broken the jug of oil. He did this so naively and continued handing the rod to his mother that she understood his innocence and smiled at his cleverness.

The Silly Little Ghosts!

John Bosco had always been a courageous youngster. One day while he was at the home of his maternal grandparents, he heard them discuss ghosts, and how in that house they occasionally heard strange sounds in the attic.

John laughed at such nonsense and he attempted to convince them that those sounds must have a natural cause. But they would not believe him; in fact they laughed at him.

One evening, however, they heard what sounded like blows in the attic; then a loud, slow noise which travelled from one end of the room to the other. The discussions the family frequently had about ghosts, the

silence, the darkness of the night and above all their fear had made these sounds seem formidable to all, except to John. Thus, everyone but John was terrified and they began running away shouting, "Ghosts!"

Bravely, John said: "I want to go upstairs and find out what it is. Get a lamp!"

Several of them took lamps and followed John up the stairs. When they reached the top John pushed the door open and, holding up his lantern, looked around.

There was no one there and everything was quiet.

Those who were with him looked in and some even entered the attic, but soon they shouted and took to their heels.

A wheat sieve that was in a corner started moving and slowly came closer. At the shouts of the people the sieve had stopped moving but now was proceeding again and reached the spot where John was standing. Instead of running away, John calmed the others and advanced a few steps.

Putting down the lamp he reached out to grasp the sieve when they all called out in chorus, "Do not touch it!" But he did not pay any attention to them and lifted the sieve.

Suddenly everyone burst out laughing. Beneath the sieve was a hen that the owner of the house had placed up there to sit brooding and which he had then forgotten all about.

Since in the sieve, which had been hanging on the wall, there were a few grains of wheat and the forgotten hen was hungry, she had tried to peck at them. The sieve having fallen and turned over had imprisoned the hen who dragged the sieve about without being able to free herself.

This incident won John the applause of all and they laughed many times about their unfounded fear of so-called "ghosts"!

Thrilled at His Mother's Heroism!

Someone who lived very near Becchi, Don Bosco's home town, had taken a stranger into her house.

The neighbours all merrily gossiped about it but no one had the courage to put an end to the scandal. Finally, Margaret, John's mother, took matters into her own hands and one fine evening, accompanied by her son John, set out for this woman's home.

When they had reached the house, Margaret knocked at the door and called: "Martha!"

A few moments later, Martha appeared at the door which she held half open. Slightly nervous Martha said: "Oh, it's you, Margaret! What good wind brings you to these parts?"

Margaret answered that unfortunately it was no "good wind" and then stated that she would like to have a few words with her. After asking

Martha several questions about her family background and about her religious practices, Margaret said: "You would not care to have me, your good friend, condemn you, would you?"

Martha, needing no further explanation, blushed and mentioned her unfortunate financial condition. But Margaret insisted that her foremost duty was not to cause any scandal but to save her soul.

Martha in turn insisted that she did not know what to do and at that remark Margaret took a decisive step. Going right up to the door and looking straight in she shouted: "Get out of here, you servant of the devil, you destroyer of souls!"

In the meantime all the neighbours had gathered and they too shouted after the stranger who at that moment wished that he had been miles' away. He came running out of the house as fast as his legs could carry him, broke through the crowd, practically rolled down the hills and finally disappeared never to show up again in that town.

While everyone complimented Margaret, little John laughed heartily at his mother's courage and also at the precipitous flight of that unfortunate being!

Black Bread and a Good Heart

Secondo Matta worked as a helper on a nearby farm where John Bosco was a shepherd.

The former would take a piece of black bread for lunch while John would always receive a loaf of very white bread from his mother.

John would often ask Secondo to do him the favour of exchanging bread with him. Secondo would always consent willingly. He asked John why they exchanged bread and John said: "Yours must be tastier than mine, or at least, I like it better!"

In his simplicity Matta believed that Bosco really found his bread tastier and always accepted the suggestion that they exchange bread with each other. This continued for two years even though Matta's dark, hard bread was far from being palatable.

Years later when they had both reached manhood and Matta realized what John had done for him, he would often remind John of the experience and the two of them had many hearty laughs over the pleasant and generous trick.

Off the Tree He Fell, Straight!

Little John was a very able tree-climber. One day he climbed an immense oak tree in order to reach a nest of tiny birds. In no time he was at the top but the nest was at the very tip of a long branch which bent under his weight.

John was not disheartened. Carefully, slowly, silently, John managed to reach the nest and one by one he placed the tiny birds inside his shirt. Up to this point everything had gone along smoothly. Now his chief

difficulty was, returning to the trunk of the tree. Suddenly his foot slipped and he found himself suspended in midair holding on tightly to the branch with his hands!

John realized that he was in a very precarious position and tried very hard to grasp the branch with his feet. But the more he tried, the more the branch bent downward. John, therefore, decided that the best solution was to jump. This he did very cautiously, making sure that he would land erect, feet first and on his toes.

This acrobatic stunt worked beautifully, but that did not prevent him from feeling the result of the thump for a long time afterwards and he relived his fear each time he related the experience to his friends.

So Much for a Blackbird!

One day, John caught a blackbird. He put it in a cage, fed it, and took very good care of it. By whistling notes and arias into its ear he even taught it to sing. He became so enamoured of the bird that it became his delight and his chief source of entertainment.

As we know, everything on earth must come to an end. And thus it was that one day when John returned home from school he found the door of the cage open, bloodstains here and there, and the lifeless form of his bird half-eaten by the house cat.

The heartache that this incident caused little John is indescribable and for several days he felt completely lost. One day, he began to consider the whole situation and realized that he had attached too much of affection to the bird. He decided to forget his melancholy since he did not want to be unhappy all his life because of a little blackbird and he went about the house smiling once more.

A Priest at Any Price

Ever since his early childhood John had been very studious. In fact, if he ever refused to play with his companions it was because he felt the need to spend more time with his books. The boys of course would become terribly agitated with him, first arguing with him and later coming to blows as well. But he would remain unmoved.

One day, instead of arguing with them or defending himself, John told them that they could beat him as much as they liked but he would nevertheless become a priest.

The little rascals teased him and addressed him as "Reverend"! Bosco did not mind this and in a prophetic tone said:

"Yes, I shall become a priest and you will come to me for confession." These words were enough to mortify the children who understood by the seriousness of them that it was very possible. From then on he had no more difficulty with the boys. As a matter of fact when they saw that he was studying or praying they no longer disturbed him, and only when they

were certain that he had finished would 'they run to him gaily to enjoy his good company.

John would entertain them by telling them many interesting stories and by teaching new hymns and some lovely songs.

When he finally did become a priest they all flocked to him for confession whether he was at Becchi, at Castelnuovo or at Turin and they laughed with him when they recalled the episodes of their youth.

He Begins to Dream

It is sometimes customary for the Lord to announce our vocation to us in the form of a dream especially in those cases where we have been destined to accomplish great deeds. This is exactly what happened in the case of John Bosco. When he was but nine years old he was so vividly impressed by a dream that its effects accompanied him throughout the rest of his life and occasionally the dream would repeat itself.

He dreamed that he was in a large courtyard where there were a great number of children, some laughing, some playing and some singing. There were also some fighting and swearing.

When John heard the unpleasant words they were using, he rushed towards them and spared neither words nor blows in order to quiet them. At that moment there appeared before him a man wearing an extremely white cloak. His face radiated so much light that it was impossible to look at him.

That person addressed John by name and said to him: "You will not win these boys over with blows, but with kindness. Lead them and teach them how ugly sin is and how precious virtue is and they will become your friends."

John, who was confused and a bit frightened, said timidly:

"Who are you who command me to do such impossible things?"

In reply, John was told that this might appear impossible to him then but that as he acquired knowledge it would become quite possible. He added that he would give John a teacher who would instruct him and that he should permit her to guide him.

The scene changed. The man disappeared. The children were transformed into dogs, wolves and other animals. There now appeared before him a very majestic woman wrapped in a golden cloak which glittered with jewels. She took him by the hand and told him not to be frightened because that was to become his vocation. She told him to notice carefully what was about to happen to those animals because that is what he was to do for her children.

She told him to look at all the children who were there before him, to render them humble and robust and to convert them into an equal number of lambs.

He turned about and saw that all those ferocious animals had been changed into an equal number of lambs that jumped about and bleated happily about that lady. Placing her hand upon his shoulder she said to him: "Have courage, my dear boy. In time, you will understand everything." And having said these words, she disappeared.

Finally John awakened, perspiring, his hands aching on account of the blows he had given. He pondered over that dream again and again and the following morning related it to his family.

Everyone began to laugh. His brother Joseph told him he would probably become a shepherd, another brother named Anthony said he would become the leader of a group of brigands; his grandmother dismissed the entire affair by saying that he should not pay any attention to his dreams. But his mother instead said: "I wonder if it means you are to become a priest?"

Bosco was inclined to agree with his grandmother and laughed over it with his brothers. Nevertheless he could not forget about it and as a matter of fact he later saw the entire dream materialize in the admirable work which he performed.

A Charlatan to the Fore!

Having often accompanied his mother to market-places and to fairs, John noticed that people listened in amazement and fascination to any charlatan who happened to be at hand. This appeared as a revelation to the child and he considered it an excellent means of attracting and holding the attention of others. He asked his mother to send him back soon again.

He began to pay very careful attention to these charlatans, to notice all their mannerisms, to learn all their tricks to the last detail. When he returned home he practised everything he had seen until he had perfected each motion, each word.

You can well imagine the number of bruises he acquired when he tried to imitate the various tricks, somersaults, etc. He even learned to dance on a tight rope and to walk on his hands with his feet in the air. Very persevering and agile, he gradually became proficient in all sorts of tricks.

Soon he became well-versed in the art and began to give his own performances especially on Sundays in his home town, Becchi. There in a field he would put up a rope between two trees, prepare a table on which he would place a chair, spread a rug on the ground and many people would gather about curiously.

When he had succeeded in attracting a large group, he would have them recite the Rosary and sing a hymn. Then he would climb up on the chair from which he would repeat the sermon which he had heard that morning at Mass, adorning it with instructive tales.

If anyone made faces or complained, John, who looked as majestic as a king upon his throne in that chair, very seriously would force him into submission.

Then he would proceed to perform all sorts of tricks among which the most ordinary were changing water into wine, increasing the number of balls or eggs, killing a chicken and then reviving it and walking on his hands.

He walked along the tight rope as though he were on a path, he jumped and danced on it; he suspended his body first by one foot, later by both; sometimes he would suspend himself by his hands and then hoist his body up on the rope once more! All this he did with an astonishing amount of agility, always accompanying his performance with humorous stories.

Everyone admired him, laughed heartily, applauded and shouted: "Bravo!"

Breathless, John would stop occasionally to begin a prayer or a hymn or to give advice.

Only one person did not cooperate and that was his stepbrother Anthony who would say: "You are an imbecile! Why do you expose yourself to the ridicule of so many people?"

But John paid no attention to Anthony's mockery because he realized that even if people were laughing at him he was doing so much good.

... **And Industrious, Too!**

In order to carry on what he was doing, John needed funds. He was poor but very industrious and capable and was able to adjust himself to any situation.

An expert trapper of birds, he caught birds of all species, employing one or the other of his numerous methods, and sold these quite profitably.

In addition there were many odd tasks he undertook, nothing seeming too difficult for him! He made hats and baskets of straw and bird cages of reed which he then took to market to sell. He even went out into the fields and picked mushrooms, aromatic herbs as well as herbs to be used for dyeing; he trapped snakes, too — anything that would bring him some profit.

He had learned to spin thread of all kinds: cotton, linen, silk. He learned to knit and made stockings and sweaters, from each attempt deriving a profit.

His mother, who had been watching all this attentively and with sincere interest, always left him unmolested in his endeavours because she realized the noble purpose on his mind and was certain that some day her son would accomplish valuable deeds. She smiled with him, delighted at his many and varied industries and was ever ready to encourage him.

He Interrupts a Public Dance

He was about twelve years old when on the occasion of a religious holiday, a public dance was being organized on the village square of the nearby town of Murialdo.

It was almost time for Vespers and the crowd continued growing thicker and thicker. John realized that it would be impossible to convince these people to stop dancing and chatting and laughing long enough to enter the church. He must find some solution. He began to sing with such a beautiful, sonorous voice that gradually everyone gathered about him and began to follow him blindly, as though by enchantment, straight into the church.

When the religious ceremonies had ended the people again commenced to dance and John, realizing that as night fell, the situation would have become more dangerous, began once more to sing even better than before and at the sound of his magic voice the dancing stopped a second time.

Everyone applauded him enthusiastically and offered him money and gifts of all kinds; but John accepted nothing and continued singing a variety of tunes.

The sponsors of the dance knew that if they permitted this boy to continue singing, their profits would be cut in half. At first they offered him money if he would stop singing, then threatened to beat him. John was unmoved and answered fearlessly: "What manner of talk is that? Am I not free to do for the well-being of the people what you do with the danger of harming them? Your money does not attract me; neither do your threats frighten me. I have many friends and relatives here. Try to harm me and you will see what happens! I want my town to continue maintaining its fine reputation. Am I perhaps insulting you because of this sincere desire of mine to do good?"

Such wise and sincere reasoning could not but succeed in convincing even the most stubborn among his listeners who realized that they were so few and weak in comparison to the number of strong friends and relatives John had. They decided that the best alternative was to pack up and go, leaving John and his friends cherishing joyously their complete victory.

For the First Time He Challenges a Charlatan — And Succeeds!

One Sunday evening a sermon was scheduled to be preached in a little church of a neighbouring town. The church was practically filled with people when, rather unexpectedly, the sound of a bugle was heard — it was played by a charlatan.

It was impossible to hold the children and young boys in church and gradually they were followed by the men so that the only people remaining were a few women.

John also went out to the square and elbowing his way through the crowd, took a seat in the first row, and challenged the charlatan to a demonstration of his ability.

The latter looked at John scornfully while everyone shouted: "Bravo!" Finally the charlatan accepted the challenge and suggested the game of the magic wand. He brought forth a wand and invited the boy to prove his ability.

John took the wand in his hand. At one end he placed a hat and placing the other end in the palm of his hand he let it jump and balance first on the tip of his little finger, then on to the next finger and so on, until it had been balanced on the tip of each finger. From his thumb it passed on to the knuckles of his hand, from there to his elbow, his shoulder, his chin, his lips, his nose, his forehead; then retracing the same path it finally landed on the palm of his hand again. He then handed the wand to the charlatan for him to perform the same trick.

The people, who had been looking on in admiration became almost delirious as they applauded John and shouted to the charlatan: "It is your turn now!"

The charlatan proclaimed that he was not afraid that he would lose. He took the wand in his hand and began performing the same trick. Everything went well up to his lips but, unfortunately, his nose was very long and the wand stumbled, lost its balance and fell to the ground! The audience erupted in laughter and their cries could be heard blocks away. The poor man, embarrassed, gathered his belongings as fast as he could and angrily disappeared.

At this point John turned towards the laughing multitude and told them to enter the church. Not a single person declined to obey, their laughter continuing to the very threshold of the church.

Away with Vulgar Speech!

On another occasion a stranger had come to town and had begun to deliver a speech that was far from being fitting and was accentuated with the narration of numerous untrue stories.

John, having given the matter serious thought, decided that he must put an end to this scandal immediately and stop the boisterous laughter of the men and children who were in the audience.

He went home for a rope which he fastened securely to two trees not very distant from each other. He then jumped on the rope, gripped it and climbing up on it, began to walk, jump and dance, accompanying himself with varied and melodious tunes. One by one people turned from the speaker to watch John's antics and to listen to his delightful voice. Finally the speaker became discouraged, turned about and disappeared.

The people smiled at John's ingenuity and he smiled because he had saved them.

Prodigious Memory

In the year 1826, when John was about eleven years of age, there was a mission being preached at Buttigliera d'Asti, a town about three miles distant from Becchi. The preachers were well known and hundreds of people congregated from various nearby towns. John did not miss a single sermon.

On his way home one evening, John was walking along with Don Calosso, the new chaplain of Murialdo, with relatives and friends. Naturally everyone was discussing the sermon. Don Calosso noticed that this youngster walking alongside of him was listening very attentively.

Turning to him he said: "What do you know about these sermons? If you can repeat two words that were preached this evening, I shall give you four cents."

Immediately, John answered that he felt confident that he could repeat not just two words but the entire sermon from beginning to end and he asked Don Calosso whether he would care to hear that evening's sermon, the morning's sermon or the one which had been preached the previous day.

Don Calosso, thinking that the child was boasting, burst into laughter. Unperturbed, John said: "Very well, which one? I am ready!" Don Calosso chose the evening's sermon and John, not in the least concerned, began, speaking for about half an hour, not omitting a single word. Everyone marvelled at his memory, at his precision and at the clarity of his speech. When he had finished, Don Calosso questioned him about the sermon which had been preached that morning. Bosco began repeating it verbatim until Don Calosso, moved to tears, asked him his name, enquired who his parents were, where he lived and how much education he had had.

John answered that his name was John Bosco, that he lived at Becchi, that his father had died while he was still an infant, that his mother's name was Margaret and that she had five mouths to feed. About his education he said he had learned to read and write and nothing further.

Don Calosso inquired whether he would care to study. Enthusiastically, John answered that he would like to very much but that his mother was too poor to afford him that luxury. The reverend Padre told him to be brave and expressed his desire to speak to his mother.

As Bosco parted with him, he did so with a hope-filled heart and ran home to tell his mother about the happy encounter.

Generous Renunciation

Since the day of that meeting, Don Calosso had become Bosco's teacher. Several months later Don Calosso had a paralytic stroke and John hurried to his bedside.

Although he was unable to speak, he beckoned to John to come closer to his bed and taking a key from beneath his pillow he handed it to John. By using many signs he made John understand that no one but John was to touch that key and that all that was contained in a certain coffer which this key opened was to be his.

John pocketed the key, and began taking the most affectionate care of his teacher until the moment of his death.

When the various relatives arrived John handed them the key telling them that it had been given to him by Don Calosso in the presence of witnesses and that he had been made heir to the contents of the coffer, but that he did not want to be the cause of a dispute.

When the nephew opened the chest he discovered that it contained six thousand lire which he immediately turned over to John saying: "I respect my uncle's wishes. Take these; they are yours." John thought for a moment and then answered: "I do not want anything. Paradise is more precious to me than all the money in the world." In time, Don Bosco came to handle millions and millions of lire but he never felt any attachment for the money. His only wish was to have enough of it so that he might carry on his work uninterruptedly. He smiled when his hands were full of it and became very sad when he did not have any.

The Farm-hand and His First Prophecy

After the death of Don Calosso, John again found himself in need of looking for work. He went to speak to the Moglia brothers at Castelnuovo and became a farm-hand there.

One day the Moglia brothers took John with them to help plant rows upon rows of grapevines. John's task was to tie each vine to its particular support. After several hours John became not only fatigued but uncomfortable because of the position in which he had to work and exclaimed that he had a terrible backache.

The landowners spurred him on telling him that if he did not want to suffer from backaches in his old age he had better accustom himself to them during his youth.

Courageously John continued his work and some time later he smiled and turned to the landowners saying: "These vines which I am now tying will bear the best grape, will give the best wine and will last longer than all the rest!"

One of the men laughed at him but the other one said: "I hope it is true!"

And true it was because that row of vines did produce twice the amount that was obtained from the rest. Some of the others had to be uprooted and replaced while the vines of that special row, which was called Don Bosco's row, prospered admirably from 1828 to 1890— 62 years to be precise!

About forty years later the landowners' grandchildren visited Don Bosco at his Oratory in Turin and brought him some of the grapes from that famous row in order to keep reminding him of the continued good crop. Don Bosco laughed at his very first prophecy which had become such a marvellous reality!

A Second Prophecy

The Moglia brothers had a younger sister Anna who noticed that John always had a book in his hand and often heard him repeat that he was going to become a priest and preach and hear confessions. She would often ridicule him and add scornfully that he would not succeed in doing anything.

On one occasion when Anna was again teasing him about his future, John said to her: "Do you realize that some day you will come to me for confession?"

The girl laughed, as did everyone else present, but these words became facts, for when he finally was ordained and became the director of the Oratory in Turin, Anna, who was then a woman, went especially from her town to Turin so that Don Bosco might be her confessor. Remembering the prophecy of his youth they both had many laughs together.

He Answers His Companions in Strong Tones

Having been transferred to the schools at Castelnuovo he soon met with bad companions who teased him because of his naiveté and invited him to cut school with them and join them in their games, but John made many excuses saying that he had no money. One of them turned to him in surprise saying: "No money?"

What does that mean? Get some! Get some wherever you can. You must learn to live and to enjoy yourself the way we do!"

John shuddered upon hearing such dishonest suggestions and told them he would never become a thief. "Do you not know," he said, "that that is a sin and that gamblers and thieves always end up badly? If your friends do these things, they are dishonest; and if you make these suggestions to others, you are just as bad as they. Keep far away from me, I do not wish to be your friend!"

From that day on he was no longer disturbed because they had understood the seriousness of his words. The good boys, however, kept flocking to him in larger numbers to enjoy his fine company and his pleasant manner.

If I succeed in Becoming a Priest

There were several priests at Castelnuovo and occasionally others would stop by for a few days. Each time Bosco saw one of them he bowed, went up to him and politely greeted him always expecting a smile and a few encouraging words.

In those days it was believed that in order to maintain the dignity of the Church, a priest must be very serious. For this reason Bosco received nothing further than a mere nod of the head. Often he would complain to his mother saying: "What would they lose by smiling and by making a few encouraging remarks to me, which would do me so much good? Jesus never acted the way they do! If I should succeed in becoming a priest I shall devote my life to children, I shall be very friendly and the first to approach them. I shall never be too serious and I shall keep the children happy by making them sing and play and in this manner shall I save their souls!"

Rubbing his hands in anticipation of carrying out his noble mission he closed his little speech with a smile. Time would prove the veracity of his words.

He Gives Proof of His Ability

At the age of sixteen Bosco attended the only Latin school which existed in Castelnuovo d'Asti. His professor had made up his mind that John was stupid, that he could be nothing but stupid merely because he came from the town of Becchi. He was a fine chap, that he would concede; but nevertheless, stupid. Even his very age helped: at sixteen he cannot but be stupid! Nothing would convince him that he might be wrong.

One day at examination time the assignment to write a composition was given. John, who was a first year student, begged his professor to permit him to write on the topic which was assigned to third year students.

The professor burst into laughter and suggested that John give up entirely the idea of studying Latin because he would never be able to understand it. But John, for his part, instead of becoming discouraged and offended at his professor's words, continued insisting and the professor finally said: "Do as you please but I shall never read the nonsense which you will write."

The subject assigned to the third year students was a very difficult Latin passage which was to be translated into Italian and Bosco after having worked on it scarcely one hour, handed it in. The professor took the paper and threw it aside on his desk without even looking at it.

John begged the professor to look his paper over and to correct his errors for him. Even the other students encouraged the professor to read it out loud because they too wanted to hear the "stupid" errors they thought he had made.

Finally the professor condescended to read the paper. He was unable to discover a single error in it. He put the translation aside and added that Bosco was a good-for-nothing and that he had probably copied the entire paper from one of the other students because it certainly could not be his own work.

Bosco turned to the professor and suggested that he glance at the other papers to see if there was another like his, a suggestion that met with the approval of the entire student body, for they thought it was a just request. Of course, Bosco was triumphant and the accusation was withdrawn. Everyone admired his genius and knowledge while Bosco himself laughed, not at the praises of his companions, but at the stubbornness of his professor.

He Wins the Prize on the Grease Pole

That year during his summer vacation there was a celebration in his town and a very tall greasy pole had been raised. At the top of this pole there were several objects which were to be awarded as prizes.

A numerous crowd had gathered about the pole. All the youngsters of the town came close to the pole and looked up at its great height.

Everyone made the attempt to climb the pole. Some reached one third the height, some half-way up and, not being able to proceed farther, would slide down again. The spectators shouted encouraging remarks to all who tried.

John had been observing the contenders very closely and carefully. He noticed that each of them began the ascent at great speed and continued without ever stopping to catch his breath. Naturally, as they reached a certain point, they began to feel weak and were forced to slide down.

When his turn came he gripped the trunk very carefully, and calmly began to climb. He crossed his legs in order to maintain a better grip on the pole and occasionally he sat back on his heels to rest.

The spectators could not imagine why John was going through such strange motions and laughed at him. They expected that at any moment he too would be forced to slide down again, but John kept on climbing.

When he had almost reached the top, which was swaying because it was so thin, there was perfect silence, which in a few moments exploded in ecstatic applause as he reached the very tip of the pole and pocketed the gifts as his prize.

Returning to the ground, he broke through the crowd and ran home jubilantly!

Another Proof of His Ability

After graduating from the school at Castelnuovo he attended one at Chieri. His professor, a very stern man, seeing before him this big husky young man, remarked before all the students: "Either he is a genius or a dunce."

Everyone laughed and John joined in also, adding: "Somewhere between the two! But my intentions are good." Scarcely two months had passed since the opening of the session. One day John had accidentally left his text book at home. After giving the

necessary explanations and comments, the professor noticed that John did not have his book and he proceeded to call on him to read and then repeat the explanation.

John was not a bit upset. He picked up one of his books at random, opened it and repeated the entire passage verbatim, from memory. Then he gave all the comments that had been made by the professor.

As soon as he had finished, his friends applauded him. At this the professor became angry and demanded to know why they had caused all that disturbance. Thereupon they pointed out that John did not have the correct textbook before him and yet had read and explained the correct passage as though he had the words before his eyes.

Wanting to ascertain that the boys were telling the truth, he went up to John Bosco, took the book from his hands and made him recite two or more sentences. His anger turned to admiration. "You have a marvellous memory," he said to Bosco, "use it well!"

Everyone laughed at the episode, Bosco joining in, too.

Supernatural Assistance

Besides his ingenuity and his fine memory John possessed another virtue that often came to his aid — a secret and supernatural one.

One night he dreamed that the professor had dictated the topic for the theme intended for the examination, and he was developing the subject. John awakened, jumped out of bed and wrote that composition which, by the way, was in Latin. Very calmly he then proceeded to translate it.

When he went to school that morning, the professor dictated the very topic John had dreamed of. Naturally John immediately set out to write his composition without even referring to a dictionary and within a very short length of time he handed over the completed work to the professor.

Everyone marvelled at his ability and their surprise became even greater when he was questioned by the professor and naively confessed that he had dreamed about the composition.

And the Experience Repeats Itself.....

The work Bosco had handed in was, although completed in a short space of time, perfect in every respect. The professor looked at him in amazement and asked for the rough copy. What John gave now, caused even greater astonishment.

The professor had prepared that very theme in those very words the preceding evening, but believing it to be too long, had dictated only half of it. In John's note-book he saw the entire theme written out! What power was John hiding? It was highly improbable and unimaginable that John could have gone into the professor's room during the night and had it copied! Then what explanation was there?

John smilingly confessed that he had dreamed about the entire theme with its translation and had written it in his notebook. Naturally, on the

paper he handed in he wrote only half, that is, the portion which the professor had dictated.

Everyone had a good laugh over the happy happening, and John was rewarded for having completed three years' work in one with excellent results.

Valiant Horsemanship

During the vacations, when John went to the pastorate of Castelnuovo for rehearsals, he was given the duty of keeping the pastor's horse clean.

John had become quite fond of the horse and so performed his duty with great sincerity and dedication. On certain days when the priest was not using the horse, John would take him out for a walk; he would then make him trot and running alongside would jump on his back. With remarkable control and ability he succeeded in remaining standing and performing various tricks while the horse continued to run.

One fine day, while he was riding along he had an accident. The horse became excited because a flock of birds dashed out of a hedge unexpectedly. John was thrown off the horse who ran on wildly through the fields.

John, who had been trampled upon naturally did not even smile at that moment. Nevertheless, he did enjoy a good laugh when he told the story later on!

The Spirit behind the Fun

Although John was always the best student and a perfect example of discipline and obedience, in fact of any and every virtue, he was also extremely fun-loving, and his friends looked up to him for leadership in their games.

He had a keen sense of observation; he never omitted a single detail. Many and varied were the games he knew: card games, ball games, racing, jumping, etc., and he was well-versed in all. As we have already seen, he would often give performances in public and in private. The people marvelled at his dexterity because in those days one rarely witnessed such forms of entertainment.

Blessed with an excellent memory, John had at his fingertips a good number of the classics: Dante, Parini, Petrarca, Monti,

Tasso and many others. He could quote them at a moment's notice just as though they had been members of his own family! During his many entertainments he sang, played, composed poetry both humorous and tragic; he delivered speeches, too. He was able to make his audience burst into laughter as well as move them to tears. Even the most apathetic and indifferent of them were touched. At times they even trembled with fear at his words.

He smiled at this ability of his, not out of conceit or self-satisfaction, but because he knew that he was entertaining others in a pleasing manner. He had adopted the saying:

“Laetare et benefacere... Lasciar cantar le passere!” i.e., “To please and to oblige...

Let even the sparrows sing!”

All for a Good Cause

Whenever he noticed a group of companions, friends or acquaintances whom he feared might enter into harmful conversation, he would join them and after passing a few pleasant remarks would begin one of his popular games: challenge them to pick up a penny between the pinky and the index finger, or bend over backwards and touch the ground with their head, or place their feet close together, bend down and kiss the ground without touching it with their hands. At other times he challenged them to bite an apple floating in a bucket of water, or to pick with one’s mouth a penny buried in flour.

Often he challenged them to run or jump with their feet tied with a rope.

As they performed, their companions became hysterical with laughter as they watched the contortions, the hopeless attempts, the falls of the less experienced boys and the mouthfuls of flour and water!

At other times he would recite poetry or speak in Latin or Greek; he would deliver extemporaneous sermons or dialogues, or enact interesting comedies.

With their minds so occupied, the boys forgot all unhealthy conversation and always departed laughing heartily, carrying home with them some good, wholesome thoughts. What a perfect master Bosco was in this art.

“Sempre ridere e scherzare, Mai e poi mai peccare!” i.e., “Always laugh and grin, But never, ever sin!”

Clever Acrobat

At nineteen John was still attending school at Chieri. An acrobat who happened to be in that town had been giving performances for some time. The most attractive tricks he reserved for Sunday evenings in order to interest and stop the people as they set out to attend the religious services.

Bosco sent a messenger out to speak to the acrobat, entreating him to stop his performances at least during the church services. But instead of cooperating the latter merely laughed at such a proposal. In fact he boasted of his unusual ability and began to challenge everyone to compete with him.

Bosco realized that if the adversary were defeated, he could accomplish much good because the acrobat in his embarrassment would

surely have to leave the town. With this idea in mind, Bosco challenged him.

Accepting the challenge, the acrobat suggested a race from one end of the town to the other, betting on 43 lire for the winner. John did not have the money but his friends came to his aid. The judges were chosen, Bosco removed his jacket, crossed himself and the race began. At first the acrobat was a few paces ahead, but John soon overtook him, leaving him so far behind that he stopped altogether and conceded the victory to John.

The acrobat was mortified by the laughter of the spectators who had gathered in great numbers and felt that he must redeem himself. He therefore challenged Bosco to jump, but this time the wager went up to lire 86.

The acrobat jumped first. He chose a spot against a low wall bordering a canal and jumped across allowing his feet to land as close to the opposite wall as possible; in fact he grasped the wall with his hands in order to avoid falling into the canal.

The people were concerned about Bosco. What could he do to prove his superior ability since it was impossible to jump any farther, they wondered. John thought for a moment, jumped in exactly the same manner as his opponent, but when he reached the opposite side he grasped the wall with his hands, jumped over it, and landed on the opposite side.

At this unexpected and undreamed of demonstration of acrobatic ability, the people applauded enthusiastically and the poor impostor who saw his small fortune gradually disappear, almost in desperation cried: "I will suffer any humiliation but not allow a chit of a boy to defeat me! I have lire 215 left and offer it to the one who comes the closest in reaching the top of that tree!" It was a huge elm tree that he was indicating, bordering the road.

Encouraged by his friends, Bosco accepted the challenge. Gripping the trunk, the acrobat was the first to begin the climb. Impelled by excitement and anger, he was at the top of the tree in a short while; in fact it was so high that the branches were in danger of snapping under his weight.

All of the onlookers naturally felt that the victory was his since it was impossible to climb higher. When it was his turn, Bosco climbed, reached the same point as the acrobat; then, gripping a branch tightly with his hands, he turned upside down lifting his feet above his head so that they reached a point at least three feet higher than had been reached by his opponent.

The shouts, the applause and the excitement of the victor's friends and the anger of the impostor that followed were simply indescribable!

Bosco felt sorry for him, however, and offered to return the money, provided that he was willing to treat him and his companions to lunch. He

accepted willingly and everyone was proud of John's prowess. From that day on the acrobat never once showed his face again.

A New Samson

Besides his many other virtues Bosco was further endowed with extraordinary muscular strength.

One day at Chieri, when he was about to enter the school, Bosco saw a group of fellow students molesting Louis Comollo, his best friend, because of his fine qualities. Incidentally, Louis was one of the best students in the school.

Naturally, Bosco came to the rescue of his friend, but the other boys began to beat, kick and strike poor Comollo on his head. That was all Bosco needed to make him lose control over himself and began striking in every direction! And just at that moment, in walked the professor! Furious at the sight of arms and legs being flung in the air, he reprimanded the students and demanded to know the cause of such a disgraceful scene.

Unperturbed, Bosco told him the truth. Turning to the guilty students the professor said: "You really deserve more severe punishment but for this time let Bosco's words and blows be a lesson to you. Be very careful in the future not to molest anyone especially someone who is wiser and more virtuous than you!"

All morning long, the professor, unable to suppress a chuckle, was forced to stop the lesson and laugh when he recalled those arms and legs flying about in mid-air, Bosco and the other students merrily chiming in.

A Magician Speaks the Truth

At Chieri John had organized a "Glee Club", of which all his friends were members. At the club's meetings John entertained them with his famous repertoire of games and tricks.

Amazed at his ability and able to find no plausible explanation for his unusual skill, many became convinced that he must be a magician and that he was able to perform his many stunts only through the help of the devil. Among those who shared this opinion was Cumino Tommaso, his landlord.

On his name-day, Cumino prepared a chicken in gelatine for his boarders. When the dish was brought to the table and the cover was lifted from it, to the surprise of everyone, a rooster came out, and flapping its wings, began a merry cock-a-doodle doo.

On another occasion, after having boiled a pot full of macaroni, he placed them in a dish, and discovered, to his surprise, they were many bits of dry husk.

Oftentimes, he would find that bottles of wine contained water whereas he had filled them with wine. On other occasions, instead, when he desired a drink of water, he discovered that his glass was full of wine.

Intermittently, he even found cake converted into slices of bread; or money in his purse converted into pieces of tin, or his hat changed into a baby's cap.

Then there were times when his eyeglasses would mysteriously disappear. After having searched in vain for them, they would suddenly turn up in one of his pockets which he had turned inside out just a few minutes before. Similarly, some object which he had carefully hidden, such as a ring, a chain or a wallet, would, upon a signal from John, suddenly appear in the palm of his hand; whereas some article which he held in his own hand would suddenly and inexplicably disappear.

One day he made a bet that he would make a key disappear. Everyone knew definitely where this key was located. They discovered the key at the bottom of a bowl after the soup had been poured out of it!

Either God or the Devil

Such tricks as these continued to happen practically every day and Cumino came to the conclusion that John must be either god or a devil. "No:" thought he, "he cannot be god, therefore he must be a devil and I must denounce him."

Cumino did not dare mention these ideas to his family, but something must be done, he felt convinced. He decided to consult a priest. As he told the priest of the various occurrences, he exaggerated most of the facts, partly out of fright and partly from excitement. Even the good priest was so impressed that he became convinced that he must refer the matter to the higher Ecclesiastical authorities.

The entire affair was entrusted to a Canon who sent for Bosco. When John arrived, he found the Canon distributing alms to the poor. When John had entered the study, the Canon very seriously said to him: "My dear John Bosco, up to this point we have all been very well pleased with your scholastic achievements and with your conduct. But now, I'm sorry to say, there are strange tales circulating about you! They say you can read another person's mind, change the colour of things, guess how much money someone has in his pocket and know what is going on both near and afar. In short you are causing people to talk about you. What's worse, it is believed that you resort to magic and that some demon intervenes in your work. Please tell me, in the strictest confidence, how you accomplish these things. I assure you that I will not betray your confidence, but that I will use it only for your own good."

Bosco, without becoming a bit upset, asked him for a five minutes time-frame before answering and then said: "Please may I know the exact time?"

The Canon put his hand into his pocket, but, to his amazement, his watch had disappeared.

"If you cannot find your watch, then let me have a dime:" said Bosco. Again the Canon looked in each pocket but could not find his wallet.

“You rascal!” hollered the Canon, rising in anger. “Either you serve the devil or he serves you! You have stolen my watch and my wallet. Now I can no longer remain silent! I shall have to refer the matter to the Bishop. I do not know what keeps me from giving you a sound thrashing.” Bosco coolly and smilingly told the Canon to calm himself. “How can I calm down? Where is my wallet and my watch?” the Canon raged.

Bosco again repeated that he should calm himself, explaining that it was merely dexterity, but the Canon would not be calmed. He could not understand how a young man could smile about having stolen a watch and a wallet.

“Well.” said Bosco, “now let me explain everything. When I arrived, you were distributing alms to the poor and left your wallet on that kneeler. Then when you left the room you placed your watch on that table. I took both articles and hid them under this lampshade.” Lifting the lampshade, both the articles which previously had been thought stolen, were made visible.

The Canon laughed heartily at this surprise and asked Bosco to show him some more tricks. When he learned how one can make an object appear or disappear, he was delighted and gave Bosco a gift. Taking leave of him, he told Bosco to return home and tell everyone that “ignorance is the master of admiration”!

Irrefutably Prodigious Memory!

As you read these facts about the student days of Saint John Bosco, you might think that he neglected his studies. On the contrary, John had been accustomed by his mother to sleep very little; he would spend two-thirds of the night with his books. Often it would be time to wake up and John would still be poring over his books.

John had made arrangements with a bookseller and he would spend long hours at the store reading and rereading both Latin and Italian Classics. This was not done merely for enjoyment but for the purpose of studying each word carefully in order to derive from his reading the true meaning and feeling and beauty of each word. By studying them in such a careful manner, he was able to retain not just an expression or two but the entire text from beginning to end.

He did not distinguish between reading and studying. With the greatest facility he was able to repeat word by word any book which he had read whether in Latin, Italian or Greek.

One day John and a friend of his were reviewing their preparedness for the examinations. His companion turned to Bosco and said: “Shall we see who memorizes this page first?” Naturally, Bosco found the challenge interesting and agreed.

His friend, after having glanced at the page, recited the entire text from memory. Then came John’s turn and we can be certain that he too

found no difficulty in repeating each word. But then, he sprung a surprise! "Can you repeat it backwards?" he asked. His friend thought this an unusually strange idea. "Very well," said Bosco and he proceeded to repeat each word beginning with the last and ending with the first, smiling jovially as he did so!

Another Proof of His Herculean Strength

During his Easter vacation in the year 1835, at the age of twenty, he went to Pinerolo to visit a friend of his, a certain Hannibal Strambio who was to one day become a statesman, a consul at Marseilles and a great friend of the Salesians.

One day Bosco and his friend decided to take a trip to Fenestrelle which was several miles up on the mountain side.

Their only means of transport was a two-wheeled carriage. For a few hours all went along smoothly, but when they had reached a certain height, a terrific wind arose and the horse was pushed backwards and lost all its strength. To make matters worse sand and tiny pebbles were blown about by the force of the wind striking against the face of the two men and entering the eyes of the unhappy animal.

In the meantime it was growing darker and the horse was becoming more and more frightened no longer wishing to continue the journey. The strong wind menaced to precipitate horse, carriage and men down the mountain side.

At a distance not too far off, they sighted a cave which seemed to offer safe refuge. But how were they to reach that point? The horse refused to move another step and the wheels were embedded in the road.

Bosco turned to his friend and said, "Hannibal, take hold of the horse's bit and I shall push from the rear." But instead of advancing, the horse went even farther backwards.

Bosco said to Hannibal, "Very well, you come here and push and I shall take care of the horse."

Having changed positions, Bosco took the horse's reins into his hands and applying all his strength he pulled horse, carriage and friend to the providential refuge. Once they were inside the cave, the two of them could hardly contain their laughter even as they brushed the mud off their clothes!

Iron Strength

In the month of December, 1884, Don Bosco went to St Benigno for the second religious vestition of his novices and spent the entire day with them telling them pleasant tales about his youth. All of a sudden one of the little altar boys whom the saint was holding by the hand said to him: "Don Bosco, when you were a youngster you used to win all the races

and challenge the acrobats, and now you can scarcely walk! It is a shame that your legs no longer serve you!”

Don Bosco answered that although it was true that his legs no longer served him, yet, his hands were still strong and, he began pressing a hand of each of the boys.

It was only with difficulty that each of them was able to release his hand but the poor little one whom we have mentioned above remained prisoner and he was forced to beg for mercy!

Drying the perspiration from his face and putting the sore, livid fingers into his mouth he exclaimed: “Your hands really do serve you your muscles are as strong as iron I felt them!”

Everyone including Don Bosco laughed heartily.

The Violinist

While he was at Chieri he had learned to play the violin from the choirmaster of the Cathedral and thus he was able to accompany the singing at religious services.

As a seminarian he had been invited by his uncle, who was 102 years old, to a celebration. He was to assist by singing and playing the violin. Everything went well until after the dinner, which was given at the home of his uncle who was in charge of the celebration.

After dinner, the guests, among them the Pastor, invited him to play so that they might relax. John accepted especially because he wanted to please his aged uncle who kept insisting more than anyone else. Everyone applauded him enthusiastically. All of a sudden John heard chatting and the shuffle of feet in the courtyard. He looked outside and there he saw a multitude of people who had gathered and were dancing gaily to the sound of his violin!

Bosco was very angry because he had always protested so strongly against dancing and now he had inadvertently become its promoter. “This will never happen again:” he declared. Throwing the violin on the floor he trampled on it breaking it into a thousand pieces, declaring that he would never again play a violin as long as he lived.

He laughed many times when he told the story and the just punishment which he had imposed upon himself.

Improvised Teacher!

During that same vacation he had been invited by the pastor of Cinzano Monferrato to take part in the celebrations being held in honour of the feast of Saint Rocco, an event always of great solemnity in that town.

It was towards the end of the dinner when the bells announcing Vespers began to ring and the invited preacher had not yet appeared.

The poor pastor was very anxious and dismayed and Bosco, in order to prevent the embarrassment of the pastor, turned to each priest present begging them persistently to preach the sermon. No one felt the urge or the ability of accepting the responsibility. Don Bosco asked if they wanted to see the people return home without having heard at least a few words. One of them became annoyed at the insistence of Bosco and said: "It is not so easy to stand up there and speak about Saint Rocco, especially extemporaneously. You do it if you feel capable!"

Every one applauded and Bosco, whose pride was hurt, said: "Very well, since everyone refuses, I accept."

After Vespers Bosco ascended the pulpit and preached a sermon that was never to be forgotten by his listeners and which was judged the best they had yet heard on the topic ever.

He replaced a missing speaker many times after this experience. Refuse? Never! Everyone marvelled at his confidence and his success and he laughed at their wonderment.

He had asked for this power of being able to preach well as a special gift from God on the day of his vestition and it had been granted to him — in abundant measure.

The Chair on His Nose!

One evening during his last year at the Seminary he began to tell his companions about the acrobatic skills of his childhood days. Many of his friends refused to believe him. In fact, a certain Giacomelli even began to tease him. Bosco felt hurt to think that they doubted him.

Grasping a large, heavy armchair he lifted it with outstretched arm and supporting it with one leg, let it rest on his chin. With the chair thus balanced he proceeded to walk about the room.

Everyone but Giacomelli applauded. He jeered: "Let me have that chair."

He grasped the chair, turned it about a few times then lifting it, was about to balance it on his chin, but, being inexperienced and not too steady, the chair fell on his nose. All the boys, including Bosco, laughed when they saw their mortified companion nursing an aching nose and scratching his head in bitter disappointment.

The Pact with His Friend

John Bosco and his intimate friend, Louis Comollo, had resolved to pray for each other. They had also agreed that whoever died first was to have given the news of his salvation to the survivor whenever God so willed.

Comollo died on 2 April 1839, while he was still a Seminarian. On the day following his burial on 3 April, Bosco and his companions were fast asleep, when at midnight, a prolonged sound was heard which originated in the corridor and advanced gradually, becoming increasingly louder and

terrifying as it approached until finally it sounded like a train as it speeds along on its tracks of steel.

All the Seminarists including Bosco awoke, but no one dared utter a word. The sound came closer and closer; the door of the dormitory was flung open; there appeared a light which became brighter and brighter and in the midst of all the accompanying noise approached Bosco's cell. The light became extremely bright, the noise ceased and the voice of Louis Comollo could be heard distinctly saying three times: "Bosco- - - Bosco Bosco- - - I am saved!"

The noise commenced again becoming even louder than before and gradually withdrew. The door slammed with a thunder; the entire house shook as though it had been moved by an earthquake, and then all was silent.

Bosco's companions jumped out of bed and went to hide. Bosco called them, calmed them down and told them of the mutual agreement which he and Comollo had made.

Don Bosco did not laugh when the incident actually took place; but later on he did laugh at the fright he had had, causing him a serious illness almost bringing him to his grave. He was often wont to repeat: "Almighty God sometimes permits such occurrences; but let us be convinced of the existence of the soul and of a life hereafter without seeking any proof for them."

Death Comes to Life!

The weather on the last day of the school year, the day on which they were to return home for the summer vacation, was a very rainy one. Bosco was seated at the window of his dormitory observing the menacing sky while his companions were busy packing their trunks.

Suddenly, a flash of lightning followed by a loud peal of thunder struck the parapet of the window by which Bosco was sitting. Some bricks were loosened and struck Bosco on the abdomen throwing him unconscious on the floor amidst his fellow students.

His friends ran up to him, carried him to a bed and sprinkled water over his face. Believing him to be dead they began to mourn him; but the coolness of the water helped revive him and suddenly Bosco, opening his eyes and jumping out of bed, said:

"Why are you so frightened? Don't worry! The Madonna has saved me!"

He Predicts the Future: His Landlady Will Live to Be 90!

During his Easter vacation in the year 1839, Bosco, on a visit to his former employer John Moglia, made it a point to call on the ailing Mrs Moglia.

Hearing her lament that all her strength was gone and that “it was all over for her”, John advised her with a smile that she should be patient and should not become disheartened for she would live to be 90.

As a matter of fact she recuperated and placed so much faith in John Bosco’s words that in the future, each time she was attacked by some illness or other, no matter how serious, she refused to take any medicine saying: “Don Bosco has assured me that I would live to be 90! It would, therefore, be needless to bother with any medication!

Incidentally, Mrs Moglia survived even Don Bosco and finally died at the age of 91. Everyone called her “the old lady of Don Bosco”!

Another Gift from the Madonna

Shortly before his ordination, which was scheduled to take place on 5 June 1841, his mother had climbed a tall mulberry tree in order to pick some leaves to feed to her silkworms. Suddenly, the branch upon which she was resting broke and she fell to the ground with a heavy thud. As though that misfortune had not been enough, the broken branch, in the process of falling, struck her on the forehead leaving a scar which she bore for the remainder of her life.

Quickly she arose and, as though nothing had happened, hurried home to feed the hungry worms!

When Don Bosco discovered what had happened he said, “Do you see how good the Madonna is? The devil attempted to take your life in order to prevent you from kissing your son’s hand when he becomes a priest, but not being successful he decided to leave a scar so that you would remember his roguery for a long time.” They both laughed heartily.

Self Eulogy in the City Of Alba

A few months after he had celebrated his First Mass Don Bosco set out for Turin in order to complete his studies preparatory to the hearing of confession.

His thoughts and feelings as he viewed the city of Turin from the height of the Superga he expressed well even as he developed the eulogy in honour of San Felipe Neri at Alba.

He developed his discourse in a very poetic manner that day. He imagined that he was on one of the Seven Hills of Rome and that the city spread before him. From that vantage position he saw a young man who, tired and exhausted from a long journey, paused to rest.

“Let us approach him and question him,” said Don Bosco.

“Young fellow, who are you and what are you staring at so anxiously?”

The young man answered that he was a stranger and that as he gazed upon that city a thought came to his mind, but he feared it was folly or temerity.

“What thought?” asked Don Bosco.

“I should like to dedicate my life to so many poor souls, to so many children who, for the lack of religious instruction, are following the road to perdition.”

He was then questioned about his knowledge, his material means, his church and his home and he answered that he had had a few years of schooling but that he was not one of the superior students, that he had neither money nor food except the crust of bread which was given to him by his employer, and that he had very poor lodgings.

“Well then,” asked Don Bosco, “how can you consider such an undertaking?”

The young man admitted that all Don Bosco said was very true and that it was for those very reasons that he could not make a decision. When he was asked whether he loved the Madonna he answered, “Oh, yes, very much!”

At this point Don Bosco closed the dialogue and proceeded to describe the face of the young man as he brightened at the last question; he described his smile and then asked him one last question: “What is your name?”

Don Bosco wanted to answer “Felippe Neri” but a shout went up from the parishioners, “John Bosco!” The cries finally stifled, the whispering ceased and the sermon continued, beautiful and moving. The minute the people were outside of the church they began a general applause and they all shouted to their hearts’ content: “John Bosco! John Bosco!” Don Bosco laughed with them because he had betrayed himself.

Don Bosco, Your Cassock Is Too Thin!

He had been in Turin for only a few weeks and already many boys flocked about him, eagerly waiting for him to come out so that they might accompany him through the streets. It seemed as though he were the Apostle of youth even from the earliest days.

One evening he chanced to meet the Canon Cottolengo, who stared at him, then complimented him and invited him to work with him at the “Little House of Providence” where Don Bosco would find much to keep himself busy — an invitation Don Bosco considered Providential.

A few days later, arriving at Valdocco where Cottolengo was located, he was received warmly by the Canon who then conducted him on a tour of the Home. Here Don Bosco saw sick people of various types: cripples, invalids, paralytics, the ulcer stricken; further on, there were orphans, children who had been abandoned by their parents. Indeed, this Home was a refuge for people enduring all types of human misery and of all those who had been rejected by other hospitals.

When the visit was over, Don Bosco was expecting another invitation to work at that Home. Cottolengo, again staring at him, said: “This is not your field. You were meant for more active work, for greater accomplishments.” Then feeling the material of which the young priest’s

cassock was made he added: "This material is too thin. Have your cassock made of stronger material so that it will withstand the tugging of the hundreds of boys whom you will have." So saying, the Canon took leave of Don Bosco with a smile.

Don Bosco smiled too because he foresaw a great prophecy in those words, a confirmation of all his dreams which shortly after began to be realized.

From that moment on each time those two holy men met, Cottolengo would point to Don Bosco's habit and together they laughed about the fine plans which had been made by Providence.

A Sound Thrashing from the Sexton!

On the morning of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1841, Don Bosco was preparing himself for Mass in the sacristy of the church of St Francis d'Assisi.

Seeing a little boy in a corner of the sacristy the sexton invited him to serve Mass.

"I do not know how," answered the lad, embarrassed. "You rascal!" cried the sexton. "If you do not know how to serve Mass, what are you doing in the sacristy?" So saying, he picked up a cane and rained merciless blows on his back and head.

Screaming and in pain, the poor unfortunate boy took to his heels. Don Bosce scolded the sexton and demanded an explanation: "What was that for? Why were you beating that Youngster?"

"The wretch does not even know how to serve Mass and yet comes to the sacristy!"

"Call him back! He is a friend of mine; I want to speak to him."

Reluctantly the sexton ran after the boy, called him, and persuaded him to return to the sacristy where Don Bosco was waiting for him.

"Have you heard Mass yet?" asked Don Bosco in all tenderness.

"Not yet, Father," said he, still trembling from fear and pain.

"Then stay and hear Mass; after that I want to speak to you about something which I am sure will please you." After Mass the pre-arranged interview took place.

"What is your name, my friend?" "Bartholomew Garelli."

"Where do you come from?" "From Asti."

"How old are you?" "Sixteen."

"Can you read and write?" "I do not know anything."

"What about your father and mother?" "They are both dead."

"What kind of work do you do?" "I'm a bricklayer."

"Have you made your First Holy Communion?" "No, Father."

"Have you ever gone to confession?" "I did, when I was little."

“Do you attend Catechism classes?” “I dare not, because my friends poke fun at me.”

“Suppose I were to teach you Catechism here, would you come?” “Gladly, Father, provided I do not get a beating!”

“Do not be afraid. From now on you are my friend. When shall we begin?” “Any time you say, Father!”

“Even now?” “With pleasure, Father, if you will!”

It was just what Don Bosco was waiting for. From then on Bartholomew came regularly every Sunday. Soon many of his friends joined him, and Bartholomew Garelli remained the cornerstone of Don Bosco's Festive Oratories and of the entire Salesian enterprise.

In later years he recalled the experience, and together with Don Bosco laughed at the thought. “The sexton's beating has led to my happiness,” reminisced Bartholomew.

Power of Enthusiasm

Don Bosco was very popular. In fact, he could be said to have had a magnetic personality, for everywhere he went he would have a following of boys calling after him and cheering him.

One day he chanced upon one of his boys who had been shopping and who held a bottle of vinegar in one hand and another small one of oil in the other.

As soon as the youngster saw Don Bosco he began to call to him and to jump up and down with joy.

Smiling, the saint also cried out: “Viva!” When he had reached the boy, Don Bosco jokingly said: “Can you do what I am doing?” and started to clap his hands.

The boy was beside himself with enthusiasm. Placing the “small bottle under his arm he was about to clap his hands when both bottles fell to the ground with a crash.

Hearing the sound of the breaking glass and seeing the liquids spilled on the ground, the boy remained stunned for a moment. Then he burst into tears because he feared that his mother would give him a sound spanking.

Don Bosco tried to cheer him saying that it was not a serious accident and that it could soon be remedied. “Come with me,” he said.

He took the boy to a nearby store, explained everything to the woman in charge and asked her to replace the oil and vinegar.

Presently the woman handed the boy another bottle of Vinegar and one of oil.

“Who are you?” she asked the priest.

Don Bosco told her who he was and asked the price of the condiments.

The woman answered that the price was 23 cents but that for Don Bosco it was free. Don Bosco thanked her before he and the boy left the store both smiling at the happy ending.

Another one of his boys was employed in a dry goods store which had an immense glass door facing one of the main streets of Turin. One day while he was cleaning the store he happened to see Don Bosco pass by. Enthusiastically he rushed out to greet Don Bosco, but in his eagerness he forgot to open the door, slammed his head against it and shattered the glass in all directions.

At the sound of the shattering glass, all the employees and the owner of the store ran out to see what had happened. The owner began shouting at his apprentice. Curious passersby gathered around as though demanding an explanation. The trembling boy went up close to Don Bosco for refuge.

Smiling, the saintly priest asked the lad what had happened.

The boy explained that when he saw Don Bosco pass, he wanted very much to speak to him and did not notice that the door was shut.

Don Bosco offered to pay for the damage.

The proprietor by this time realized that it must have been an oversight and said he would not dream of punishing the boy for his deep affection for the priest nor would he want to take advantage of Don Bosco's generous offer. He did say, however, that he hoped that the next time little Charles would not expect to be able to penetrate a glass door like a ghost! They all laughed heartily with Don Bosco.

Singers in a Boat

Don Bosco used singing and music as an effective device to attract and hold his boys. Singing, in fact, greatly increased the enthusiasm of the youngsters and the admiration of the people.

One day he took his boys for a boat ride on the River Po as far as the Madonna of Pilone. When their three boats were in the middle of the river, the boys began to sing a hymn. The people who were along the banks were fascinated by their music and followed the course of the boats. A group of trumpeters happened to be there and started to accompany the simple melody. The effect was beautiful.

As the boats kept sailing along, the crowd kept growing and when they had reached the Madonna of Pilone, the inhabitants were out in full strength to felicitate the young singers and to treat them to fruit and candy!

At this success of his boys, Don Bosco smiled happily and rendered his thanks to the Lord.

A Mind Reader and a Prophet

The Lord had singularly blessed Don Bosco's work even from the very first days.

In the year 1844, at Saint John's Hospital, there was, during the months of May and June, a woman who was in the last stages of consumption. Her life had been deplorable and it was feared that death would be a desperate one.

She had reached such a sad state that, for a long time she had not received the Sacraments. When the Chaplain or a nun broached the subject she became violent. All attempts failed. Even Saint Joseph Cafasso had been repulsed by her and he had begged Don Bosco to try. Don Bosco spoke to her on various topics. Then, in conclusion he said to her: "I want to tell you in the name of God that He is giving you a few more hours of life so that you may settle your accounts with Him and put your soul at peace. Have your confession heard immediately and receive the other Sacraments, for tomorrow you shall face Eternity."

These words filled that poor soul with such trepidation that, calling the saint back, she asked him to hear her confession then and there. That very evening she died, resigned to her fate and converted. Everyone congratulated Don Bosco, and he laughed to himself for the blunt method he had employed in saving a soul.

Several days later, a wealthy woman, the wife of the Portuguese Ambassador to Turin, was about to set out on a trip. She decided to put her soul at peace first. With that purpose in mind she went to the church of St Francis d'Assisi, where Don Bosco was the Second-Curate.

Neither of the two had ever met the other. Seeing a priest who was praying fervently near a confessional, she decided to go to him.

Don Bosco heard her confession, told her, as penance, to do a certain act of charity that very day.

"Father, I cannot do that!" she said.

Don Bosco asked her why she could not, since she possessed so much wealth.

The woman was amazed and wondered how that priest knew of her social position because she was certain that she had not mentioned a word about it.

"Father, I cannot carry out that penance because I am about to set out on a trip."

"Very well," answered Don Bosco, "then pray to your Guardian Angel that he protect you from any harm that might befall you today."

The woman was still more perplexed. She returned home, told her family about the experience, asking them to join her in prayer to her Guardian Angel, then, rode away in a carriage together with her daughter and a maid.

When they had gone a short distance the horses began to gallop wildly. The coachman was thrown off his seat. The carriage turned over and the woman fell on her head as the horses continued on at top speed.

In a moment of consciousness she asked the aid of her Guardian Angel and immediately the horses stopped.

People ran to their assistance and much to their surprise, they found that no one had been injured.

The noblewoman returned to Turin and again went to the church of St Francis d'Assisi to inquire who that priest was, and to thank him. From that moment on she became a great admirer of his, and a fervent supporter of the Salesian Society. Each time she met Don Bosco, the two laughed over their first encounter and over the manner in which he had saved her life.

His Special Shrewdness

Since the very beginning of Don Bosco's stay in Turin, his reputation for sanctity had become widespread and many families rushed to him in order to form a closer friendship with him.

One day an entire family had gone to pay him a visit. They were very anxious to hear his words.

Don Bosco noticed that two of the women were not very modestly dressed but he did not want to reprove them too bitterly, so he began speaking to the smallest child: "I should like you to explain something to me." The little girl was beside herself with happiness and was ready to answer any question.

Don Bosco asked her why she had so much contempt for her arms. The child answered that it was not so. When Don Bosco insisted, the mother said: "On the contrary, often I must scold her for her vanity. Besides washing them, she even perfumes them with eau de Cologne." Don Bosco continued addressing the child and saying that that was precisely why he said the child had contempt for her arms — "Because when you die, your arms shall be burned in the fires of Hell."

When the child heard these words she became alarmed and said she had not done anything bad and did not want to go to Hell.

Don Bosco said that it would probably end that way, or at least she would go to Purgatory and only the Lord knew for what length of time. He told her that the flames would creep up her arms and burn her neck.

Finally, the mother understood and said, "Now I understand! It is up to me to remedy the situation and I shall do it."

From then on, that family paid numerous visits to Don Bosco, but they were always modestly dressed and they smiled with him at the effective method he had used to explain the point.

The Tilted Hat on an Impertinent Woman

The crowded headquarters where Don Bosco gave religious instruction were proving too small to hold the ever increasing number of boys. As a result, Don Bosco went in search of more spacious accommodation which

he finally found in the chapel of the ancient cemetery called San Pietro in Vincoli.

He came to an agreement with the Chaplain and on Sunday 25 May 1844, he led his boys there. When they saw the spaciousness of the chapel they were beside themselves with joy. But alas! Scarcely had they begun to enjoy their enthusiastic outburst and cherish its cause when the atmosphere suddenly changed into one of sadness by the sudden appearance of a stern looking woman. It was the Chaplain's housekeeper who had heard the singing and shouting and laughter of Don Bosco's 400 lively youngsters, and had come out of the house in a fury. With her hands on her hips and her dusting cap awry, she commenced to scold them with that elegance of speech that is characteristic of an enraged woman.

She was not alone but was assisted in her admonition by a girl. As though that had not been enough, a dog was barking, a cat was meowing, the hens were cackling too! In fact there was such a commotion that one might safely conclude that a War was imminent, if not already on!

Don Bosco tried to calm the storm, but at each attempt, he received a torrent of insulting words from that poor soul who kept shouting and clenching her fists and stamping her feet. She ended by saying: "And as for you, Don Bosco, see to it that you do not return here next Sunday or there will be trouble!"

The saint was anxious to stop that disgusting scene and in a simple and calm manner he told the woman that she herself was not certain of being there the following Sunday and yet she was complaining so vociferously.

As he rounded up his boys and left the chapel, Don Bosco said to them: "Poor woman, she warns us not to return here, but by Sunday she will already be in her grave!"

The Last Letter of the Chaplain

The Chaplain was not at home when the aforementioned incident took place, but the minute he returned, he immediately set about writing a bitter letter dictated by the furious woman and addressed it to the city authorities. The letter was the last ever written by the chaplain. He mailed it on Monday and a few hours later he died of a heart attack.

That was not all! Scarcely had he been buried when his housekeeper suffered a similar fatal attack and was buried two days later, so that by the middle of the week, Don Bosco's two adversaries had already left the world.

Naturally, everyone was greatly impressed by these two incidents. It was impossible not to see in them the hand of God.

The order against Don Bosco was not carried out, but from that day on the City, its Archbishop and pastors favoured him more and more and

the affection of his boys grew warmer and warmer. They spoke and smiled about the benevolence of the Lord, about how fortunate they were in having the blessings of God always in their favour.

Another Eloquent Notice

Having been obliged to move out of that chapel, Don Bosco secured the permission of the City Authorities to gather his boys in the church of Molazzi, or rather, the mills of the municipality.

When that happy and noisy group first arrived, the neighbours began to complain. Soon, the owners of the mills and the millers themselves joined in complaining. The most bitter enemy of Don Bosco and his boys was the secretary of the mills who gathered false evidence from here and there against the boys and their leader, generating rumours as well and wrote a long accusing letter to the authorities. As a result the city council sent out an evacuation order.

When Don Bosco made this new announcement to his boys he encouraged them saying: "Do not become alarmed. You know that when cabbages are transplanted they grow larger and better; so also shall we become better and increase in number!" They all laughed at this interpretation. But in a prophetic tone Don Bosco added: "The Lord will come to our aid because He realizes your innocence."

The prophecy came true. That was the last letter ever written by the secretary. Stricken by a nervous disease, in a short time he died and his son who was left alone was compelled to beg the help of Don Bosco when he opened his Oratory.

Breakfast in the Mountains

When he moved away from the mills, Don Bosco was forced to rent a field where he might gather his boys. There he gave them religious instruction and preached to them. As far as Mass was concerned, he took them to a church in some nearby town. In order to keep up their spirits he would organize hikes and occasionally reward them with a picnic.

One Sunday they climbed to the top of Capuchin Hill where they all received Communion. After Mass they went out to the large square and Don Bosco served them breakfast. And as they all ate happily, he noticed that one of the boys had gone off alone and was looking on sadly. He went up to him and asked: "What is your name, son?"

"Paul" answered the boy.

After questioning him further, Don Bosco discovered that the boy had not had breakfast because he had neither been to confession nor had he received Communion.

Naturally enough Don Bosco assured him that neither was necessary in order to have breakfast.

The boy looked at him and asked: "What is necessary?" Don Bosco explained that the only requirement was an appetite!

The boy was delighted because he was after all very hungry. Don Bosco led him to the breakfast basket, supplied him with plenty of bread and fruit, then added with a smile: "Now you will no longer be afraid of me, and we shall be good friends!"

"Oh, yes' said the boy, "very good friends!"

He kept his word, joined the boys of the Oratory and attended regularly and enthusiastically. Many times afterwards, when he mentioned that providential encounter with Don Bosco, he smiled happily.

The Guard of Honour

Even in that field Don Bosco was frequently harassed. One day the Marquis Cavour, mayor of Turin, came in person. When he saw Don Bosco seated on the ground surrounded by a circle of boys he asked: "Who is that priest?"

Much to his surprise he was informed that it was Don Bosco. The Marquis exclaimed that either he was crazy or should be behind bars. He sent for Don Bosco and began asking him several questions. He then advised the good priest to set those ruffians free because they would bring nothing but unhappiness to him and trouble to the authorities. He added that such meetings were dangerous and that therefore he could no longer tolerate them.

Calmly and humbly the saint tried to reason with him, but the Marquis finished off by asking why Don Bosco should be concerned about those rascals at all — the best thing to do was, in his opinion, to leave them in their own homes and not to take such responsibilities upon himself.

Don Bosco answered that he was very much concerned about their religious instruction, about salvation, and that he felt this to be his responsibility before God's eyes.

The Marquis answered that in the meantime he was going to have him watched. And from that day on, each Sunday, a few policemen were sent to take their post on the field. They were told to guard the place carefully at all times, particularly when the saint was hearing confessions, to listen carefully to his sermons and to follow them when the children were led to Mass or even for a walk.

Don Bosco was not at all disturbed by all this. In fact, he smiled when he noticed that he was being accompanied by what appeared a guard of honour, just like a king! It was one episode he never forgot and always smiled as he referred to those days as the most romantic ones of his Oratory.

Believed Insane!

Don Bosco was harassed not only by the Civil Authorities but by his own confreres who tried very hard to impede the development of his work. What was most galling was that among these priests were some of his earliest friends. It was precisely these people who were convinced that

Don Bosco had gone out of his mind, that his preoccupation and time spent with the youngsters were a mania. And like good friends they tried to persuade him to abandon his undertaking.

A few of them visited him and, with all the kindness they had in their hearts, explained that he was compromising the dignity of the priesthood, that by joining those “rascals” in their games and accompanying them through the streets and squares he was losing his respect and being ridiculed.

Don Bosco knew for certain that his work served a just cause, and that, therefore, it was impossible to move him by the logic of their arguments.

Nevertheless, his friends, far from being discouraged, continued pleading with him. Finally, convinced of his insanity, they told him that his mind was no longer functioning properly, that he should be patient and should not become obstinate — that he could not do the impossible! Still, Don Bosco was not dissuaded. One of them said: “Do you not see that even providence is against you, and you cannot even find someone who will rent you a house to carry out your work?”

Lifting his hands towards Heaven, Don Bosco said: “You are wrong! It is Divine Providence that has sent each of these little ones to me and I will not turn even one of them away! Since no one will rent me a place, I shall build one. There will be huge edifices with laboratories, classrooms, offices, playgrounds, cloisters, and a magnificent church. There will be seminarians, art instructors, professors, assistants and many priests. Providence has always helped me and will do everything that is necessary. You will see!” As he said these words his entire expression lighted up with a singular splendour.

His friends were really moved by what they heard and saw in them a real proof of his insanity. When they had left him, they shook their heads saying: “Poor man, he has really lost his mind! We must do something about it immediately.”

Don Bosco, who had accompanied them to the door could read their thoughts, and understood their intentions. Patiently he awaited developments ever ready to face the most difficult struggle.

To the Insane Asylum

The expected did happen! Those priests who had visited him spoke to the Bishop of the Diocese and, having obtained the necessary permission from him, went to speak to the director of the Insane Asylum. Then, having secured a place for Don Bosco, two of the most courageous ones took upon themselves the task of executing the sad plans.

They rented a closed carriage, called on Don Bosco and after having gone through the usual formalities, invited him to go for a ride with them explaining that a little fresh air would be good for him and adding that they had a carriage ready.

The saint immediately understood the trick but he pretended not to suspect anything. With great enthusiasm he said: "Three cheers for the carriage! Although I am not accustomed to ride in carriages, let us go!"

When they reached the carriage they invited him to enter first, but Don Bosco stepped aside saying that it would be lack of respect on his part to precede them.

Without suspecting a thing the two men entered, believing that Don Bosco would follow immediately. As soon as they had entered, Don Bosco slammed the door of the carriage shut, simultaneously calling to the coachman: "To the Insane Asylum, buddy! Hurry!"

Without investigating, the driver cracked his whip and started off at full speed. In a jiffy they had reached the destination where, with the gates wide open, the nurses were waiting. The guard quickly locked the gates; the attendants surrounded the carriage, opened the doors and instead of finding one "insane" priest they saw two!

Although the humiliated priests protested vigorously, they were led to the top floor where they had to make the best of the situation among the inmates since both doctors and director had left for lunch and naturally no one would listen to them. It was only towards evening that they were able to explain the mistake and were finally released.

The news about this incident travelled fast throughout the city causing everyone to laugh heartily! From that day on people corrected their ideas about the saint and their admiration for him grew ever more.

Self-ringing Bells

Even the bells of the Madonna di Campagna began ringing, their peals mingling with the laughter of the people over the Insane Asylum incident as though in testimony of the great protective kindness Providence always had for our friend and saint.

On Palm Sunday, the very last day that Don Bosco and his boys were permitted to meet on the field, he announced that they were going to hear Mass at the church of the Madonna della Campagna which was in the charge of the Capuchins.

At this news the boys became jubilant. On their way they recited the Rosary and sang hymns and praises to our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

When that long procession of 400 boys entered the boulevard leading to the monastery, the bells started ringing jubilantly and in such a loud and happy tone that had never been heard before that everyone was simply amazed! The people began flocking to church, all the monks hurried there also, asking the reason for all that gay ringing, who was responsible for it and who had requested it.

No one knew the answer, for no one had ordered the ringing, neither had anyone rung the bells. They came to the conclusion that the bells had really rung by themselves!

In order to celebrate the occasion, the Father Guardian of the house had a delicious breakfast prepared in the garden of the monastery for all those young pilgrims. It was enjoyed by all, the laughter of the boys adding zest to the already festive spirit. Don Bosco, still bewildered, was even more grateful to the Divine protection that he and his youngsters had always enjoyed.

Threats and Punishment

Our saint had finally succeeded in purchasing a house in the Vicinity of Valdocco where he inaugurated his first Oratory in the hope of carrying on his work tranquilly.

The devil, however, never one to leave saints in peace, was at his active best. No sooner had Don Bosco settled down when there arose other enemies who did their utmost to influence the Masonic Civil Authorities then in power to put an end to the good work.

Soon the Marquis Cavour had Don Bosco called before him and without any preamble told him that since he was so obstinate in his refusal to give up his work, he would have to issue an order to close the Oratory.

Don Bosco answered, "Excuse me, Marquis, but if I were to abandon my Oratory, I should fear God's malediction not only on myself but on you as well."

"Nonsense!" thundered the Marquis. "It is my duty to ensure peace for the public; therefore, I shall have you watched at all your gatherings and the minute you do anything objectionable I shall have your rascals disbanded and you will be responsible for the consequences!"

Those were the last words ever pronounced by the Marquis in his office, for as soon as he returned home he suffered a serious attack of *podagra* which after much suffering led him to his grave.

The death of the Mayor made a strong impression on the people of Turin and especially on the members of the City Government. For many years, Don Bosco was left in peace and he laughed with his boys over these victories, and his work profited because of them.

Unbelievable Affection

All the young people who met Don Bosco even for the first time and who heard him speak were so impressed by him that they developed a deep sense of affection and reverence for him, to such a great extent that many felt they could not live without him.

In 1846 his doctors advised him to go to the country and rest. Don Bosco went to Sassi, a town situated in a valley near Turin. At that time the students attending the Religious Schools had a course called Spiritual Exercises during which not one student had gone to confession in anticipation of having their confessions heard by Don Bosco.

On the last day of the course Don Bosco had not yet arrived. In groups of 50 and 60, the boys (300 of them!) went first to Valdocco and from there to Sassi. They arrived in a pitiful state of fatigue, drenched as they were in perspiration and covered with mud, what with the weather at its rainy worst.

When Don Bosco saw that tremendous group and heard the motive behind their trip, he was deeply moved. Immediately he went to the confessional together with the pastor and numerous other priests. Since those poor boys had been fasting and had no food with them, the good pastor provided bread, cheese, fruit, potatoes, rice, cornmeal — it turned out to be a real party. For a long time afterwards, they all laughed with Don Bosco when they thought of that splendid feast.

After the grand repast, they all returned to the city, jubilant, singing festive rounds and, between songs, shouting loudly and enthusiastically: “Viva Don Bosco!”

Singular Victory

At that time throughout Turin and all of Piedmont, the Marquise Barolo, a very wealthy and generous woman, was well known for her numerous acts of charity.

This woman had a deep affection for Don Bosco. But not understanding his soul and his great mission in life, she tried to persuade him to leave his boys and become the spiritual director of her Institutions.

One day, calling for Don Bosco, she explained to him her proposition telling him that it was to his advantage.

Without hesitating a single moment Don Bosco answered: “What are you saying, Madame? Leave my boys? That I could never do, and must never do! You are very wealthy and it will be easy for you to find someone to help you in your work. But who would take care of my boys?”

“In other words you prefer your vagabonds to my Institutions? What can you do without funds and without my assistance?”

Don Bosco answered that he might be poor, in fact, penniless, but he did not need her help.

“Such pride!” exclaimed the Marquise. “He is penniless and yet he does not need my help.”

Don Bosco said that it was true. He did not need her help but, should Providence want to ask her to assist him, he would take advantage of her assistance and would be very appreciative.

The Marquise insisted that she would never again assist Don Bosco — “Don’t ever return to my door! I shall slam it shut in your face!” So saying, she dismissed Don Bosco. The saint made a deep bow and left.

Now, the Marquise being a woman of fine character and excellent judgement, it was not long before she became calmer and returned to her usual good sense. She resumed her generous gifts of 200 or 300 lire to Don Bosco. Each time the saint received one of these offers he would

laugh to himself over his victory but, naturally, would keep his satisfaction a secret.

He Laughs and Weeps with His Boys

During the month of July 1846, Don Bosco became ill with a serious and stubborn case of bronchitis which sapped most of his strength and energy. Everyone was praying fervently for him. One night, which all concerned feared would be his last, Father Borel who was attending on him, suddenly felt inspired to suggest that Don Bosco say a prayer for his own recovery. Don Bosco remained silent but the good Father continued: "Don Bosco, you know that the Holy Ghost advises us to pray when we are ill — if for no other reason, pray for this one, I urge you." But Don Bosco answered: "Let God's will be done."

Father Borel begged Don Bosco to repeat at least a few words of prayer after him, but still Don Bosco remained silent.

Finally, he appealed to him through his poor boys who were crying because of the serious state of his health.

In order to console the good priest, Don Bosco finally agreed to his request. After four or five words the priest arose and drying his tears said: "That is enough! Now you will certainly recover. All we needed was that you add your prayers to all of ours. Now they are complete!"

Indeed, he was not to be disappointed! Don Bosco fell asleep and when he awoke the next morning, there was already new life in him. In fact, when his physician arrived, expecting to find him dead, he took his pulse and said to him: "Dear Don Bosco, get up and go and thank your Madonna for it is she who deserves the credit!"

The news of his unexpected recovery spread rapidly and consoled the hearts of all. At first they were moved to tears, later they shouted with joy.

On Sunday they placed him on a large arm-chair and carried him about town cheering and laughing with him jubilantly.

The Devil — Struggles, Humiliation, Victory!

During the early years of his permanent residence at Valdocco, Don Bosco had many occasions to struggle against the devil. Twice the building which he was having erected was thrown down and left in ruins.

The third time it was struck by lightning endangering his very life as well as that of all the boys; and finally the devil had become so bitter that he did not allow Don Bosco a moment's peace.

As soon as he had gone to bed he would hear strange sounds about him: a rock striking somewhere, the rolling of stones, deafening noises of all kinds, and as though that were not enough, one night his bed was raised from the floor and then came down again with a loud thud.

For a long time Don Bosco had spent sleepless nights. As a result he had lost weight and was in danger of becoming ill again. He decided, therefore, that he must put an end to all these disturbances.

Arming himself with the picture of the Madonna he went up to the attic and walked in every corner of the huge room holding the picture high and shouting: "Out of here, you Devil! Out of here, this very instant!" Then he hung the picture on the wall and begged the Madonna to free him from those disturbances and diabolic hoaxes.

From that moment on all those strange noises ceased as though by enchantment. The picture remained in the attic for six years until the very moment when Don Bosco himself had the building demolished in order to have it replaced. The devil with all his strength was thus defeated forever.

Needless to say, Don Bosco shared a hearty laugh over this occurrence with his boys!

His First Failure

One evening during the month of April in 1867, Don Bosco was returning home from a sick call. It was rather late and he was thinking of the numerous boys who had no home and wandered about all night in bad company. Suddenly he came upon a group of reckless boys who, the minute they saw him, began passing remarks which were not very complimentary and would even have gone as far as throwing stones at him.

Don Bosco would have preferred avoiding them but realized that he was too close and had already been seen by them. He decided to make the best of a bad situation and greeted them saying: "Good evening, my dear friends! How are you?"

One of them answered that they were not very well because they were thirsty and had no money. Another suggested that Don Bosco treat them all to drinks. At that bright idea they all surrounded the priest thus preventing him from escaping.

Don Bosco said: "Very well, but I want to drink with you."

The boys answered: "Of course! What a kind priest! If only all priests were like you!"

They went to a tavern and Don Bosco ordered two bottles of wine. When he saw that they had become gentler and benevolent he said to them: "Now you must do me a favour."

Of course the boys answered that they were disposed to do any number of favours for Don Bosco because now they had become friends.

Don Bosco said that he wanted them to return home instantly and then on the Sunday following to see him at his Oratory.

The boys protested that they had no home and that they slept here and there — like in some convenient barn, or wherever.

Hearing this, Don Bosco invited them to return with him. Followed by those boys he arrived home, presented them to his mother saying: "Here are our first guests, Mama! Please put them up for the night."

After having them recite the “Our Father” and the “Hail Mary” which they had forgotten, Don Bosco led them up a ladder to the hay stack where he gave each boy a sheet and a blanket and begged them to maintain absolute silence. This done, Don Bosco descended the ladder, satisfied and happy in the belief that he had thus initiated the “enterprise” of which he had always dreamed. But the Lord did not want his boarding schools to begin in this manner and Providence did not want to use that type of person.

At dawn Don Bosco got dressed and went to awaken his new friends and offer them a cheery good morning. To his surprise he did not hear a sound and believing they were still asleep he called to them, then went up the ladder to their sleeping quarters.

To his great surprise and disappointment, he discovered that the thieves had run away, taking with them both sheets and blankets! His attempt had failed!

Descending the ladder, he went to tell his mother what had happened. And they both laughed heartily at the trick!

The Providential Flash of Lightning

Since that day many boys knocked at Don Bosco’s door seeking food and lodging and Don Bosco and his mother had to use their ingenuity to find room for all. Soon every niche of available space was filled; even the kitchen was transformed into a dormitory by night.

What was he to do, he wondered. Don Bosco had his eye on a neighbouring house and asked if he could rent it. The proprietor, one Ms Vaglianti, asked for an exorbitant rental; after much discussion Don Bosco was about to give up when something very unique happened, removing all difficulties.

The sky, which had suddenly become cloudy, turned black and very unexpectedly a vivid flash of lightning was seen across the sky, followed immediately by a loud bolt of thunder which made the house shake from top to bottom. The frightened woman turned trembling to Don Bosco, exclaiming: “If God spares me from this lightning I shall let you have the house at whatever price you offer.”

“Thank you,” answered Don Bosco. “And do not worry! I shall pray to God that He spare you not only from this storm but from all others as well.”

At that instant the lightning ceased, as did also the thunder, the sky brightened and the contract was made — at 450 lire! Don Bosco hurried home to share the good news with his boys who laughed with him at the unusual but happy result.

Bread Pills

In 1844 at Montafia d’Asti, a certain Mr Turco became ill with a stubborn fever and no drug could cure him. Having heard of Don Bosco’s

fame, this man's family went to him for advice. Don Bosco suggested that first of all Mr Turco go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. In addition he gave the sick man a box of pills advising a certain number to be taken daily and told him to recite the "Hail Mary" thrice.

The stricken man went to Confession, received Communion, took his first few pills and was completely cured.

Everyone marvelled at his speedy recovery. The village pharmacist asked if he might make an analysis of the miraculous pills and discovered that they contained nothing but bread.

In order to ascertain that his findings were accurate he went to another pharmacist and repeated the analysis. They both agreed that there was nothing but bread present.

Mr Turco went to Turin to thank Don Bosco and to relate how everyone in his town was talking about the miraculous cure. He also spoke of the analysis of the pills and the conclusion of the pharmacists.

Don Bosco laughed and answered: "Yes, I know they were made entirely of bread. The three *Hail Marys* which you recited in the state of grace were the prodigious victuals accompanying the bread."

"Your Money or Your Life!"

Don Bosco was wont to say that a priest is always a priest and no matter what circumstances present themselves he must always remember it both in word and in deed. A priest must always have foremost in his mind the salvation of souls and whoever approaches him must not leave without first having heard a few good words for his spiritual well-being.

In those days Don Bosco would often go to Becchi to visit his brothers. Late one evening, returning home alone along a country road, he was attacked by an unknown man who demanded: "Your money or your life!"

Don Bosco stopped short, stared at him for a moment and told him to be patient.

"What patience?" sneered the stranger. "Just give me your money or I'll kill you!"

"I have no money for you and as far as my life is concerned, that was given to me by God and only He can take it away from me."

Although the stranger had his hat drawn over his eyes, Don Bosco recognized him as one to whom he had given religious instruction in a prison in Turin and who had been freed a few days before on his recommendation. Calling him by name he whispered: "Anthony, how can you do such a terrible thing? Is this the way you are keeping the promise you made me in Turin?"

The unfortunate being recognized Don Bosco from his voice and stammered: "Oh, Don Bosco, forgive me! I had not recognized you!"

Don Bosco explained that his apologies were not sufficient but that he would have to change. "I promise," pleaded Anthony.

Don Bosco still maintained that those words were not enough, that he would have to change immediately, that he would have to go to confession.

He was willing to do that too and promptly, only he did not feel prepared.

Don Bosco offered to prepare him telling him to promise the Lord that he would stop living that sinful life once and for all.

“Yes, I do promise!”

Don Bosco led him by the hand to the edge of the road, where he sat down and made the other kneel beside him. Thus it was that Anthony made his confession with all the signs of true repentance. When finished Don Bosco gave him a religious medal and what little money he had with him.

The following day our saint took the man to Turin with him and obtained employment for him. Anthony carried out his duties honestly and became a fine Christian, got married and became a virtuous father. Each time the two men met, they could not help but laugh over the encounter at Becchi!

Don Bosco the Prophet

Besides his many other virtues Don Bosco was further endowed with a marvellous sense of mental penetration and intuition.

In 1847, Don Bosco had to go to Stresa. He left Father Carpano, a friend of his, in charge of the Oratory.

Don Bosco was travelling alongside of the impresario Frederic Bocca when suddenly he became worried and said: “Now Father Carpano is taking advantage of my absence and has left the Oratory and my boys. At this moment he is attending to some irrelevant business of his.”

Upon returning to Turin Mr Bocca, the headmaster, said to Father Carpano: “On Sunday you left the Oratory and neglected your duties.”

“Who told you?”

“Don Bosco himself!”

“So they told him everything immediately! Who told Him? I must know!”

He soon calmed down when he discovered that Don Bosco had guessed it all. Apologizing, he begged to be forgiven for his shortcoming. For a long time afterwards he laughed with Don Bosco over the latter's powers and prowess.

The Mysterious Slap

The following year Don Bosco was at Lanzo at the Spiritual Exercises and from there he wrote to Father Borel telling him that on Sunday, during the religious exercises, Costa and Berretta had left the church and had slipped out through the door of the sacristy. From there they went to Dora

to take a swim, but while they were in the water they received some healthy slaps from an invisible hand.

Having read these words, Father Borel questioned the two lads and they confessed, crying over their misbehaviour. When Don Bosco returned, they hastened to him, threw themselves at his feet and begged his forgiveness, but they never forgot those mysterious slaps. Many times later they laughed with Don Bosco who had administered them at such a distance!

Four Cents Worth of Cornmeal

One day a man presented himself to Don Bosco saying that he had five young children for whom he had not been able to provide food since the previous day, and that they were suffering from acute hunger. The saint looked at him with much compassion, then digging into his pockets he finally found four cents which he handed over to the man with his blessings.

When the poor father had left, Don Bosco turned to Joseph Brosio, who was known as the Sharpshooter, and said to him: "Poor man! If I had had 100 lire I should not have hesitated one moment in giving him the entire amount because he told me the truth."

"How do you know he told you the truth if you have never seen him before?"

"In fact, I shall tell you something else" added Don Bosco. "Not only is this man loyal and sincere, but industrious and very devoted to his family as well. He has been reduced to this pitiful state of misery by one single misfortune!"

"But how do you know all that?"

Taking his hand and pressing it warmly, Don Bosco exclaimed: "I read it in his heart."

It so happened that after some time, Joseph Brosio met that man in Turin one day. Recognizing Mr Brosio, the man told him that with the four cents he had bought some cornmeal with which he prepared dinner for his children. This small amount should have been enough for only two people, but miraculously seven people each had a generous portion so that not one of them felt hungry until the following day. Don Bosco is truly a saint! At home we call him the saint of the cornmeal. Moreover after his blessing I obtained employment and things have been improving daily."

When the Sharpshooter told Don Bosco of his encounter with that man the saint laughed saying: "I am really a *priest* of the cornmeal!"

Jesus in the Host

The cries and mottoes of 1848 had so excited everyone because of their novelty that it seemed that the majority had lost their reasoning. Don Bosco was seriously preoccupied as regards a possible bad effect upon the Church.

One day he was celebrating Mass at the Institute of the Good Shepherd. He had reached the solemn moment of the Elevation when suddenly a nun cried out shrilly, disturbing everyone about her.

After Mass Don Bosco had that nun brought to him and asked her what she had seen. "Jesus in the Host" she answered. "He was alive, in the form of an infant and He was bleeding!"

"What does that mean?" asked Don Bosco.

The nun said that she had no idea. But Don Bosco had a very definite one: "It means that the Church will go through a period of serious persecution. Bear that in mind."

Unfortunately, such was indeed the case as was proved by the bitter war against Pope Pius IX.

When Don Bosco returned there to celebrate Mass again, those good sisters asked him to explain the apparition to them. Smilingly, Don Bosco answered: "Perhaps Jesus would have explained it in greater detail to me if that nun had not frightened Him away with her cries!"

The Dead Comes to Life

In 1849, a fifteen-year-old boy named Charles, who had been frequenting the Oratory quite regularly, became critically ill. The son of a nearby innkeeper, his illness grew worse and finally his family realized that the end was near.

The day that the doctor had given him up as incurable, his family decided to call a priest. Charles wanted Don Bosco who had always been his confessor, but Don Bosco was out of town then. During the night he passed away calling for Don Bosco.

When Don Bosco returned to Turin the following day and heard of the serious condition of the lad, he rushed to the inn but when he reached the door one of the waiters told him it was too late because Charles had died during the night.

Don Bosco said: "He is sleeping." The waiter stared at him ironically. Don Bosco added: "Would you care to bet a bottle of wine that Charles is asleep?"

At that moment the other members of the family arrived and cried: "Yes, he is really dead! Our poor Charles is no longer alive!"

The saint was led into the room where Charles had already been laid out and covered with a white veil.

Don Bosco approached, prayed fervently, and then said to everyone: "Would you mind retiring for a moment and leaving me alone with the boy?"

When they had all gone, Don Bosco said in a commanding tone: "Charles, Charles, get up!"

At the sound, of that voice, the boy moved and as though he were awakening from a deep slumber he rubbed his eyes, opened them, looked around and said: "Where am I? Oh, Don Bosco, is it really you?"

You do not know how much I have wanted to see you! I need you so much. I am glad you have wakened me!”

In the meantime, the mother who had been listening at the door, hurried into the room at the sound of her son’s voice, but Don Bosco said: “Wait, it is not yet time. Call the rest of the family. I shall tell you when to enter.”

Turning back to Charles, Don Bosco continued: “I am here for you. Tell me everything you want to say.”

“Oh, Don Bosco, I should be in Hell now. The last time I went to confession I hid a sin which I had committed and dared not confess. It was all due to the fact that I kept bad company. I have just had a terrible dream — I dreamed I was at the edge of an immense furnace and was about to be pushed in by many demons. Then I heard your voice and awoke. I want you to hear my confession.”

Immediately he began his confession with all the signs of true repentance. As soon as he had finished, Don Bosco motioned to the family to enter.

Charles turned towards them and said: “Don Bosco has saved me from the fires of Hell. I had not made a good confession but now everything is straightened out.”

Charles remained in this state for two hours in complete control of his faculties, and answered all their questions. Although he spoke and moved about, his body remained cold, his face livid, and his eyes wan.

Don Bosco told him that he was now in the state of grace and that Paradise was open to him. Then he asked Charles: “Do you want to remain on earth with us, or do you prefer going to Heaven?”

Charles answered happily and resolutely: “I want to go to Heaven! Goodbye! I shall see you again in Heaven!”

Having pronounced these words his head fell back on the pillow and he slept the sleep of the peace of death.

For a long time afterwards everyone spoke about that miracle. Everyone knew the name of the boy. Everyone pointed out the Inn and the Oratory. Each time one of the townsfolk met Don Bosco he would say to the priest: “You who can raise the dead are fortunate indeed!” And a humble Don Bosco would add: “Yes, the dead who are asleep!”

Multiplication of Chestnuts

The Sunday following the Feast of All Saints in 1849 Don Bosco and his boys had been going through the Exercises of a happy death. In the evening Don Bosco took them to the Cemetery promising them a treat of chestnuts on their return.

Mama Margaret, Don Bosco’s mother had purchased three sacks of chestnuts but thinking it over carefully she decided that half a sack would be enough for those boys and therefore had just that amount cooked.

When the boys returned that evening they lined up and stood at attention like soldiers. Don Bosco began distributing the chestnuts filling each boy's cap. His mother, who was looking on said to Don Bosco: "What are you doing? We will not have enough to go around if you continue distributing them that way!"

Don Bosco insisted that three sacks of chestnuts would prove to be more than plenty. Even when his mother announced that only half a sackful had been cooked, Don Bosco still continued filling each boy's cap. Meanwhile the basket was nearly empty. There were but a few handfuls left while about 600 boys had yet to receive their share. Naturally, their joy suddenly turned to anxious silence, fearing that they would be left without any chestnuts.

Not for a moment did Don Bosco show signs of ever becoming upset. Rather, with the faith of one who performs miracles, he encouraged the boys saying: "Do not worry! The best ones are at the bottom of the basket."

Rolling up his sleeves he placed both hands into the basket, bringing forth each time more and more chestnuts. It seemed that no matter how many he took from the basket they never diminished. When each of the boys had received his share, Don Bosco carried the basket into the kitchen. There were still enough chestnuts left for him and for his mother.

Through all the streets that evening people cried: "Don Bosco has multiplied chestnuts!" Don Bosco chimed in with their jubilee. "It was the Madonna who performed the miracle," he said simply. This miracle is still spoken about today at the Oratory. In all of Don Bosco's Homes chestnuts are distributed on the Feast of All Souls and they still laugh over the miracle of the chestnuts.

Multiplication of Hosts for Communion

Two years before this event, on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin in 1847, some 650 boys had gone to confession in readiness to receive Holy Communion.

Don Bosco began celebrating Mass believing that there were hosts in the Tabernacle. Instead, the Ciborium was almost empty and the sexton had forgotten to place the other on the altar to be consecrated.

Soon enough, when he reached for the consecrated hosts, Don Bosco noticed the lapse. Humanly speaking there was no remedy. Lifting his eyes to Heaven, he sighed, and then began to give Communion to each person as though nothing were wrong. As he continued the hosts multiplied in his very hands and without breaking a single host he was able to administer Communion to everyone.

Later, when his boys asked him what he had done, Don Bosco answered: "Well, you cannot believe that Jesus could become disgusted merely through the forgetfulness of the sexton. You know He wanted to enter your heart — and enter he did!"

In his usual cheery way he urged everyone to receive Communion frequently.

Similar multiplications occurred on many other occasions — with bread, with medals, with nuts and with many other things.

The Prophetic Sermon at Milan

In 1850 Pope Pius IX had announced a “Jubilee” in order to counter the spiritual harm done by the rebellions and wars of the time.

In Milan no one dared undertake the preaching of the homily especially after the famous “Giornate”. It seemed as though the city were actually perched atop an active volcano. The police kept a vigilant eye everywhere and particularly on the clergy, who, they feared, would use the pulpit to refer to the uprising which had recently been quelled. Such were the conditions when Don Bosco presented himself to the pastor of St Simpliciano and offered to preach the jubilee sermon in his parish.

The pastor hesitated and sent him to the Archbishop who in turn did not want to commit himself. It was only when he understood that Don Bosco was insistent that he said: “I have no objections, but if there should be an accident, I do not want to be held responsible. You know what we have been witnessing... you cannot be over prudent in these times.” Don Bosco thanked the Archbishop and told him he would preach exactly the way they used to preach 500 years ago. Having received the blessings of the Archbishop he left.

He began his sermon by speaking of the necessity of reforming certain habits. He said that sinners must repent and amend their lives. He spoke also on death, judgement, eternity, and so on, but never once made the least reference to politics.

The church became ever more packed with a curious crowd. The effect of the sermon on the people was extraordinary. From the church of St Simpliciano he went to Santa Maria Nuova, to St Charles, to St Eustorgio and finally to Monza where the Barnabites were located.

An unusual coincidence occurred. It was believed that he preached at Milan at the same time that he was preaching at Monza.

This news soon reached Turin and upon his return he was questioned by many people. Don Bosco smiled and answered: “Yes, they kept me in Milan as a spirit!”

In the Nick of Time

For some time Don Bosco had been considering the purchase of the house belonging to his neighbour, Mr Pinardi, because he felt the need to expand his Oratory. Mr Pinardi, however, sought an exorbitant price. On the evening of 19 February 1851, a violent quarrel took place in the restaurant across the street resulting in injuries and deaths.

Tired of witnessing this constant disturbance and such unpleasant scenes, Mr Pinardi finally went to Don Bosco and said to him: "There are constant quarrels across the street and they are becoming very upsetting to me. If you would like to purchase my house, you may have it." "And for how much?" asked Don Bosco.

"Eighty thousand lire," he replied. Don Bosco said that the price was rather fabulous. Anxious to leave that neighbourhood, Mr Pinardi told Don Bosco to name his own price. The saint had already had the value of the house estimated between 26 and 28 thousand and now offered Mr Pinardi 30 thousand. Mr Pinardi consented and asked for a cash payment.

The two men decided to sign the contract in one week's time and shook hands on the deal.

Where was Don Bosco to obtain the money to pay for the house? This was his one annoying thought. The Abbot Rossini had promised him 20,000 lire — but that was not "30,000"! Where was he to secure the other 10,000?

Again Providence stepped in. Quite unexpectedly his friend and adviser, Don Cafasso, arrived at the Oratory, bringing with him a generous offering of 10,000 lire sent by the Countess Casazza as a contribution towards Don Bosco's good works.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Don Bosco. "That is a real gift from heaven!" And he proceeded to tell Don Cafasso about the deal which he had made with Mr Pinardi.

As soon as Don Cafasso had left, Don Bosco went directly to Mr Pinardi, placed the gold coins on the table saying, "When shall we sign the contract?"

Seeing all that gold Mr Pinardi decided to go to the Notary Cotta immediately.

At the time of signing the contract, Don Bosco turned the money over and suddenly observed that he had yet to pay the Notary's fee and to give the promised gift to Mr Pinardi — which amounted to 3,500 lire. In his happy excitement Don Bosco had not thought of this additional expense and as he emptied the bag containing the gold coins he said: "I hope they will come; they must come!"

Everyone laughed at Don Bosco's enthusiasm. Mr Cotta, who had always been a benefactor of his, exclaimed: "Very well, I shall add the 3,500 lire myself. Is that satisfactory?"

"You see, they did come!" exulted Don Bosco. "I knew that Providence would not fail me!"

Everyone smiled at the happy ending.

Wine of the Holy Name of God!

It is often said that your appetite improves as you eat, and this is precisely what happened in Don Bosco's case. Scarcely had he purchased the

house when he decided he must have a church where he might gather his boys comfortably.

One day, he spoke to his mother about his new plan to build a church in honour of Saint Francis de Sales, the patron of his Congregation. Mama Margaret objected saying that they had no money, because it was expensive taking care of all those boys, and suggested that Don Bosco ponder over the matter very carefully and ask God for his help. Don Bosco said that he had already thought it over carefully, that the Lord had plenty of money for everything in this world and that therefore there was no need for fear.

Without further delay, he had the plans drawn up by an architect and promptly turned them over to a contractor.

Soon about 30 men were put to work on the new project. Among these men a few would occasionally swear. This would hurt Don Bosco and his mother no end. The two of them entreated the men to refrain from swearing but they answered matter-of-factly: "Aww well! We cannot help it. It is a habit — impossible to control it."

"Very well," said Don Bosco, "if you do not swear, each Saturday I shall give you a glass or two of wine."

These words were more effective than any number of sermons and the men made the promise and kept their word. For over a year each Saturday Mama Margaret would bring them a small keg of wine.

Obviously impressed with the quality of the wine, they asked her the name of the wine. Don Bosco's mother answered smiling: "It is the wine of the Holy Name of God!"

Don Bosco, who heard everything from his study, smiled at his mother's fine sense of humour.

I Shall Eat a Dog!

When Don Bosco came forth with his new idea of building a church, Don Cogliotti, a friend of his, said teasingly, challenging him: "If you are successful in building a church, I shall eat a dog!"

Of course, Don Bosco during his life-time built not just one church but hundreds of them, whereas Don Cogliotti had not eaten a single dog. If he had carried out his challenge either he would have died from dog-days or he would have become a dog himself! So much so that whenever the Saint chanced to meet him, he would smile and say: "Well, Don Cogliotti, what about the dog?"

Trouble in Turin

Among his young boys there was a certain Gabriel Fassio, a boy of thirteen. He was a lad of remarkable character, excellent habits and very kind by nature.

Don Bosco held him in great admiration and often remarked about his fine qualities. "But he will soon die." Don Bosco's words proved prophetic

for in a short time he became very ill and when the end was near Gabriel sighed: "Trouble in Turin... Trouble in Turin . . . !"

His friends who assisted him during his illness asked him why he said "trouble". Gabriel answered that there would be a terrible earthquake in Turin on 26 April.

"And what should we do?" asked his friends.
"Pray to St Louis that he protect the Oratory and everyone in it."

Shortly afterwards Gabriel died and the boys of the Oratory who had been inspired by Gabriel's words and who had been deeply impressed by them, added to their regular morning and evening prayers a *Pater*, an *Ave* and a *Gloria Patri* in honour of St Louis with the invocation: "From all evil, deliver us, O Lord!"

26 April 1832 arrived and at noon a tremendous rumble was heard at a radius of twelve miles making the city shake and tearing down doors and windows. Not a piece of glass was left unshattered. To make matters even worse, a thick dust storm had blown up. Unarguably, Turin was left in ruins. But the building housing the Oratory, about 500 yards from the centre of the dust storm, remained intact and the boys who had run out to the streets and the nearby fields were unharmed. Don Bosco had a remembrance of thanksgiving printed. In the background could be seen the city of Turin and the dust going up in flames; above, the Virgin Mary, and in the foreground many youngsters facing the Virgin with their hands clasped in prayer. Below the picture was the following

verse:

*Noi dalle accese polveri,
Per tua merce ' scampati,
Ai piedi tuoi, gran Vergine,
Grazie rendiam prostrate!*

We from the burning sands,
By thy mercy freed,
At your feet, great Virgin,
Render prostrate our thanks to thee!

The Saint and his boys sang these lines of praise with gusto, adding a shout of "Viva" to the Blessed Virgin and to Gabriel Fassio who had warned them of the coming peril.

They laughed heartily when they remembered the episode of their flight in terror with pots in their hands and bread under their arms.

Greek Upside Down

When the persecution by the government came to an end, a new one began at the hands of the Protestants. The latter thought that by challenging him to debates, Don Bosco would give up his struggle against them. At first the Protestants of Turin and its neighbouring towns took

part, but, since they were continuously defeated, they finally called for the Minister Meille and two of his chief assistants.

The three men arrived at Valdocco and went directly to the Oratory. After the customary greetings they immediately presented an argument which lasted from 11 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening and ended in a very ludicrous fashion.

The discussion was on the dogma, or rather the existence, of Purgatory.

Don Bosco had proved his argument from reasoning, from history, and from the Latin text. Meille objected and would not acknowledge defeat, saying that the Latin text was not sufficient but they would have to consult the original in Greek.

Don Bosco arose, went to his bookshelves, took out a copy of the Bible in Greek and handed it to Meille inviting him to consult it and adding that he would find it in complete accord with the Latin text.

Meille, who did not know a word of Greek, but who did not wish to admit his ignorance of the language to Don Bosco, began looking through the book from beginning to end pretending to seek the passage in question.

But, as luck would have it, Meille was holding the book upside down and Don Bosco, who noticed it, could hardly keep from laughing. With a chuckle he said: "Pardon me, Mr Meille! But you will never find the quotation that way, because you are holding the book upside down! Turn it the other way!"

You can readily imagine Meille's embarrassment. Turning as red as a lobster he flung the book on the table and hastily rising cut the discussion short with angry laughter which, unfortunately for him and his friends, he was unable to hide. Don Bosco's face instead brightened up with a victorious smile.

Polite, but Shrewd

The Protestants realized that they could not defeat Don Bosco with their arguments. Soon they resorted to other methods: money, threats, action — the works!

One Sunday in August 1853, two men appeared at the Oratory and asked to speak to the Saint. They were led to his room and one of them, who must have been a Valdesian minister, praised Don Bosco for his genius and his zeal, and then said to him: "Reverend Father, if instead of bothering with the *Catholic Readings* and the writing of religious books you were to concentrate on history or some other related subject, you would be able to benefit your Institute to a greater extent." So saying, he handed four one hundred lire bills to Don Bosco telling him to accept those as a beginning and assuring him that more would be forthcoming. Don Bosco politely yet firmly declined the offer. Rising with indignation,

the two said menacingly: "You do wrong in refusing and you have offended us."

Don Bosco who had known that a few of his boys were at the door on guard, said to the two men: "I see that you know nothing about Catholic priests who are always ready to die for God and for souls. I should therefore suggest that you cease your threats because — I just laugh at them!"

These words angered the two men even further. As they approached and were about to lay their hands on Don Bosco, the Saint grasped a chair and said: "If I wanted to use force, I could easily show you the price you would have to pay for the violation of my house. But the strength of a priest lies not in his muscles but in his patience and forgiveness. Now it is time to put an end to this. Get out of here!"

At that precise moment the door of the room was flung wide and open and Giuseppe Buzzetti, one of Don Bosco's most faithful strongest boys entered.

Calmly, Don Bosco said to him: "Please show these gentlemen the gate; they are not very well acquainted with the stairway!"

Those two men looked at each other, and then silently and docilely followed their guide who, with a smile on his face, led them out, while Don Bosco followed them with his eye.

Poisoned Chestnuts

These menaces were the beginning of a series of attempts on Don Bosco's life and they were so many and often so violent that it was a real miracle that he should escape unharmed.

One evening he was called to the bedside of a sick man in order to hear his confession. Don Bosco was about to set out — he never refused anyone— but deeming it more prudent, asked a few of his boys to accompany him.

When they reached the house, the boys remained at the door while Don Bosco entered. Seated at a table were half a dozen young men laughing, talking and eating or, rather, pretending that they were eating chestnuts.

When Don Bosco entered, the men arose to greet him, politely inviting him to be seated and have some chestnuts while they went up to tell the sick man of his arrival.

"Thank you," answered Don Bosco, "but I have just had supper."

They invited him to taste their wine and he answered that he drank only at his meals. They insisted that just a small glassful would not harm him.

One of the men filled the glasses; then, taking another bottle filled a glass for Don Bosco.

Don Bosco knew that something mysterious was going on and that there might be poison in his glass. Nevertheless, he said nothing. Taking

the glass in his hand, he raised it and made a toast to everyone present; then without tasting the wine placed his glass on the table.

The men said they felt insulted and wanted him to drink at any price adding that if he did not drink for pleasure they would force him to take it. At this point someone grasped him by the shoulders and another grasped his glass.

Realizing that he was being forced, Don Bosco told them that if they really insisted on his drinking they should free him because otherwise he would spill the wine.

When he was freed, Don Bosco who had already measured the distance with his eye, took a long step backwards, flung the door wide open and invited his boys to enter.

The unexpected appearance of those robust youth calmed the evil-doers and their leader said sheepishly: "Well, if Don Bosco really does not wish to drink, be patient; there will be another occasion."

Don Bosco left with his boys, who were jubilant because they had saved him and also because of the trick they had played on the evil-doers.

The Storm of Blows

Those wicked men were actually hired and paid by the Protestants, wherefore they made another attempt on Don Bosco's life.

One evening he was called to hear the confession of a sick woman who was at the point of death. Again he was accompanied by the same faithful boys. Two of them remained outside and the other two went up as far as the landing just outside the bedroom door.

When he entered, Don Bosco saw a woman lying in bed and breathing heavily. She was such a good actress that that she appeared to be on the verge of drawing her very last breath.

Close to the bed were four suspicious-looking, foul men. Don Bosco requested them to move away so that he might hear the woman's confession.

Pointing to one of them the woman said: "Before you hear my confession, I want him to retract the calumny which he has hurled against me."

The guilty one objected saying there was no truth in the woman's words. A heated argument ensued, which then resulted in blows. Everyone joined in the fight.

Suddenly the lights went off and there began a storm of blows all directed towards Don Bosco. Aware of the foul trick and not knowing of a better way to protect himself, he grasped a chair nearby, placed it over his head, and made for the door.

Unfortunately the door was locked and the blows continued even more furious than before, leaving Bosco unharmed because his head was protected by the chair.

Infuriated at the sounds of those loud blows, the boys who were standing guard leaned heavily against the door with all their might until it gave way under their weight. Thus freed, Don Bosco was able to return home with his boys, safe and sound, laughing and talking about the strange hailstorm he had withstood!

Threatened with Guns

Realizing that their tricks had failed, the Protestants finally decided to have recourse to more drastic measures.

One Sunday afternoon in the month of January 1854, two elegantly dressed men arrived at the Oratory and went up to Don Bosco's room, where they were received with the Saint's usual courtesy. The boys were all at Vespers, but John Cagliero, who had seen the men arrive and who was suspicious of them, entered and stopped near Don Bosco's door.

From that position the boy was unable to understand their words but he soon realized that the argument was becoming heated. Suddenly the two men arose and loudly and angrily pronounced the following verdict: "Either you stop publishing your *Catholic Readings* or we shall stop you by force!"

Naturally Don Bosco answered that he would never stop publishing them. His opponents told him he must promise to do so or die. At these words both drew their guns and pointed them directly at Don Bosco. Facing them resolutely and speaking with a voice of assurance, the Saint said: "Shoot!"

At that moment a loud blow ripped the door open. Fearing that some harm might befall Don Bosco, Cagliero, in his excitement, had hit the door so hard that it opened, at the same time, shouting: "Help! Help!" The two men quickly hid their guns and greatly agitated left the room while Don Bosco followed them and courteously bowed and took leave of them, laughing inwardly over their confusion and over the promptness of his faithful, Cagliero.

The Gray Dog

No matter how many insults Don Bosco received from his adversaries or the threats he faced, he never carried a gun nor did he ever resort to any type of force to repel their attacks.

It was always Providence that provided him with the necessary protection, sometimes by making use of "Grigio".

Who was "Grigio"? Grigio was an aristocratic looking dog, a greyhound more than three feet tall, with a long muzzle, straight ears, whose appearance was that of a wolf, and who on many strange occasions had saved the life of Don Bosco.

One evening in 1852, Don Bosco was returning home late, alone. When he reached the square, he heard someone running after him.

Giving a quick glance behind him, Don Bosco saw, just a few paces away, a man armed with a knotted club. Don Bosco began running too in the hope that he might reach home before his pursuers could overtake him.

He had almost reached the road leading to the Oratory when at a corner there suddenly appeared a group of men who evidently were waiting to trap Don Bosco.

What was he to do? The first thought which came to his mind was to protect himself against the person who had been following him. Stopping short, he pointed both elbows at the man's chest so cleverly that the unfortunate wretch fell to the ground crying: "I am dead!"

Thus he was successfully freed from the clutches of one person. But the group was ready to surround him with uplifted clubs when there appeared as if from nowhere Grigio who jumped upon them and began to bark so furiously and became so enraged that the men begged Don Bosco to calm him and keep the dog beside him. Don Bosco obliged and one by one they sheepishly departed, leaving Don Bosco to return home quietly.

Escorted by Grigio who kept prancing about happily, Don Bosco arrived home safely and laughed at the fear of those "courageous" gangsters.

Grigio Again!

On another occasion towards the end of December 1854, on a dark, cloudy night he was leaving the centre of the city to visit his friend, Father Cottolengo. A short distance ahead of him he noticed two men walking towards him who accelerated or diminished their pace according as to whether Don Bosco accelerated or diminished his. He realized that this was certainly done with a purpose.

No matter how hard he tried, it was impossible to lose them. Naturally, Don Bosco concluded that they had evil intentions; therefore he decided to go back a few steps and seek refuge in some nearby house. But it was too late, for, suddenly, those men turned around, came upon him, and threw a cape over his head.

For a moment Don Bosco was able to free his head long enough to see what they were doing. He began fighting with them and called for help. This time the two would be assassins covered his head even more securely and managed to put a gag in his mouth.

Precisely at that moment, out of the stillness of the night, came Grigio, mad as a lion, and looking equally ferocious he jumped first on one of the men, then on the other throwing them both down into the mud. Then going alongside of Don Bosco he looked at the two men with an air of triumph.

Covered with mud and trembling with fear, the two men arose and called out: "Don Bosco, please save us from this dog! We apologize!"

“Very well,” Don Bosco answered. “This time I shall, but you go your way and let me go mine.”

The men thanked him as they took to their heels leaving behind them both the handkerchief and the cape. Don Bosco patted Grigio on the head and smiled. The two returned home tranquilly.

It’s Grigio Yet Again!

On another occasion instead of accompanying him, Grigio simply prevented Don Bosco from crossing the threshold.

It was late at night and Don Bosco was to go out on business. His mother tried hard to dissuade him but Don Bosco begged her not to fear; he then took his hat and accompanied by a few of his boys, left the house.

When they had reached the gate they found Grigio stretched out as though he were waiting for someone.

“Fine,” said Don Bosco, “get up and come with us.” The dog, however, did not budge. Instead he let out a shrill cry and remained in his position. One of the boys touched Grigio with his foot but instead of moving, he growled again.

Mama Margaret, who had heard the dog, came out to investigate. “If you do not wish to listen to me’ she said, “at least give heed to the dog.”

In order to please his mother Don Bosco re-entered the house, and at that moment a neighbour arrived, upset and breathless to tell Don Bosco not to leave the house because four armed men were roaming through the streets ready to take Don Bosco’s life.

Many other times when Don Bosco failed to return home at the expected hour, his mother sent a few boys to look for him and they would find him accompanied by his faithful four-legged guide who seemed to laugh at the fear of others.

The Cholera of 1854

At the beginning of the month of August in 1854 the cholera epidemic had broken out in Turin. Don Bosco had predicted it several months before when he told his boys: “During this year the cholera shall spread to Turin and will do great damage. If you do exactly as I say, you can escape the dreaded sickness.”

“What must we do?” asked the boys.

“First of all you must be in the grace of God; then you must wear around your neck a medal which I shall bless. Every evening you must say a *Pater*, an *Ave* and a *Gloria Pari* in honour of Saint Aloysius.”

The cases of cholera kept rising rapidly and in three days surpassed the 1400 mark. The most afflicted region was Valdocco, precisely where the Oratory was located.

While entire families were destroyed, not one member of the Oratory was infected although many of them had offered to assist the sick both in their homes and in the hospitals.

Don Bosco continuously told them that if they remained free from sin no one would be stricken by the sickness. This proved to be a real prophecy.

When the worst and final phase of the epidemic had ended, Don Bosco took his boys out on a gay hike to Becchi, his home town, for the feast of the Holy Rosary, where they enjoyed themselves to their heart's content because they had escaped the danger.

Funerals at Court

As the epidemic subsided another seemed to strike the nation in the form of a "bill" for the suppression of Religious Orders. On 28 November 1854, the bill was introduced in the legislature. Naturally all Catholics regretted such action and Don Bosco felt it very keenly, too.

During those times Don Bosco had had another of his famous dreams. It seemed that one day he was in the courtyard of his Oratory surrounded by his boys and some priests when suddenly a court page dressed in red hurried towards him and said: "I have an important announcement to make. There is a great funeral at Court." Having said these words he hurried away.

Five days later Don Bosco had another dream. He was busy writing in his room when he heard horses' hoofs in the courtyard. The door opened and the same page, dressed in the same red uniform, appeared before him once more and announced: "Not a great funeral at Court, but great funerals at Court!" Having repeated this announcement he quickly left the room, closing the door behind him.

Don Bosco stepped out on his balcony and seeing the page already in his saddle, hastened to ask him the reason for that announcement. In answer the page merely repeated: "Great funerals at Court!" and disappeared.

Don Bosco, who had already announced his first dream to the king, wrote another message to His Majesty that morning telling him of his second dream and begging him to avoid this tragedy by impeding the passage of such a bill.

On 28 November 1854, however, the bill was introduced into the legislature, and on 9 January 1855, hearings began on it in spite of the fact that petitions to the contrary kept pouring in. In the meantime Maria Theresa, the Queen Mother, became ill and on 12 January died, aged barely fifty-four. She was buried on the 16th and on the evening of the same day Queen Mary Adelaide received the last rites of the Church and died on 20 January at the age of thirty-three.

The same evening Prince Ferdinand, brother of the king, also received the last rites of the Church and died during the night between 10 and 11 February. He too was barely thirty-three. There was still one bit of hope left and the Lord sent His fourth warning. On 17 May the Royal House was once more filled with sadness for the youngest son of the deceased Queen, Mary Adelaide, was in the last stages of a serious illness and was about to join his mother.

Thus, in the brief space of four months, the King had lost his mother, his wife, his brother and a son. Don Bosco's dreams had come true. Yet, five days later, on 22 May the bill was passed by the Senate by a slender majority.

This time Don Bosco did not smile because hundreds of convents and monasteries were seized and thousands of nuns, priests and monks were scattered throughout the country. The only people who laughed diabolically were the Masons whose hearts were filled with hatred and revenge, while at Court and among the people there was much weeping and deep mourning.

Two Precious Friends

Incidentally, Don Bosco did not lose hope but continued writing to the king so that the latter might find a way to have the harmful law repealed. One fine day the king was discussing the matter with his Aide-de-Camp, Count d'Angrogna who exclaimed: "I would like to meet this person and have a chat with him."

One morning he and the king mounted their horses and went to Valdocco, where they asked to speak to Don Bosco. Now, it so happened that the Saint was very busy that day, and had given strict instructions to ensure that he was not disturbed that day, even if the king himself should come! The door-keeper was faithful to the wishes of the priest, and Victor Emmanuel left.

The following day His Majesty's Aide-de-Camp returned and asked: "Are you Don Bosco?"

When the Saint answered in the affirmative, the Count asked him how he had dared write to the king telling him how to rule his country and called Don Bosco an impostor, a fanatic and an enemy of the king.

Don Bosco tried to explain that though he had indeed written to the king, he had no desire to impose his ideas on anyone as such, least of all the king. But it was nigh impossible to pacify the Count who insisted that Don Bosco, having insulted His Majesty, must now sit down and write the king a letter of apology exactly as was dictated to him.

The Count began dictating a retraction which was a complete negation of the truth, whereupon Don Bosco put his pen down saying that he could not write such a retraction. The Count insisted that he must, but when he saw that Don Bosco was equally firm in his refusal he placed his hand on his sword as if to challenge the priest to a duel.

Not a bit alarmed, Don Bosco, with his usual calm, patient manner disarmed the Count saying: "If I had known that you wanted to settle this matter I should have come to your house thus saving you the trouble of making this trip." Hearing that, the Count calmed down somewhat and asked Don Bosco if he was serious, if he really had the courage to go to his home. Don Bosco answered in the affirmative and the visit was fixed.

At the appointed hour, Don Bosco presented himself before the Count and they proceeded to compose a suitable letter to the king. From that day on the Count became one of Don Bosco's best friends and benefactors.

Following that experience even His Majesty, Victor Emmanuel, became a great admirer of Don Bosco's and on several occasions tried to meet him in Turin and in Florence. One day he told the Archbishop of Genova that Don Bosco was really a saint. From then on the king sent generous contributions to Don Bosco and became one of his protectors as the House of Savoy has done ever since.

Naturally, Don Bosco rejoiced over his newly acquired friends and over the large offerings which he received from them!

The Best Proof

We have historic proof of the esteem His Majesty, King Victor Emmanuel, had for Don Bosco. Indeed, theirs was a friendship that really spoke for itself.

Finding himself in great financial distress, Don Bosco had turned to the Lottery. About 400 people, the best of Turinese society, had formed a committee for the promotion of his lottery. Huge gifts poured in each day and package after package of tickets kept going out. Among those buying the greatest number of tickets were various ministers and members of the Royal Family.

One day Count d'Angrogna was speaking to the King about Don Bosco's lottery. His Majesty immediately said that he wanted the Count to have 500 tickets bought for him. The Count reminded His Majesty that they had already been bought.

"Very well," answered the King, "have 500 more bought! We must help this poor priest."

The Count carried out the wishes of the King and Don Bosco laughed twice — once over the first purchase and then again over the second!

Monsignor? Not at All!

In 1850 when Don Bosco went to Rome for the first time to confer with the Pope on the founding of the Salesian Congregation, the Holy Father had decided to show his appreciation and esteem for Don Bosco by making him one of his domestic prelates, viz., a "Monsignor".

Don Bosco, who had never sought high titles and honours, graciously thanked the Pope and added politely: "Your Holiness, how would I look if I

were to return to my boys dressed as a Monsignor? My boys would no longer recognize me, they would not dare come close to me; they would not tug at my cassock or pull me in this direction and that. Besides, people would believe me to be wealthy and I would no longer receive donations; then my boys would die of hunger and my works would come to naught. No, Your Holiness, it would be best for me to remain as I am!”

The Pope appreciated his humility and the two became close friends. When the Saint returned to Turin, he told his boys about the Pope’s proposal asking them whether they would prefer having him become “Monsignor” or remain “Don Bosco”. In chorus they all answered: “Don Bosco!... Don Bosco!...”

Under the Pope’s Foot!

During Easter Week of that year, the Pope desired to have the Saint with him during the various functions at Saint Peter’s. On Easter Sunday the Saint went with one of the Cardinals to the Balcony from which the Pope was to give his blessing to the people of Rome. While he was observing that spectacle of over 200,000 people standing in Saint Peter’s Square, he suddenly saw behind him the portable chair on which the Pope was carried.

Not being able to move in any other direction he turned sideways and felt the Pope’s foot on his shoulder. Two days later when Don Bosco returned for an audience with the Pope, His Holiness said to him: “Where were you on the day of the Papal blessing? There in front of the Pope? And with your shoulders almost beneath his foot — as though the Pope needed your support!”

“Your Holiness,” answered Don Bosco, “I was caught there inadvertently. I beg of you to forgive me if I...”

“So you insult me further by asking if you offended me?!” Poor Don Bosco looked at the Pope in utter confusion, and it took all of Pius IX’s seriousness to keep from laughing.

When Don Bosco finally realized that the Pope was joking, he laughed heartily.

The Pope’s Picnic!

During that same audience, the Pope wished to prove his paternal kindness towards Don Bosco and his boys. After having said: “I concede all facilities possible to you,” he added: “You wanted to ask something else of me?”

“What else could I ask after having received your blessing,” said Don Bosco.

The Pope said he knew Don Bosco loved his boys and wished to keep them happy when he returned to them.

Saying these words he opened a chest, took from it a fine handful of gold and, without even counting it, handed it over to Don Bosco saying:

“Take this, and have a nice picnic in my name with your boys when you return to Turin.”

Don Bosco did exactly that! In fact, he called it the “Pope’s picnic”! He and his boys laughed heartily and joyously cheered the benevolent Pope to the skies!

Sudden Death

In January 1856, Don Bosco was asked to go to Viarigi in Monferrato to conduct a Mission. In this parish a priest had been spreading heresy among the parishioners, to such an extent that they had become firm in refusing to heed even the pleas of various bishops.

At the first of his series of sermons, Don Bosco told the few people present to warn their fellow-citizens that, if they refused to attend the sermons, the Lord would force them to go. He then invited the people to join him in saying a *Pater* and an *Ave* for the first person who might die in that town.

News regarding this development spread like a flash of lightning throughout town and everyone trembled with fear. That evening a dance was being held in one of the well known residences, lasting until the early hours of the morning. Rather unexpectedly, the host was stricken and fell to the floor, dead.

Someone ran for the pastor of the church but he did not arrive on time and that morning after his sermon, during which not one allusion was made to the incident, Don Bosco asked the parishioners to join him in a *Pater*, an *Ave* and a *Requiem* for their poor friend who had died a short while ago.

He recited these prayers so slowly that they made a great impression on the congregation. Indeed, it worked like a miracle. From that day on the church was always crowded with people and of the 3,000 inhabitants of the town there was not one adult who did not go to the Sacraments. This had a very beneficial and lasting effect that led to the redemption of the town as a whole.

You can imagine how Don Bosco felt about the happy results of the terrible God-centred warning.

Family Secrets

Because of his close relations with the Pope, Don Bosco was suspected by the police and in May 1860, he underwent a very thorough search during which the police found a drawer of his wardrobe locked.

As a natural result of this discovery the police wanted to know what was in it and Don Bosco answered that they were very confidential, secret things which he did not care to have anyone see. He was told that during a search nothing was confidential or secret and that he must open the drawer.

Don Bosco insisted that he could not comply with their wishes because his reputation might suffer as a result and added that they should respect family secrets.

When the police threatened to break the drawer, Don Bosco yielded.

One of the police agents grasped the papers contained in the drawer showing them to the other men with an air of triumph.

Immediately they began to go through them, one by one with great curiosity.

One was a baker's bill for 1800 lire due, another was a cobbler's bill for 2150 lire due, a third was a tailor's bill for 1730 lire due, etc.

"What kind of papers are these?"

Don Bosco answered that now that they had begun they might just as well continue and they would soon know.

The men opened other papers and found nothing but unpaid bills for oil, rice, macaroni, etc. One of the men finally said: "Why do you ridicule us this way?"

Don Bosco said that he had no desire to have anyone see his debts but since it had happened there was nothing he could do about it. However, if those men wanted to pay one or two of the bills, he would appreciate it very much.

The men began to laugh and went into a consultation. Finally Don Bosco sent for a bottle of wine and they all drank to the health of the perquisition!

The Cat in the Closet

Among the most rapid inquisitors of the priests and of the religious institutions and hence against Don Bosco, the worst one was a certain Cavalier Gatti (Gatto=Cat) who held one of the highest governmental positions.

This Mr Gatti had been put in charge of the investigation of the schools of the Oratory and had made a malicious and false report to the government.

When Don Bosco became aware of the situation, he feared the closing of his Institution. Therefore, he went directly to the Minister of Education to straighten out matters.

The Minister called in Mr Gatti so that he might face Don Bosco and defend his false accusations. Gatti became so confused that at a certain point when he was no longer able to sustain his claims and lies, he arose angrily and tried to leave.

It so happened that in his anger he mistook one door for another and entered a closet instead. The Minister, noticing the error called to him saying: "Slowly, Cavalier! That is a closet." He arose and showed him the right door, at the same time smiling with Don Bosco over the embarrassing error.

To complete the story we must add at this point, out of respect for truth and education that, from that day on Gatti's luck changed. Not long after, he began to show signs of insanity and finally went to live in his villa near Felizzano. After having smashed his wife against a wall, he himself died a miserable death devoid of any form of comfort.

Sometimes God punishes his persecutors late, but He always punishes them justly, at times in this world itself.

Roses and More Roses!

In December 1862, Don Bosco was invited by his friend and benefactor, the Marquis of Sommariva, to spend the day with him. Throughout that day snow had fallen so heavily that during the night it seemed as though their castle were sleeping lazily curled up among the huge rose bushes which covered the magnificent facade and the side wings.

A visit from Don Bosco was always a blessing and a cause for joy at that castle, but this time it brought with it a remarkable, mysterious and miraculous surprise. The morning following the arrival of Don Bosco the naked rose bush appeared entirely in bloom. Roses could be seen everywhere and their delightful perfume filled the air. They grew higher and higher forming festoons and garlands, resting on cornices and window sills and decorating balconies and terraces.

The first to notice the occurrence were the door-keepers and the caretakers who announced the gay news to everyone. Almost immediately, the creaking sound of windows long closed could be heard as everywhere shutters were flung open and people looked out of their windows to see the unusual and beautiful sight.

After Mass everyone surrounded Don Bosco who acted innocent of the whole incident he, too, standing in admiration. For days the magnificent roses bloomed amidst the candid wintry background.

This legendary episode signifies that the Saint always brought with him roses of grace and celestial blessings.

The Title of "Mary Help of Christians"

In 1863 Don Bosco wished to begin the construction of the magnificent church of Mary Help of Christians. His greatest difficulty lay in obtaining due approval from the civic authorities who, when he submitted his plans, objected to the title saying that it was unpopular and inopportune, that it smacked of bigotry and was not suitable for the times.

"Very well," answered Don Bosco, "let us omit the title."

The engineer wanted to know what name he wished to substitute; Don Bosco said he would think it over and decide later. The engineer was afraid, however, that he might be tricked and that eventually the same name, to which he had objected so strenuously, might be used.

Don Bosco explained that no trick was involved; but since neither the engineer would approve the plans due to his objection to the title nor could Don Bosco at the moment think of one he liked as well, they might forget their differences and get on with the plans. Thus both would be satisfied.

The engineer smiled, approved the plans and Don Bosco returned home from the City Hall smiling and gay over this victory of his which meant the immediate beginning of the construction.

The Conspicuous Sum of 8 Cents

All the inhabitants of Valdocco and perhaps all the people of Turin became enthusiastic over the unveiling of the plans for the construction of the Church and the commencement of the tremendous undertaking.

The remarks made by the people who stood by and watched the construction were very interesting to say the least. Some wondered where he would obtain the money, others feared that he would overburden himself with debt, yet others feared bankruptcy, or insanity and still others thought he might have found a treasure.

Don Bosco listened, remained silent and proceeded with the work. Excavations completed, the cornerstone was laid with the greatest ceremony. At the end Don Bosco turned to the chief Contractor, Charles Buzzetti, and said: "Fine, Buzzetti! I want to make my first payment immediately. It will not be very much but it will be all I have at the moment." So saying he took out his wallet, opened it and emptied its contents into the Contractor's expectant hands. To everyone's surprise the coins added up to the princely sum of eight cents! And Don Bosco smiled!

"Do not be afraid," said he, "the Madonna will take care of everything. Indeed, it is she who will provide all the money necessary for her church."

In fact, that is exactly what happened. The church cost more than a million lire, yet the Madonna helped pay for everything with her great and numerous miracles.

Don Bosco himself was so amazed that he took to saying that each brick in that church was there precisely by the grace of the Madonna.

Ten Thousand Lire of a Marquise

In September 1864, the capital of Italy was moved from Turin to Florence. Finding himself in need of aid, Don Bosco decided to go to Florence.

His trip was a great triumph so to say! All the leading dailies reported his arrival. He was treated hospitably at the Archbishop's palace. The canons of the Cathedral held an entertainment programme in his honour. Likewise the Florentine nobility vied with each other in feasting him.

Among others the Marquise Gerini invited the Saint to her home, but Don Bosco said he could not accept, because his boys were waiting for him.

“Let them wait,” said she. “When you return, they will see you.

Don Bosco explained that the poor boys would starve without him.

The discussion continued and when the Marquise learned that there were approximately a thousand boys to feed and that it would cost about 10,000 lire she said: “Suppose we could find that sum, would you really stay?”

“Why not?” answered Don Bosco. “Very well, I shall give it to you,” she ventured.

“May God bless you,” exclaimed Don Bosco smiling, and he remained in Florence.

That generous offering led to others, each almost as large.

Puff... Puff... Puff...!

During the time that Don Bosco spent in Florence he was called one day before the Minister of the Interior on very important business.

As he was conversing with the Ministers Lanza, Bettini, Ricasoli and others, Lanza asked him how he was able to meet the expenses of caring for and feeding so many youngsters.

With his usual smile and wit Don Bosco answered: “I go ahead like a locomotive.”

“And what does that mean?” asked Lanza. “Puff, puff, puff — or rather debts, debts, debts!” They all laughed heartily but then Lanza insisted that eventually these debts would have to be paid. “What is your secret?”

Don Bosco replied that every machine must be replenished with fire and that he added plenty of that. “Of what fire are you speaking?” asked Lanza.

“I mean the fire of faith in God and in His Divine Providence, without which man is helpless, empires crumble and kingdoms are ruined.”

Saying these words, as only he could say them, he impressed everyone and they were persuaded that he must be a man of God.

They took leave of each other laughing about Don Bosco’s “puff, puff, puff”, and remained his close friends and admirers.

Guest of the Famous

On another occasion he was having dinner with people of varied political leanings and listened to the toasts to Victor Emmanuel, to Cavour, to Garibaldi and to liberty.

Finally Don Bosco was invited to speak. Lifting his glass he said: “Long live Victor Emmanuel, Cavour and Garibaldi, all under the Papal flag so that they may save their souls!”

They all laughed and applauded him, admiring both his tact and his sincere profession of his ideas. One of the men shouted: "Long Live Don Bosco! He does not wish harm to anyone!"

In his dealings with the Ministers at Florence as the mediator between the Holy See and the Government, he protested thus to the President of the Council, Ricasoli: "Your Excellency, you must know that Don Bosco is a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among his boys, and a priest in the Minister's office. He acts in Florence exactly the way he does in Turin, in the palace of the king and of the Ministers as he does in the homes of the poor."

Ricasoli well understood this and from that day on he went on to become his friend and benefactor.

In February 1878, Don Bosco was commissioned by the Holy See to inform himself concerning the government's intentions as regards the approaching conclave for the election of a new Pope. Don Bosco made an appointment with Crispi, the Prime Minister and seeing that the latter hesitated, the Saint said very frankly: "In the name of the Sacred College, I ask for an immediate and definite answer. Because, no matter what position you take, the conclave will be held, be it in Venice, in Milan or in Avignon."

Crispi, overtaken by Don Bosco's firmness and realizing that if the conclave were held in Rome it would be to the advantage of the government, suddenly rose and gave Don Bosco his hand telling him to assure the Cardinals that the government would respect the conclave and would see to it that the people also respected it, and that the government would assume complete responsibility for the behaviour of the people.

Don Bosco hurriedly returned to the Vatican and everyone, overjoyed at the good news he brought, heartily congratulated him on his victory.

Don Bosco's firmness and sincerity was always admired by all. He himself also took delight in these characteristics of his because through them he was able to work for the glory of God and the good of numerous souls.

"We Shall Share Equally!"

In 1854 Don Bosco met a 16-year-old boy who had come to ask for a holy picture. Don Bosco looked at him; then, making a sign of dividing his left hand into two parts with his right, said: "Michael, we two shall share equally!"

The child had never before met Don Bosco, and did not understand the mystery of this utterance of his; but later, after other meetings, he became so very fond of the Saint that he followed him in all his undertakings, like his own shadow.

This boy became Don Bosco's first seminarian, his first 'priest, his chief assistant, and his successor — he was Don Michael Rua, who in life shared Don Bosco's virtues, and in death, his sanctity.

Many times did these two holy men smilingly remind each other of the hand divided in two!

He Predicts the Future of the Pope

As 1870 approached, Don Bosco wrote to Pope Pius IX telling him not to place any hope in the apparent peace moves, but rather to prepare himself to give up Rome because it would be taken away from him. Subsequently, His Holiness called Don Bosco for an audience on 21 February 1870.

That day, before taking leave of the Holy Father, Don Bosco told His Holiness that there were many important matters which he could reveal, but he did not dare. The Pope prevailed upon him not to conceal anything.

Then Don Bosco revealed the horrible battle between France and Prussia, the withdrawal of Napoleon's troops from Rome, the fall of the French Empire, the great disaster which would be experienced in France, in Paris particularly.

After a moment's silence he asked the Pope whether he should continue; His Holiness begged him not to.

The moment he reached Turin, Don Bosco wrote a letter to the Pope completing what he had not told him in Rome. There was no reason for Don Bosco to smile on this occasion; but later, when the battle between the various governments of Europe and the Church had receded into history and the situation had calmed down, he and the Pope did share many a chuckle over the prophecy.

Predicts the Future to King Francis of Naples

In 1867 Don Bosco was in Rome and Francis II, dethroned King, asked him about his destiny — whether he would regain his kingdom as many had predicted. "Your Majesty:" Don Bosco replied, "if you want me to be perfectly frank, you will never again ascend the throne."

Francis II wanted to know upon what facts Don Bosco based his prediction and the Saint explained that it was all due to the bad treatment given the Church by the Royal House of Naples.

Francis II objected saying that during his last years King Ferdinand, his father, was in perfect accord with the Pope.

Don Bosco insisted that the causes still remained.

"Things would improve if I were to return to the throne."

Don Bosco answered that he knew of Francis' devotion to the Holy See but that power would not correspond to his good will!

King Francis asked the Queen Mother to have a talk with Don Bosco but she was told in no uncertain terms that she would never again return to Naples. And that is exactly what happened, for that very year she died of cholera at Albano, and Francis, who had sought refuge in Paris, died

there in 1894 without ever having seen Naples again, just as Don Bosco had predicted.

Predicts Recovery of One of the Boys

One of the finest boys at the Oratory became seriously ill when Don Bosco was not at home. Upon his arrival priests and boys ran to meet him and begged him to hurry to the bedside of the dying boy if he wished to see him while he was yet alive.

Don Bosco did not become alarmed at that; neither did he hurry, instead, merely smiled.

“Davico will not die,” he said. “I have not yet signed his passport.”

Arriving at the boy’s bedside, Don Bosco bent over and whispered a word into the ear of the delirious boy and then exhorted all those present to kneel in prayer for the sick lad to Dominic Savio, whose name Davico bore. All obliged.

Immediately after that short prayer, the boy sat up in bed and exclaimed: “I am cured!”

To the surprise of all present, Don Bosco said to Davico: “Very well, get up and come to supper with me.”

It seemed almost insane to extend a supper invitation to someone who just a few moments before was dying. But Don Bosco insisted and the boy arose, and went to supper with the Saint. That evening there was great rejoicing at the Oratory because everyone who had seen how ill Davico was, now saw how well Davico really was!

Miraculous Cures

In May 1869, Don Bosco had gone to Lanzo for the feast of Saint Philip Neri, patron of his first school.

When he arrived he learned that six of the guests were ill with smallpox and posed the danger of spreading it throughout the house.

“A feast and smallpox do not gel well!” exclaimed Don Bosco. “Go and prepare their clothes at the foot of their beds and I shall be right up to bless them.”

“Don Bosco, may we get up?” asked the boys when they saw him. “Give us your blessing!” they pleaded.

Don Bosco asked if they had faith in the Blessed Virgin; they all answered: “Yes!” “Well, then, get up!”

Don Bosco blessed them, and left. All but one got out of bed, dressed and ran down to the playground. Baravalle, who doubted his complete recovery, remained in bed as an extra precaution.

That evening the doctor arrived and having learned that they had got up and had gone out on that cold, humid day became angry at their imprudence and added that such a foolish act would surely prove fatal. While Don Bosco laughed, the physician went up to the sick room where he found the prudent Baravalle, who remained under the doctor’s care

and was cured only after twenty days, while the others, who had had faith in Don Bosco, had been running about happily during those twenty days!

A Challenge to Death

In May, 1883, Don Bosco went to Paris to seek assistance for his work and above all for the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome which was under construction at the time.

His trip to Paris was a great triumph. On the very evening of his arrival he was called to bless a young dying boy — the son of a very famous countess — who had already received the last rites of the Church.

Don Bosco promised that he would go and bless him on condition that the following day the boy would go and serve at his Mass at the Madeleine.

Naturally this proposal seemed very strange to everyone; but Don Bosco started out calmly for the home of the dying boy. When he arrived, the boy was already entering a stage of coma. Reciting a short prayer and blessing the boy, Don Bosco said to him: "Tomorrow you will come and serve Mass for me at the Madeleine."

The news of that challenge to death spread like wildfire throughout Paris and the next morning the Madeleine was filled to capacity by curious crowds.

Everyone knelt in silent prayer and anxiously held his breath. Finally they heard the ringing of the bell which announced Don Bosco's Mass and preceding the Saint was the young Count, beautiful as an angel, holding the Missal in his hands.

The emotion of the crowd was great; binoculars were pointed towards him, the miracle son who last evening was dying. Everywhere sobs and sighs were heard.

A noblewoman who was present immediately made a vow ' to leave her entire estate to Don Bosco's fine work, and the Saint smiled over the cure, the generous offering and the inheritance which he had received.

A Second Challenge to Death

In the Autumn of that same year the most authoritative members of the Austrian aristocracy called Don Bosco to the bedside of Prince Henry, son of the Duke of Berrj. All the newspapers announced that he was dying and the prince wanted Don Bosco in the firm belief that the Saint could cure him.

For a while Don Bosco hesitated, saying that they had so many priests, and even bishops, at their disposal and wondered why it should be necessary for a poor padre like Don Bosco to hasten there. Everyone told him that the prince wanted to hear a few encouraging words from him and that he should therefore go.

So good Fr John Bosco went, and when he reached the castle he said to those who had come to meet him: “Infirmitas haec non est ad mortem” (The patient will not die).

Don Bosco blessed the prince, had him invoke Mary Help of Christians and then went down to dinner.

That day was Saint Henry’s feast day — the prince’s name day — and at the end of dinner the prince came down to the dining room to drink a toast with his wife Maria Theresa of Este, and with the members of the court who were gazing in admiration at Don Bosco. The following day the prince joined the hunting party given in his honour.

That cure astounded all the medical authorities of Europe who had treated the prince. When Don Bosco returned to Turin and everyone complimented him, the good priest said: “How much less embarrassing it is to be home at the bedside of poor people than in royal palaces, at the bedside of princes!”

Test of Providence

When Don Bosco had improvised his first chapel under the Pinardi’s shed, he realized that he had no chalice for his first Mass there.

Since he did not possess a penny he went to his mother and told her that he needed a chalice and that she must help him think up some way of getting the money to buy one.

The poor woman was very willing to help, but where was she to find the money? She thought and thought, and then began a systematic search. Finally at the bottom of a very rarely used chest she found a roll containing eight glittering crowns, the exact amount necessary for the purchase of the chalice. No one knew of the existence of this money.

“I wonder who could have put it there?” she said.

“That is a fine question to ask! Of course it was put there by Providence who wanted to play a joke on us,” retorted Don Bosco and they laughed together.

Another Test of Providence

One day a friend came to visit Don Bosco and greeted him in the usual manner: “Good morning. Don Bosco! How are you?”

“Without a penny!” answered Don Bosco.

“What a strange thing. Suppose you were urgently in need of money, what would you do?” “I should turn to Providence,” answered Don Bosco. The friend said that that was all very well and good. But what if he needed the money immediately?

“Then I should send you to the waiting room, where you would find a person who, at this very moment, is bringing an offering to Don Bosco.” The man was amazed, for just a moment before, when he had entered,

there was no one in the waiting room and he could not imagine who had told Don Bosco that someone had entered since.

The Saint explained that no one had told him, but that he knew it and so did Providence.

The friend went to the waiting room and sure enough there he found a man who explained that he had come to bring an offering to Don Bosco.

At the same time the Saint appeared and said: "Do you see how right I was in trusting Providence?"

The three of them smiled over the happy event especially since the contribution was rather large.

Faith that Overcomes Obstacles

In 1869 Don Bosco again went to Rome to obtain Papal approval for the Salesian Society.

At the station the carriage of Cardinal Berardi awaited his arrival with the request that he proceed immediately to His Eminence's home to visit and bless an eleven-year-old nephew of his. The only child of a rich and noble family, the boy had for two weeks been struggling between life and death, burdened with a high typhoid fever which defied any form of treatment.

When Don Bosco arrived, the family begged of him to bring about the boy's recovery. Turning to the Cardinal, Don Bosco said: "I have come so that you might help me obtain the Holy Father's approval of the Salesian Society."

"Very well," answered the Cardinal, "you hasten the cure of my nephew and I shall go and speak to the Holy Father and do my utmost for you."

Don Bosco, begging everyone to have the utmost faith in Mary Help of Christians, went up to the child's bed, blessed him and immediately the fever left him — the youngster was completely cured!

They all turned towards the Saint to congratulate him, but Don Bosco said: "Give your thanks to Mary Help of Christians!"

This was but the beginning. The Cardinals who were to vote were all opposed to the Constitutions of the Society. The one person who could exert influence was Cardinal Antonelli. When Don Bosco went to visit him, he found him motionless in an armchair.

"Come, my dear Don Bosco," said the Cardinal. "Your Eminence, how are you?"

"You see how I am. I have been confined here for several days with a very painful attack of the gout."

Don Bosco told the Cardinal that if he helped him, he would be cured.

The Saint explained his troubles to the Cardinal who realized the difficulty of the situation and promised to attend to the matter just as soon as he could go for an audience.

"But you must go very soon, in fact, tomorrow," said Don Bosco.

The Cardinal objected that he could not move and that it would be impossible.

"Have faith in Mary Help of Christians and go tomorrow. Tomorrow you will be better."

But suppose I become worse?

"Then I shall be responsible," answered Don Bosco. "The Madonna knows what to do."

It was agreed that the Cardinal would go the following day and he kept his word. When he related the conversation and the cure to the Pope they both laughed over the strange sanctity of Don Bosco.

One by one the various obstacles disappeared, but there still remained one which was perhaps the greatest of all.

The person who was the most difficult of all to convince was Cardinal Svegliati, a scholarly and a very active secretary of the Sacred Congregation. Don Bosco decided to pay him a visit too

When he arrived Don Bosco found that the Cardinal was in bed with a serious case of pneumonia. The saint narrated his story and said that he must have his assistance.

"My dear Don Bosco, your case is very serious and almost impossible, and in my present condition I have no idea when I shall be able to return to my office." Don Bosco pleaded saying that he must go — that he must go soon, in spite of the fact that the Cardinal explained how impossible it was with his high temperature.

Our Saint assured him that his cough would cease and his fever would pass, but insisted that he must go the very next day! Naturally the poor Cardinal stared at him in amazement.

"Have faith," Don Bosco told His Eminence. "I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin and if you promise to take an interest in the Salesian Society I assure you that you will be cured at once."

"If you assure me of this I shall go, but within a few days."

"No," replied Don Bosco, "you must go tomorrow without fail!"

The Cardinal promised that he would go the following day, provided he was better.

The following day the cough had disappeared completely and there was no more fever. His strength revived, the Cardinal went, spoke and pleaded in such convincing terms, that a few days later, on 29 February 1869, the Salesian Society was finally approved by the Holy See.

When all the details had been worked out and all formalities completed, Don Bosco went to thank the Cardinals, smiling with them over the graces of the Madonna and at faith which overcomes all obstacles.

The Vision of His Dead Mother

Don Bosco's mother had been dead for some time but he always remembered her with tender emotion and one day in 1860 he saw her in a fleeting but consoling vision. She stood before him agile and smiling.

It seemed so real to the saint that he asked his mother if she were not dead.

His mother answered that she was, but that she lived!

After further inquiries Don Bosco was assured that she was very happy, that she was in Paradise but had passed through the flames of Purgatory, and that various boys from the Oratory were also in Paradise.

When Don Bosco asked his mother just what were the pleasures up there, the good woman answered that it was impossible to answer that question because the delights of Heaven no one would be able to tell of or express.

Suddenly she was enveloped by a light of inexplicable beauty as she said: "John, I am waiting for you here so that we may be reunited for eternity!" Then she disappeared amidst the harmonious singing of hundreds of angelic voices.

Relating this vision to his boys, Don Bosco, as though inspired would always end with these same words: "Oh! I shall see my mother there, and you too will see her if we persevere in the service of God; therefore have courage! Be happy and never sin!"

The Spirit of Fun

Don Bosco always used to say that young people must be kept occupied because "stagnant water becomes putrid."

He always enjoyed noisy games and in order to encourage the boys he was always their originator and the spirit of all the fun.

Don Bosco had always been a fast runner and often he would challenge them to a race. He would line up the boys and say: "one... two... three!" A group of boys would start out, but each time the first to reach the goal was Don Bosco!

In order to cheer up the boys after the race, the saint would fill his pockets with candy and throw them here, there and everywhere, into all the nooks and corners! One can imagine how the boys scrambled and pushed about, shouting: "Viva Don Bosco!"

The saint, in his paternal affection for them, smiled and always had a kind and encouraging word for everyone. In return the boys were respectful and obedient, vying with each other to win his affection which was very precious to them and ever wishing to demonstrate the love and appreciation which abounded in their hearts for him.

Naturally, Don Bosco was pleased at such an attitude on the part of his boys and wished that all of the Salesians would carry out the same design. He always wanted his boys to be active, even noisy, during their recreation time. One day he noticed that a few of his boys were just sitting

around, chatting, while the others were at play. He went over to them and said: "Remember that, while you rest, the devil works!"

A few of the boys remarked that by running and playing their shoes and clothing wore out. Don Bosco explained that it was better to spend their money on shoes and clothing than on medicine. "It is better to be in the grace of God patched up, than in the hands of the devil shining and elegantly dressed." And with a winning smile he started them off in a game.

The Engineer's Kicks

In 1869 Don Bosco was aboard a train returning from Florence to Turin.

Several other men were in the same compartment with Don Bosco and they began deliberating on the various topics of the day. At the mere sight of a priest there arose in them their bitter antipathy for priests, nay, for all religious orders and for the Jesuits in particular

A discussion began and one of them said that it was about time "those Jesuits" were suppressed, and all religious schools closed. If it were up to him, his very first act would be to destroy the den which had been organized by a certain Don Bosco and he would kick him and all his boys. Turning to Don Bosco he said:

"Do you not think that an excellent idea?"

Don Bosco with his usual kindness and sincerity answered: "I think not."

They questioned the good priest further and he admitted that he was slightly acquainted with the man whom they were discussing and that he could not agree with their ideas.

They insisted that the form of education which was being imparted by Don Bosco was not according to their ideas. Our Saint looked at them as much as to say: would it not be better if you would just stop this nonsense?

One of them insisted that Don Bosco was turning out Jesuits and that they were not in need of any priests.

Don Bosco should have liked to remain silent but he felt that he must defend the cause so dear to him. He explained that he had spoken to Don Bosco, that he had visited the Oratory and that he had found that Don Bosco doing an excellent job, aiding those poor orphans and training them to become good Christians and honest citizens.

"All that you say is correct, but we are living in different times now. The days of the Middle Ages have long gone!"

In the meantime the train had arrived at the station. Those who had reached their destination hastened to get off the train. Included among them was our friend the priest-hater, who was a construction engineer.

About six months later contracts were ready to let for some important construction work. Our engineer, who felt quite [capable, decided to compete for the contract. Sometimes, however, we need just a bit more

than our ability. What has he to do? He decided to see a friend of his who as a Marquise with influence, but not quite enough. The Marquise admitted that she could do nothing for him directly but that she could send him to Don Bosco who could certainly help the engineer.

The engineer said he had heard of Don Bosco.

He was told to go to Valdocco and present himself to Don Bosco in the name of the Marquise, that in Rome and at the Vatican Don Bosco had a good deal of influence, that just one word from him to Cardinal Antonelli was sufficient.

The engineer began losing his courage at the thought of presenting himself to a person whom he had desired to kick just a short time back. However, the project he was keen on handling was a huge enterprise that involved great profits; besides, Don Bosco had never seen him. With all these thoughts in mind he summed up enough courage and went.

The saint welcomed him kindly — “A priest is always glad to be of service; give this note to Cardinal Antonelli, and you have my best wishes for your success.”

The engineer thanked Don Bosco and asked if there were anything he could do for the priest while he was in Rome.

Don Bosco thought a moment and then said:

“Yes, when you are before the Cardinal of State, please do not tell him that Don Bosco and all his boys should be kicked out of the Oratory.”

The engineer stared at the saint. Yes, now he was certain. It was the very priest whom he had met in the train!

You can imagine the engineer’s embarrassment. He apologized to the Saint and explained his great admiration for the priest and for his work and promised never to criticize a priest again.

This was music to Don Bosco’s ears for, this was exactly what he wanted and his heart was gladdened.

The engineer went to Rome, where he was awarded the contract and made a large sum of money. Subsequently, he went on to become a model Christian, a cooperator of the Salesian Congregation and one of Don Bosco’s best benefactors. Many times afterwards the two men laughed together over the story of the famous kicks!

Don Bosco the Millionaire

On another occasion when Don Bosco was again travelling by train, he met a man who, at first sight, might be taken for a travelling salesman.

The compartment was almost full, and the traveller spoke on varied topics. Among other things he spoke about Don Bosco, uttering every sort of calumny against him even though it was obvious that he had never met the priest.

During all of this banter, Don Bosco remained silent, but when this careless talker said that Don Bosco was a meddler and that he took the people’s money to make his family rich, he interrupted saying: “Pardon

me, Sir, are you sure of what you are saying? Do you know Don Bosco? Do you know his family?"

"Of course I know Don Bosco! I see him almost every day, and I know his family very well too. He continuously sends them money and has had a summer home built for himself and keeps horses and carriages."

Don Bosco told him that this was pure imagination, that all these things he had uttered had no foundation whatsoever.

"But who are you to say that I am not telling the truth?" he snapped.

At that point the train reached a certain station and several passengers came on board. Seeing the priest they went over to him, and kissed his hand asking: "Oh, Don Bosco, how are you?"

All those present whispered to each other: "Oh, it is Don Bosco himself."

"Yes, yes, I am Don Bosco," said our Saint, "and I wish to take this occasion to clarify that what you've been hearing is one big white lie! My mother has been dead many years after having made innumerable sacrifices at the Oratory for so many little orphans. My brother still lives in the poor little house where we were both born; as for villas, horses and carriages, I have as many as this poor man who is travelling the way I am — third class!"

Everyone applauded Don Bosco's fine defence of himself and showed that they had the greatest respect and admiration for him. The unfortunate talker hastened to take the first opportunity to change to another compartment, much to the amusement of all present.

Placid Sleep

It was the vigil of a great solemnity. Midnight was approaching and Don Bosco was hearing confessions in the sacristy. There were still many boys waiting their turn in line.

Don Bosco was very fatigued by the hard day's work and also because he had not slept well the previous night. Resting his head on the shoulder of one of his boys he was gradually overcome by sleep.

At first the youngster was astonished but then he was proud to be the resting place for such a wonderful priest. The boy was particularly careful not to move in order not to awaken the saint and within a short time he too fell asleep placidly.

The other boys, who had been standing in the motionless queue for a long time, gradually fell asleep also — a strange picture: the confessor and his penitents all sound asleep!

At about two o'clock in the morning Don Bosco awoke and looking about him and seeing his boys sleeping peacefully, realized what had happened. He woke them up and sent them off to bed, postponing their confessions until morning.

The news of this spread rapidly throughout the Oratory, and all the boys laughed with Don Bosco over the amusing incident.

Placid Sleep Again!

Father John Cagliero, the most accomplished Salesian musician of his time, who later became a bishop and then a Cardinal, had written a Mass in honour of Don Bosco, naming it “The Mass of Saint John”.

The music was very delightful but because of many *adagi* and repetitions, the composition was somewhat long. It was used for the first time during the Christmas Midnight Mass, the Mass itself being celebrated by Don Bosco. In the middle of the *Credo* the Celebrant fell fast asleep. At the end of the *Credo* the deacon had to literally shake Don Bosco awake to remind him to return to the altar.

The following day our Saint called the composer and said: “Cagliero, I should like to change the title of last night’s Mass from “The Mass of Saint John”, to the “Mass for the Souls in Purgatory”!

They all laughed heartily and Don Cagliero, ever so obedient and affectionate, touched up the music, accelerating the “*adagi*” and omitting the repetitions so that no one might fall asleep... not even the souls in Purgatory!

How Does He Know It?

Our saint was also a mind-reader.

The Count of Camburzano, then a member of the Chamber of Deputies and a great admirer of Don Bosco’s, was at a gathering of noblemen and many other prominent people. He began telling them of the marvels of Don Bosco as everyone listened in amazement. One woman who was more cynical than the others challenged: “I should like to see this priest and find out whether he can tell me the state of my conscience. Then I would believe what is said about him.”

She was applauded by everyone and it was decided that she should write immediately to Don Bosco.

With his usual sense of politeness and sincerity Don Bosco answered promptly by return mail. Here is what he wrote: “The state of your conscience would be very clear if you would but return to your husband and amend the life you have been leading since your last confession twenty years ago up to the present time.”

Don Bosco did not know that woman and those who did know her had believed her to be a widow. Now receiving the priest’s reply she was greatly surprised and went about repeating: “How does he know?”

Don Bosco certainly must have smiled both over her surprise and her exclamations.

But, How Does He Know?

During one of his trips to Nice, Don Bosco received an invitation from Monsignor Postel. After a long conversation the Monsignor said to Don Bosco: "Tell me if I am in the state of grace?"

Don Bosco looked at him in surprise, smiled sweetly, and started to leave. The Monsignor, however, ran to the door, locked it carefully and, putting the key in his pocket told Don Bosco that they would not leave the room until he knew how he stood in the eyes of God.

When Don Bosco realized that the Monsignor was serious, he sighed, meditated for a few moments and then looking straight into his friend's eyes said very clearly: "You are in the state of grace." The Monsignor feared that he thought it was Don Bosco's great kindness which led him to say such words, but Don Bosco assured him that it was not kindness, but the truth.

"How did you know," asked the Monsignor.

"I read it in your heart."

Who Told Him?

One day Don Bosco was hearing the confession of a man who, perhaps because of shyness or out of fear, instead of confessing his sins outright tried to make excuses for them.

Don Bosco permitted him to continue in this manner for a while because he understood the soul of his penitent. Eventually, in his customary kind tone he said: "Pardon me, but have you come here to accuse yourself or to excuse yourself?"

"Oh, Father, I have come to accuse myself!"

Don Bosco told him then to proceed and confess his sins by saying: "I have thought so and so..." "I have done so and so..." "Such and such a thing happened..." In this manner Don Bosco clearly mentioned every smallest sin the man had committed.

Relieved and happy to be freed from the load he had been carrying around for so long, he gratefully kissed Don Bosco's hand. But he was rather confused. "How did you know all that?" he asked. "Who told you?"

Don Bosco explained that his confession and fear had revealed him so much, and that the remainder he had read in the man's heart. He asked the man to forgive him for having guessed everything but he could not have permitted him to commit a sacrilege and thus let him go to hell, since "God forgives those who accuse themselves; and accuse those who excuse themselves."

"Suppose I Should Die Tonight?"

For quite some time, Don Bosco had been using the greatest care and tact in dealing with one of the boys at the Oratory who in spite of every thing was secretive, contrary and stubborn. Finally, the saint was inspired to try a bit of strategy.

One night, on a slip of paper Don Bosco wrote the following words: "Suppose I should die tonight?" To these words he affixed his signature and placed the note between the boy's sheet and pillow case.

That night, with all the boys settled in bed, our young friend was about to follow suit, when he discovered the note. On opening it and reading its contents, he thought: Don Bosco is a saint, he knows everything; he can look into the future; perhaps it will happen: suppose I should really die tonight? But I do not want to die. I want to live!"

The youngster got into bed, covered himself carefully and tried to fall asleep. But in his excitement, sleep just would not come. Those words were like a thorn in his side.

He twisted and turned and shut his eyes tightly, but it only got worse, making more and more vivid the significance of those words, the spectre of death, the Divine Judge and hell staring him in the face. Chills played up and down his spine until finally in a sweat he groaned: "Woe to me... I want to go to confession now! Please God, I do not want to go to hell...!"

He prayed to the Blessed Virgin to help and protect him, then resolutely arose, dressed quietly and tiptoed downstairs, went through the corridors to Don Bosco's room and knocked.

The Saint, who had been waiting for him, opened the door, and letting him in, told him that he had been expecting him.

Don Bosco heard his confession and the young lad, greatly consoled and relieved, returned happily to his room, no longer tormented by dark thoughts, nor harbouring any fear, for his heart was now light and happy. In a few minutes he was fast asleep and dreamed about Paradise.

The following day he narrated the entire sequence of events to the other boys and they all laughed with Don Bosco over the magic powers of the note which brought such great consolation to his soul.

Bertha in the Bag!

Peter, a young boy who had spent several years at Don Bosco's Oratory, fell into the hands of the Protestants and finally became a member of their church.

When he became critically ill the Protestants quickly surrounded him and kept constant watch at his bedside in order to prevent him from calling a Catholic priest.

Just as soon as Don Bosco knew of Peter's illness, he rushed over to his home. The Waldensian Minister opened the door and asked whom he wished to see.

Don Bosco said that he had come to see the poor sick boy, but the Minister explained that that had been strictly forbidden by the doctor. Assuring him that the doctor certainly did not mean to apply the restriction to him, he started off towards the boy's room, calling out: "Peter! My little Peter, how are you? Do you still remember me? Do you recognize me?"

“Yes, of course! You are Don Bosco, the old friend of my soul,” replied Peter.

The Minister became enraged and asked Don Bosco to leave immediately, saying that he had nothing to do with this boy. Don Bosco, however, insisted that he had much to do with him and much to discuss with him. Then he asked who this man was who assumed such authority.

“I am the Waldensian Minister, Amedeo Bert.”

“And I am Don Bosco, Director of the Oratory of Valdocco.”

The two men continued arguing, the Minister insisting that Don Bosco had nothing to do with Peter, while Don Bosco, on the other hand, claiming that his business with Peter was to save the child’s soul. But Amadeo insisted that the boy had joined the Waldensian church, while Don Bosco insisted that long before that event Peter had been registered among the other children at the Oratory.

The Minister argued that Don Bosco was disturbing the patient’s conscience and that he would regret it, but Don Bosco said that where it was a question of saving a soul he did not fear the consequences.

Once more the Minister commanded Don Bosco to leave, but Don Bosco persisted that the boy regretted having joined the Protestant church and now desired to die a Catholic.

Finally in his fury, the Minister turned to the boy and asked if it were not true that he wished to remain a Waldensian.

“No,” answered Peter, “definitely not! I was born a Catholic! I wish to live a Catholic and to die a Catholic.”

What could the Minister do but walk away in a huff, saying he would return at a more opportune moment.

Don Bosco, accompanying the Minister to the door, told him that this indeed was the opportune moment! Then, returning to Peter, the saint smiled and spoke reassuringly to him: “Do you see, Peter, how we made him put Bertha in the bag? (i.e., how we quieted him). Our religion is so powerful and God is so good! appreciate this and be ever faithful.”

Don Bosco heard the child’s confession and the boy was happy once more. When Peter had recuperated the two of them often laughed heartily over the Minister’s defeat.

Otis... Botis. . . Pia . . . Tutis

On the evening of 7 February 1865, Don Bosco himself was telling his boys the following story: A wealthy gentleman had been ill for well over two months and a friend of his, a good Christian, suggested that he call a priest.

The patient would hear none of that. He would not have his confession heard nor did he want to even see a priest.

“Not even if Don Bosco were to come?”

“Don Bosco? Oh, yes, I have heard a great deal about him. I should like

to have him come on the condition, however, that there would be no talk of confession.”

Don Bosco was sent for. When he arrived the patient showed that he was happy to see the priest, but soon enough asked him to speak on all topics: on history, science, politics, anything, but not on religion or confession.

The good priest began telling him all sorts of pleasant and amusing tales. Noticing that the patient was deriving great delight from listening to these stories, Don Bosco continued for some time. The sick man laughed heartily and finally begged Don Bosco to stop because he said he was afraid he might die from laughter rather than from his illness.

“Very well:” said Don Bosco, “let us speak about something serious.”

“Anything you say,” replied the patient, “but remember that we agreed there would be no discussion on confession.”

“But, my dear Sir,” said Don Bosco, “you do not want me to mention confession to you, and yet you continually speak about it yourself. That is a sure sign that it is on your mind. However, I will not hear your confession but shall simply speak to you about your past life.” In this manner Don Bosco gave him all the minute details of the miserable state of his conscience.

The patient listened very attentively, and when Don Bosco had finished he asked how it was possible for the priest to know all about his past life. Our Saint replied that he had four magic words which permitted him to read into the soul of a person.

“And what are those words?” “They are: Otis - Botis - Pia - Tutis.”

The sick man gazed upon Don Bosco in amazement and said that since the priest already knew all about his past life it was not even necessary to have his confession heard. “Not if you admit that you are guilty of all those sins and if you are willing to declare that you are sorry and promise to amend your life if the Lord wishes to spare you.”

The sick man declared that he would be glad to comply with Don Bosco’s wishes, whereupon, the latter found no difficulty in granting him absolution.

When it was over, the two men laughed heartily over the magic words: Otis-Botis-Pia-Tutis, which the sick man kept repeating and twisting in a thousand different ways.

Wide Dress, Narrow Door

There was this wealthy, aristocratic Turinese lady who was very loving and generous towards the poor and who each month would call on Don Bosco to give him her offering.

One day she was wearing a dress that had a very full skirt with a crinoline foundation, and as she attempted to enter Don Bosco’s room through the door which was only half open, the little steel clamps which supported her dress broke.

She became furious and said she would never return to the Oratory.

Naturally, Don Bosco was extremely sorry about the accident and with his usual sweetness said: “Your Excellency, you had perhaps forgotten that Don Bosco’s doors are not as wide as those in your palace.”

These words, instead of calming her, enraged her even further. She called for her carriage and as she was entering, repeated that she would never again set foot in the Oratory.

“Very well,” said Don Bosco, “if you will not come here, then you will oblige me to come to your palace.”

As a matter of fact Don Bosco did go there once a week. On his third visit the lady asked how it happened that the priest had returned so soon.

Don Bosco pointed out that if she did not visit the Oratory, then he would *per se* have to keep coming to the palace, otherwise how could he possibly get along without her help especially since his boys needed everything?

The lady understood Don Bosco’s subtleness and appreciated his humility. Subsequently, she resumed her monthly personal visits to the Oratory so as to be able to bring her generous offering to the good priest.

The Typical Case of a Chaplain

A good pastor of the Diocese of Alba begged Don Bosco to go and preach for the souls of the faithful departed. The saint accepted the invitation and on the evening of 2 November, the Feast of All Souls, he was descending the hills to go to the station of Bra for his return trip when he lost his way. It was getting rather late and raining heavily, too, compelling Don Bosco to seek refuge with the chaplain of a tiny wayside church.

Incidentally, he was not welcomed too cheerfully and was, instead, subjected to a series of questions: “Who are you?” “A poor priest from Turin — I have lost my way and have come to ask for shelter.” “What is your position in Turin?” “I am in charge of a small church in Valdocco.”

As he was questioned further, Don Bosco let him in on the fact that he had not yet had supper and that he would thus appreciate anything the good chaplain in his charity might wish to offer him.

The chaplain told him he was sorry that he did not have anything in the house and could offer him only some bread and cheese, which Don Bosco accepted gratefully.

They discussed his staying overnight, and the saint said that, that would be necessary since the last train had already left.

“The only difficulty is that I have no extra beds,” said the chaplain. Don Bosco remarked that two chairs would serve the purpose.

The chaplain was delighted that his guest was so easily satisfied and apologized for the way he must treat him.

While the housekeeper was placing the bread and cheese on the table the chaplain asked if he happened to know Don Bosco, since he came from those parts, too.

“Yes, a little...”

“I have never met him, but I must ask a favour of him. Does he grant favours willingly to those who approach him?”

“When he is able he is very happy to be of use to his neighbours.”

The chaplain said that he was planning to write a letter to Don Bosco the following day asking if he would accept a poor orphan in his Oratory.

The saint assured him that the boy would be accepted with pleasure.

“Are you very friendly with Don Bosco?”

“Oh, yes, we have been very, friendly since childhood.”

“Then will you see that this favour is granted?” “Consider it already granted — that will be in exchange for the charity which is being done to me now.”

“But, who are you then?”

“I am Don Bosco in person.”

“Don Bosco? You are Don Bosco? Why did you not tell me immediately? Forgive me for having treated you so badly! Leave that cheese. I remember that there was some extra food this evening.”

All confused and greatly embarrassed, the chaplain called the maid, had her place a cloth on the table, asked her to cook some soup and some eggs and then he himself went to a cupboard and brought out half a roast chicken and could find no rest in his anxiety to do honour to Don Bosco. Of course, in the meantime our Saint laughed heartily over all these preparations just as though he were some famous prince.

Supper over, Don Bosco was given a soft bed. The next morning the chaplain accompanied him to the station still offering his humblest apologies while the saint made light of it all.

When the moment of departure arrived, however, Don Bosco said to him: “Let us learn a lesson from what happened last night. If we have nothing, we give nothing, if we have little, we give little, and if we have much we give whatever we think is convenient; let us always be guided by charity, which will ever serve to our advantage!”

300 Foxes

During his audience with Pope Pius IX on 19 January 1867, Don Bosco was convinced of the familiarity with which he was treated by His Holiness and of the esteem the Holy Father had for him.

The conversation turned to the sad state of the Church and the worse conditions which were to follow. The Pope asked Don Bosco what he thought of the amnesty given to political prisoners.

Foreseeing the serious and sad events which were to follow within a short time, the saint hesitated; but the Pope insisted that he speak freely.

“Your Holiness,” answered Don Bosco, “it seems to me that this clemency is similar to the situation when Samson captured the 300 foxes and then set them free to spread fire and destruction everywhere.”

“You are right,” said the Pope.

“We have been deceived. Wild animals may be tamed and domesticated; one can change one’s name but not one’s nature.”

Each time the two men met, they would discuss the 300 foxes and both laughed over the fine comparison!

Three Popes in Debt

To another audience with Pope Plus IX, Don Bosco had taken with him a long list of favours that he wished. Some were of such importance, that he hardly dared hope that they might be granted.

During the course of the conversation they spoke of the special attachment that Don Bosco and his Salesians had for the Holy See and for the Pope in particular, when the Holy Father exclaimed emphatically: “Yes, Don Bosco, I know that three Popes are indebted to you for having come to their defence when their reputation was at stake. They appreciated all that you did for them in your *History of Italy, Ecclesiastic History and Catholic Readings*.”

Don Bosco decided that this was his opportune moment and he added: “Yes, not only the past Popes... but the present as well!”

“I understand,” said the Holy Father, “you have some favour to ask.”

Don Bosco brought forth his long list of requests which the good Pope granted saying that in this manner the present Pope had paid his debts. He bade Don Bosco farewell, smiling over his innocent tricks.

“You Will Surpass the Years of Peter!”

This anecdote will demonstrate even more clearly how Pope Pius IX returned the affection and love which Don Bosco and his Salesians had always felt towards the Holy See.

In February 1869, Don Bosco again went to see the Pope. The Holy Father greeted him in his usual cordial and warm manner. But this time with tears in his eyes he told Don Bosco that he was growing old and that soon he would die, so that, if Don Bosco wished any favours he had better express his wishes immediately.

Looking affectionately at the Pope, Don Bosco said in his usual calmness: “Holy Father, the Lord will spare you for many long years to come, so that you may continue your good work for the Church.”

“I have only one more year to go before reaching the Pontificate of Saint Peter.”

With a prophetic air Don Bosco told the Pope that he would surpass the years of Peter.

The Pope could not imagine any such thing because it had never happened before in the long centuries after Saint Peter, but Don Bosco

assured him that he would not only reach the years of Peter's Pontificate but would surpass them.

This prophecy was fulfilled and Pope Pius IX laughed over it many times with Don Bosco, calling him the far seeing prophet. In fact, His Holiness reigned for 32 years — the longest reign in Papal history!

He Predicts the New Pope

After the death of Pius IX, when the Conclave was being readied for the election of the new Pontiff, Don Bosco was one day walking about the Vatican when he came upon a Cardinal whom he had never seen before.

"Here comes His Eminence, Cardinal Pecci," said Don Bosco to himself. Then going up to him, said in an affectionate tone: "Your Eminence, permit me to kiss your hand."

The Cardinal questioned Don Bosco, and the saint told him he was merely a poor priest who was desirous of kissing his hand now in the hope that, within a few days, he might have the honour of kissing his sacred foot.

The Cardinal told the saint that he forbade him to say such things, but Don Bosco answered that no one could prevent him from praying to God for something which is pleasing to Him.

The Cardinal threatened to have Don Bosco censured, but the priest merely replied that just then he would have no right to inflict censorship upon him but that as soon as His Eminence acquired that right, he would show the greatest respect for it.

"Who are you that you speak with such authority?"

"I am Don Bosco."

"Please do not mention this conversation to anyone. Now it is time to work, not to joke."

Don Bosco explained that he was not joking but was, instead, being very serious, the truth of which was proven when a few days later Cardinal Pecci became Pope Leo XIII, who on meeting Don Bosco is reported to have said: "You were the first to greet me as Pope, and I shall be your best Salesian cooperator!"

Pierced Hands

One day Don Bosco, who disliked debts, was conversing with a few of his first Salesians among whom was his good friend Don Rua. Turning to him Don Bosco remarked: "Everyone asks for money and you turn them away empty-handed."

"That is because our money chests are empty." "Well then, we shall sell the few tickets we have and thus pay up our debts."

"We have already sold some," said Don Rua; "but I do not think it would be very convenient to sell them all."

Don Bosco told him that, on the contrary, he should sell them all and that the Lord would provide for them.

"Excuse me, Don Bosco, but I had counted on using the little money that I have to pay off that 28,000 lire debt which falls due in two weeks."

"That would be foolish," opined Don Bosco. "Why should you be worrying now about a debt which will not be due for two weeks when there are today's debts to take care of? Sell everything and pay the present ones first."

Don Rua insisted that today's debts could be postponed for a while, but not so with the other large debt, whereas Don Bosco maintained that the Lord would provide if they left things entirely in His hands.

After further discussion Don Rua was convinced that he must do as Don Bosco desired and leave the rest to the Lord.

"When, oh when, will I find an economist, with pierced hands, that is, one who will cooperate with me?" cried Don Bosco, half in jest.

They all laughed heartily at this expression and answered in chorus: "You have found him already! Don Rua is the man!"

From that day on, Don Rua was always in complete accord with all of Don Bosco's ideas and later became his first successor and went on to found numerous schools, churches and missions. Many people remarked that he was spending money too freely, whereupon he replied with the now-famed Don Bosco smile: "Well! Don Bosco told me to have pierced hands!"

"....such long Ears!"

Don Bosco was travelling by train to Sampierdarena and he happened to find himself a vacant seat opposite two nuns of the Sisters of Charity.

When the train reached the station of Asti several people came close to the window near which the saint was seated and greeted him. The sisters then realized that they had been sitting opposite Don Bosco about whom they had heard so much, but whom they had never met.

They were overjoyed at the thought of finally seeing him at such close quarters. One of the sisters, petite as she was, and a bit bolder than the other, glanced at him through the corner of

her eye and thought: "Can it really be Don Bosco? Judging from what I have heard about him, I would have imagined a tall, husky, imposing looking man. Instead, what I see here is just an ordinary priest — and with such long ears!"

Suddenly Don Bosco turned to the priest with whom he was travelling and said: "Once, on a whim, I got myself photographed. But when the photographer handed me the six small prints, I exclaimed: "Oh, I thought I was a tall, husky, imposing looking man! Instead, what I see here is just an ordinary priest — and with such long ears!"

The little sister was crestfallen and Don Bosco, noticing her discomfiture, began speaking to her in order to distract her.

"Where are you going, sister?" "To Sardinia, Your Reverence." She added that she was to work there in an asylum for orphan girls. But Don

Bosco begged to differ, telling her that this was all a mistake because she should actually be taking care of boys. A discussion ensued and it seemed that the sister preferred being with girls, but Don Bosco was of the view that she could do so much good among boys and that, in fact, it was among them that she would eventually work.

When they arrived at Sampierdarena, Don Bosco arose and, taking leave of the two sisters, said: "Sister Brambilla, work willingly for the boys."

That was a prophecy, for when the sister reached Sassari she wrote to Don Bosco, apologized for the judgement passed on him in the train and told him that she had been transferred to a boy's orphanage where she shared all the work and responsibility with four other sisters.

Don Bosco showed the letter to his travelling companion and to his superiors as well, laughing over his long ears and the not too flattering remarks of the sister whose thoughts, name and destination he had guessed so well.

The "Young" Countess

For a long time Don Bosco had been trying to make the acquaintance of a very wealthy and religious countess so that he might eventually interest her in becoming one of the supporters of the Oratory, but it seemed that the proper circumstances just would not present themselves.

Don Bosco knew that this countess had one little weakness: she had resolved that she must remain forever young and disliked having anyone allude to her advancing age. Since she had a daughter who was past thirty to whom everyone referred as the "young countess", the idea that she, the mother, should be referred to as the "old countess" was quite unpalatable to her.

One day, Don Bosco met this countess quite by accident. She approached Don Bosco of her own accord and introduced herself.

Our Saint, always quick to seize an opportunity, promptly added: "Oh, Countess X! I am so glad we have met. Tell me. How is your mother?"

The countess said that her mother had passed away many years ago, but Don Bosco insisted that he had always heard, on the contrary, that she was well and quite young.

"Don Bosco, you must be confusing me with my daughter. I am the mother countess!"

The saint explained that it was so easy to become confused since she looked so young and had such a fine bearing and congratulated her for keeping so well.

Inwardly the countess was flattered beyond words and smilingly said that she managed to look fit because she led a quiet, peaceful life and did not permit herself to become upset, thereby maintaining good health and retaining her youthfulness so well that the good priest had mistaken her for her daughter.

“Well,” said Don Bosco, “I am very glad and I shall pray to God that He take good care of you for many more years to come.”

“Thank you, Don Bosco, I accept your good wishes and will you accept this small offering from me temporarily; from now on I shall try to increase it.” So saying she slipped two, one hundred lire bills into Don Bosco’s hand and left smiling and happy because of the compliment, while the saint smiled happily over the fine offering he had received!

“I Have Lost My Sins!”

One day a tearful youngster was brought to Don Bosco. This boy wanted to go to confession and in order to assure himself that his confession would be complete, he had, with the utmost care and precision, written down every slightest sin that he had committed, thus filling an entire little notebook. Somehow, one day, the little notebook suddenly did the disappearing trick! He looked in every pocket, in every drawer, in every possible corner where it might have possibly been placed or rather, misplaced, but in vain. It made him very unhappy but he did not want to tell anyone the cause of his tears.

Don Bosco drew him near and asked affectionately: “What is wrong, Jimmy? Do you feel sick? Is there something troubling you? Or did someone strike you?”

The poor boy answered sadly: “I’ve lost my sins!”

On hearing this, his companions and Don Bosco laughed. But Don Bosco was quick to add: “How fortunate you are and I sincerely hope you will never find them again! Now you have nothing to worry about because without sins, you will certainly go to Heaven!”

Jimmy looked up at Don Bosco through his reddened eyes and believing that the priest had not understood him, explained: “I have lost the notebook where I had written them.”

Instantly, Don Bosco, who had found the notebook, took it out of his pocket saying: “Here it is! It has fallen into good hands.”

When the boy saw the notebook, his tears disappeared.

“If I had known you had found them, instead of crying I would have laughed, and this evening in confession I would have said, “Father, I accuse myself of all the sins you have found and which are now in your pocket!”

Again Don Bosco laughed gaily over the words of the innocent little “sinner”, with everyone joining in heartily.

Little Things and Sins

In April 1876 one of the best students at the Oratory, the pride of the Superiors, fell critically ill and went home to convalesce.

On his return consequent to his recovery, he told Don Bosco in a very saddened tone of voice that, since his parents were in extremely difficult circumstances, they no longer found it possible to pay for his upkeep. In

fact, they were unable to even pay the debt they had already incurred. Then taking from a bag six small cheese forms he said: "This is all the means of compensation my parents have."

Admiring the boy's seriousness and humility, Don Bosco said: "So your parents cannot do any better than that?" "No," replied the boy, "but there is something which I could give you."

"And what is that?" asked Don Bosco. "My sins — in a general Confession!" answered the lad.

The saint laughed and said: "Very well, I shall send the cheese to the kitchen and this evening you will come to confession."

That evening Don Bosco entertained the superiors when the cheese was served by relating the story and by telling them the ingenious manner in which the lad had paid his debt.

The Disappearing Silverware

We have already mentioned that Don Bosco was a very witty saint. One day he was having dinner at the home of Baron Martin in France, and he observed that the guests greatly appreciated and admired the exquisite silverware being used, all of it so very finely engraved.

Dinner over, Don Bosco noticed that, either due to distraction or because he was busy entertaining his guests, the Baron had not given his usual offering towards the support of Don Bosco's work. The Saint went over to the table, started to pick up the beautiful silverware and without the slightest hesitation, began placing it in his little suitcase. The Baron and his guests looked on attentively and interestedly to see just how the priest's joke was going to end. When he had finished, Don Bosco turned to the Baron and asked: "Baron, what is the value of all this silver?"

The Baron answered that if you wanted to purchase a new set exactly like it, it would cost ten thousand francs, but if it were to be sold in its present condition, perhaps a thousand francs.

"Very well," said Don Bosco. "Before selling it to anyone else I am selling it to you. Give me the thousand francs for my little orphans!" Everyone laughed and the Baron gave his offering willingly to Don Bosco whose heart was gladdened at the success of his little joke.

The Chicken and the Egg

One day Don Bosco was conversing with two physicians, two lawyers and a professor. The men had decided to prove to Don Bosco that the existence of God was impossible.

Don Bosco permitted them first to give vent to all their ideas and when they had finished presenting their arguments, which of course were all stupid and unreasonable, the saint told them the story of the chicken and the egg and asked: "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" The usual answer followed, that is, the chicken but naturally came first.

“And where did the chicken come from?” “The egg, of course!”

Don Bosco wanted to know who had made that first egg from which the first chicken was hatched. Obviously, everyone remained silent because they did not have the answer! “Well then,” added Don Bosco, “which appears to you the more precise — that the chicken came first or the egg?” There was a moment of silence and finally one of the physicians answered: “To the devil with the chicken and the egg! How are we to answer?”

Everyone burst out laughing. When they had all quietened down, Don Bosco said: “Let us not send them to the devil! I would suggest, instead, that the chicken and the egg be entrusted to the cook’s care whereby we might be able to have a fabulous meal! As for you my dear friends, you could argue for years but would finally have to admit that there is a God who created the egg — as He created *all* things; from that egg was born the chicken, or the chicken from which the egg came. You can go backwards from son to father as far as you like but eventually you will find yourself compelled to stop — at a man created by God, that is, Adam, who was the first human being in the world!”

Everyone then could not but agree with Don Bosco or at least maintain silence and they congratulated him heartily for having quieted them so.

Every time Don Bosco narrated this story he would exclaim: “How little wisdom do we find in those who are so esteemed by the world!”

“Magnetic Office”

Don Bosco had heard about a certain “magnetic” office in Via Santa Teresa in Turin where a so-called “Doctor Giurio” and a clairvoyant named Brancani reportedly prescribed remedies after examining objects belonging to various people ill with occult or incurable diseases.

Keen on breaking up this harmful and dangerous folly, Don Bosco, accompanied by a couple of his friends, went over to the “magnetic” office. The room was filled with spectators. After having sat through several demonstrations, the saint asked the doctor to put him in communication with the prophet.

At a sign from the doctor, Don Bosco began to ask questions of the somnambulist whose answers, however, he found quite vague and meaningless. Finally, Don Bosco took out a lock of hair and asked: “Whose hair is this?”

“Poor young man!” exclaimed the woman, “how he must be suffering!”

Don Bosco said that it did not belong to a “young” man and added: “Tell me at least where he lives.” “He lives on Zecca Street.”

“That is not where he lives!” retorted our saint.

“Just a moment,” answered the woman, “I have not reached there yet, he lives farther down the other side of the Po.”

“That is not true,” said Don Bosco; “he does not live there at all! Tell me what his illness is.”

“In an instant! I see it, he is very ill; he is suffering from so many illnesses.”

Don Bosco pinned her down to a specific illness and the woman said it was epilepsy, but Don Bosco rebuffed her claim, informing her that the person concerned had never been an epileptic.

At this the woman was at first embarrassed, then clearly enraged and broke out into obscene language which provoked the indignation of all present, thus bringing the meeting to an abrupt close.

The people thanked Don Bosco for having opened their eyes and they left, jokingly adding: “This is not a magnetic room, but one where they draw your money from you!”

Another Somnambulist!

On another occasion, on Castello Square, there was a “magnetic magician” who attracted many people by revelations and predictions of the future through his medium, a somnambulist. This man even went so far as to have her read the contents of sealed letters. Don Bosco took a sealed letter with him and went to the quack magician, who said: “Come forward, abbot.” Don Bosco advanced among the people to the place where a woman with bandaged eyes sat motionless.

“What did you wish?” the magician asked.

“I should like to know the contents of this letter,” said Don Bosco, raising the letter so that all might see it. “Certainly,” said the magician; and turning to the woman commanded her to read.

The woman hesitated because this was quite unexpected. Feeling that she must speak, she exclaimed: “I see everything so clearly!”

“And what do you see?” “I cannot tell.”

“Why can you not tell?” “Because it contains a secret.”

“What secret?” “The secret of the seal.”

“Naturally,” said the magnetizer addressing everyone. “The somnambulist is right — the secret behind the seal cannot be violated.”

“That can easily be remedied,” said Don Bosco breaking the seal.

The charlatan turned to the woman and told her that now she could read, but the somnambulist answered that she could not and did not want to work before people belonging to the altar.

That, of course, was a sure sign that it was impossible for her to deceive a priest.

The audience started to move away booing and hissing at the woman and the magician, laughing with Don Bosco and praising him for having opened their eyes.

Of Sponges and Mules

One day Monsignor Ferre, Bishop of Casale, in a lecture to the Cooperators of the Salesian Congregation, spoke the following words: "Do you know why Don Bosco's Congregation is spreading so successfully and why the Salesian schools are progressing so well? It is because Don Bosco has two secrets which are the key to all the good that is being done by his followers.

"The first secret is that of the sponges. The saint fills his men to capacity with ideas of piety to saturation point, so that even if they tried they could not possibly do evil and therefore throw it off just as a sponge which is soaked with water refuses to take on one more drop of any liquid.

"His second secret is to load his men with much and varied works. He gives each man so many tasks to perform and so many responsibilities that they do not have any time to go astray, nor even to chase flies, just like a mule under the weight of a heavy load."

Hearing this, Don Bosco nodded in approval, adding, "Yes, as long as we are filled with piety like a sponge, and loaded with work like a mule, our Congregation will keep progressing!"

*"Muli di lavoro, "Mules of work,
Spugne di pieta", Sponges of piety,
Evviva sempre Long live
L.a pia Societa'!"* The pious Society!"

The good priest laughed and so did his dear boys who always loved and cheered him.

Religion or the Rod

An English Minister who had heard so much about Don Bosco, wished to make his acquaintance with our Saint so that he might learn the method of education used by the saint and discover the reason for his great success.

In 1855, this minister went to Turin and asked if he might visit the Salesian Oratory. Don Bosco not only obliged but also went out himself to greet him and personally took him on a tour of the house.

The Minister marvelled more and more at what he saw as they visited the well-equipped laboratories and the different classrooms. He was impressed particularly by the excellent order and tidiness that prevailed everywhere. His admiration and surprise reached even greater heights when they entered the main hall where more than five hundred youngsters were busy studying in perfect silence and discipline. All the boys were serious and intent upon their studies and the only supervision they had was from two young clerics.

With an expression almost spellbinding the Minister turned to Don Bosco and exclaimed: "Abbot, this is a magnificent sight. Please tell me the secret of obtaining and maintaining such seriousness and such

discipline. I should like to return to England and introduce the system there!”

“My dear Minister,” said Don Bosco, “my secret will be useless to you.”

“Why so?”

“Because it can be applied only among Catholics and you are Protestants. My secret is weekly Confession and frequent Communion.”

“If that is your secret, then we truly lack the most powerful instrument of education! But isn’t there something that may be used as a substitute?”

“No,” answered Don Bosco, “if this element of religion is not used, then it is necessary to resort to the rod.”

“So, Father, it is either religion or the rod?” “Precisely:” said Don Bosco, smiling.

“Now I understand! I shall speak about this in London.”

With the Little Delinquents!

During that same year, 1855, Don Bosco had preached the Spiritual Exercises to the boys at the Generalate in Turin, the reform school.

On the day of the general Communion, Don Bosco asked for, and with great difficulty, obtained permission from Minister Rattazzi to take them, 350 in all, on a hike to Stupinigi which is about three and a half miles away. All had a very gay time and that evening, on their return, everyone answered the roll call.

This surprised the authorities concerned and the management of the institution, all of whom could not comprehend how one priest had been able to maintain such order and discipline on a hike without the assistance of guards or policemen, while at the institution they had to enforce the strictest rules and resort to the use of special cells in order to maintain order and ensure obedience.

The saint immediately seized the opportunity to elaborate the advantages of his system of education. The authorities were so thoroughly convinced that a few days later, Don Bosco received an invitation to be the director of that institution. The good priest declined the offer saying, that if he were in charge he would, with his methods, make Priests out of so many of the boys and then the authorities would not be satisfied!

They all laughed at this remark of the saint.

He Lends His Voice

Towards his last years Don Bosco had again gone to France to solicit funds for his work. The director of one of the houses there had made arrangements for some entertainment and had invited all the cooperators of the institution.

When the hour of the programme was approaching, one of the principal actors unexpectedly lost his voice. It was impossible to train a

substitute at the eleventh hour and it would not have seemed very appropriate, nor would it have been prudent to have turned away so many interested spectators. They consulted Don Bosco and the saint called the boy to him and asked: "Would you be satisfied if I were to lend you my voice for the occasion?"

"Oh Don Bosco!"

"Leave everything to me! Now kneel, take my blessing and go and deliver your dialogue effectively, enacting your role confidently!"

The boy obeyed, thanked Don Bosco and rendered a perfect recital and in a normal voice while the saint remained hoarse and voiceless during the entire performance.

At the end of the programme, Don Bosco called the boy, complimented him on his fine acting and told him to return his voice because he would need it to ask for funds for his little orphans.

Don Bosco regained his voice while the boy again became as hoarse and voiceless as he had been earlier in the evening.

They all laughed with Don Bosco over his ingenuity and over the miracle he had performed.

L'Abbé Bonhomme

On that same occasion, when Don Bosco was at Nice, he one day hired a carriage. When he arrived at his destination, he discovered that he had come out without a penny in his pocket. He asked the driver to stop at the Patronage Saint-Pierre later where he would pay him.

"For whom shall I ask?" "For me."

"But what is your name?" "Abbot Bonomo."

Towards evening the driver entered the gate of Saint-Pierre and asked to see Abbot Bonomo.

"There is no such person here," said the porter.

The driver insisted and the two men began to argue. Finally in exasperation, the gatekeepers pointing to the gate, snapped his fingers and told the driver to leave.

At that very moment Don Bosco appeared and the driver shouted triumphantly: "Voilà l'Abbé Bonhomme!"

Don Bosco paid him and gave him a good tip besides. The driver was very well pleased and exclaimed: "Cet homme est rien bonhomme... Il est grand homme!" (This man is not just a good man... He is a great man!)

Don Bosco explained the reason for that scene and all evening they laughed over the pleasant episode.

Desiderium Peccatorum Peribit!

On 6 August 1876, the railroad service between Turin and CiriéL anzo was inaugurated and the Prefect of Turin had invited the Authorities to have refreshments. Included among the guests were the Ministers Depretis, Nicotera and Zanardelli, many deputies and Don Bosco.

After refreshments had been served, the guests were led to sit in the garden where a discussion ensued on the numerous and frequent trips which Don Bosco made to Rome and to the Vatican. Taking off from that, they began little games.

Ercole suggested that since Don Bosco was so clever in reading people's hearts and minds, he should tell them who was the greater sinner, Nicotera, or Zanardelli.

They all laughed at this suggestion. But Don Bosco retorted. "If these two men came here for the Spiritual Exercises and then were to make a general confession, I should be able to pass suitable judgement."

Everyone laughed heartily and since Ercole insisted, Nicotera said: "Instead of taking me as an example of comparison, why do you not ask Don Bosco whether you are a greater sinner than the others?"

Ercole explained that he had no desire to be converted yet.

"Oh yes!" answered Nicotera. "Do you not know that the Bible says: *Desiderium peccatorum peribit*" (The desire of the sinner shall perish)? Everyone applauded and laughed.

Another guest said: "Tell me, Don Bosco, do you believe we shall all be saved?"

"I hope so," answered the saint. "God's mercy is great."

"But we have no desire to become converted now!"

"Which means," added Don Bosco, "that you wish to continue as you are now, and then..., if the spirit moves you..."

"Yes, precisely."

"Then," concluded Don Bosco, "the result will be as that gentleman said a few minutes ago — *Desiderium peccatorum peribit!*"

They all laughed heartily and, before taking leave of Don Bosco, told him how much they had enjoyed his good company.

Don Bosco laughed also because he had been able to insert a little sermon and tell those men a few things which they had probably never heard.

Piedmontese Masks

Don Bosco had a singularly inventive mind.

During the Carnival of 1869, in Turin, which in those days was celebrated in the most dignified, noble and enjoyable manner, Don Bosco sought and obtained permission from the authorities concerned to erect a booth on Castello Square during the last days of the Carnival. This booth, erected by the Oratory, turned out to be one of the most beautiful and best equipped, especially with entertaining books.

The members of the band and all the salespeople were dressed in Piedmontese costumes and masks and succeeded in attracting numerous members of the Tormese nobility to whom they sold their wares at a high price.

Everyone did excellent business and a few days later the Countess CamburzanO wrote to Don Bosco, congratulating him on his unusual idea which only a saint like him could have conceived.

Don Bosco thanked the Countess, saying that it was imperative he think of all sorts of ways and means to raise money to feed his boys and carry on his work. And of course, he did not miss the opportunity to share a laugh with everyone over the success of his enterprise.

“500 lire? That Is Too Much Money!”

Don Bosco was pleasant and witty even with his subordinates.

In 1871 he sent Professor Don Paolo Albera, who was later to become his second successor, to found the Morassi house in Genoa.

Don Albera had accepted a few gifts of money from friends and acquaintances because he knew he would need funds to set up the new house.

Before his departure, Don Bosco asked him if he needed anything.

“No, thank you, Don Bosco! I already have five hundred lire.”

“But that is too much money,” protested Don Bosco. “You will find Providence in Genoa as well as in Turin.”

The saint took a few lire from a drawer, handed them to Don Albera and took the five hundred lire bill.

When this became known, everyone laughed, and Don Bosco chuckled: “It would be an insult to Providence to put away a fund for future needs.”

The saint left this maxim as an inheritance for his successors.

“Give Me Back My Watch!”

Don Bosco carried his tricks even to persons of importance whenever it proved necessary to do so.

One day he was visiting a wealthy man in Paris.

“I hear so many marvels about you, Don Bosco, and am extremely curious to see one performed before my own eyes’ said his host.

“With pleasure,” replied the Saint. “Do you wish to see one this moment?”

“Yes, yes!” replied the other opening his eyes wide. Don Bosco roamed about for a while and then said: “Would you care to note the exact time?”

The man reached for his watch in his pocket but did not find it there.

Don Bosco began to laugh, but the wealthy man said angrily: “Give me my watch! I have sufficient proof of your sanctity!”

“No,” said Don Bosco, “I will not return your watch until you give me in exchange the price it is worth — to be used for my boys!”

“But the watch is worth three hundred lire!”

“Fine, give me the three hundred lire and I shall return your watch.”

All the members of his family laughed and the man gave not three hundred but five hundred lire, while Don Bosco smiled pleasantly with them as he pocketed the bounty.

“Have I Guessed. . . ?”

During the school vacations in 1887, the Station Master of Turin, desirous of visiting the Oratory, came over with a sixteen-year-old boy who was the son of a friend of his and a student in the technical schools.

Don Bosco, who was in the courtyard, offered to accompany the two on a tour of inspection. At the end of the tour, when the moment came to say good-bye, Don Bosco touched the boy on the shoulder and said: “You remain here, Albanello. I wish to speak to you.”

No one had told the saint the boy’s name and naturally the boy was so astonished to hear it so plainly that he followed Don Bosco as though he were hypnotized.

When they had reached Don Bosco’s room the priest said: “Now kneel; I must hear your confession.”

“But I have not been to confession for years, Father”

“I know. That is precisely why I must hear it now.”

“But I need some time to prepare myself.”

“That is entirely unnecessary. I shall give an account of your past life and you will tell me if I have guessed correctly.”

When the priest had finished he said: “Well, Albanello, have I guessed right?”

“Too well!” answered Albanello in a tone showing amazement.

“Now ask God for forgiveness, and I shall absolve you!”

By the time the exercise concluded, the boy was covered with perspiration from head to toe and, naturally, anxious to leave; but Don Bosco placed a hand upon the boy’s head continuing: “That is not enough, Albanello. The Blessed Virgin wants you here and you must return. You will study with me and later I shall send you out as a Missionary.”

“We shall see about that!”

“Yes, we shall,” remarked Don Bosco. “Then you will tell me whether I have guessed correctly.”

Albanello said good-bye and on his way he reflected: “Not that! No way will I be a priest — nor will I be a Missionary.”

When vacation time ended, however, the boy was won over by the power of his vocation and, in the Autumn that followed, presented himself at the Oratory. In two years time he completed the preparatory course and in 1880 he received his religious habit from Don Bosco. Two years later he departed for Brazil to do missionary work!

Each time the young man wrote to Don Bosco from Brazil he reminded the saint of the story of his vocation and Don Bosco would

extend Don Albanello's greeting to his superiors reporting that the young priest asked him to say: "Don Bosco has guessed correctly"!

A Faith that Kills!

After one of his last trips to France Don Bosc Grenoble on his way to Turin. The streets and squar with an adoring public awaiting his arrival. The pas with his entire staff of priests to meet Don Bosc him to come and bless his parishioners.

As though that were not enough, the crowds vied with each other to reach Don Bosco, to kiss his hands or at his cassock. If they were not successful at that, they too out a crucifix and reached out in an effort to touch the good priest with it or hoping that at least he might deign to touch it. Some managed to draw his attention, others succeeded in reaching his hands, while still others pressed the religious object to his lips for a hallowed kiss.

So overwhelming was the demonstration of Don Bosco had to actually beg some of the people nearest to free him, exclaiming: "Your faith is killing me!"

It him quite a while to reach his carriage and when he finally did arrive at Turin, he was breathless and fatigued. Turning to his friends, he showed them his bruised hands and face and said with a smile: "If i have remained there even a little longer I would probably have been scourged like Christ in Pilate's court!"

Involuntary Bath!

It was during the same trip that Don Bosco took an involuntary "bath" at Nice!

He had been visiting some wealthy gentlemen who were co-operators of the Salesian Congregation, and on his way back, deciding to make a shortcut, the saint ventured to cross the River Paglione over a little wooden bridge which was not only weak but did not even have a railing which one might grasp for the purpose of steadying oneself. And so it was that at one point Don Bosco failed to get a steady footing and fell into the water before his companions could come to his assistance!

Although he was wet from head to toe, he walked without fuss to the Monastery where he asked for a complete change of clothes. But the house was poor and the solicitous priests were unsuccessful in their search for extra clothes. So Don Bosco was forced to go to bed, entrusting all his wet, wet clothes to the kindness and mercy of the mild Nice sun!

As a result of this accidental bath, the saint had to break all of his appointments and postpone his visits. The news of the incident spread throughout the city and was even picked up by one or two newspapers. That was providential because the next day there at the Monastery arrived three new habits, two fine overcoats, and many sets of underwear

and socks. Don Bosco laughed and said jokingly: "Such a profitable bath, even involuntary, could be taken every day!"

"Hey! Come and See a Saint!"

At Marseilles he had asked for hospitality with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who maintained a school with 600 boys.

During the first day of his stay there, Don Bosco was pressed with so many affairs that he had not the time to become acquainted with the boys, and the superiors had not thought of introducing him to them.

As he was crossing the courtyard, one of the boys, moved by curiosity, approached Don Bosco. With his usual friendliness, the good priest bent over and whispered something into the boy's ear.

That was like an electric spark. The boy ran off shouting: "Boys! Boys! Come and see a saint!"

Those cries echoed throughout the grounds, and both boys and superiors came running towards Don Bosco, pushing and racing down the stairs in order to get a good view. Don Bosco was bewildered by this sudden eruption, but calmly and smilingly he gathered the boys about him just as an affectionate father would gather his loving children.

That day was one of great joy at the school. The boys vied with each other to speak to Don Bosco and have their confessions heard. As a result the Spiritual Exercises were postponed.

When Don Bosco took leave of the zealous Brothers, they said to him: "If you had remained any longer you would have stolen the hearts of all our boys!"

There....! Let us Begin!"

Don Bosco has been in Marseilles for more than a week and contrary to his usual fine success he had been able to collect nothing or very little for his works.

He was discussing the matter with the Director of the Institutions and was rather dejected. Suddenly he seemed to take on new energy, new hope as he exclaimed: "There....! Let us begin!" as if to say: "These people are like Saint Thomas! Unless they touch things with their own hands they will not believe."

He really did begin. A young man, so badly crippled that he was unable to stand up, was presented to him and Don Bosco, imploring the assistance of Mary Help of Christians, straightened him up and cured him. Other sick people came and Don Bosco healed them completely. He read the minds of others, predicted their future, guessed their sins and touched their hearts.

The news of all these marvels spread in no time, and an immense crowd gathered from all parts of the city to see Don Bosco, to receive his blessing and to beg for some grace or favour.

Naturally these miracles resulted in many offerings and everyone realized that Don Bosco had indeed begun!

His trip was not only a great triumph but a financial success as well, for Don Bosco was able to leave a large sum for his works in France besides bringing back the necessary amount for Turin, for his churches and for his Missions.

Many people later reminded him of those words: "Let us begin!" To them Don Bosco would say with a smile: "I challenged Providence who, having had pity on me, yielded!"

What Does "90,000" Amount To?

Many more times did Don Bosco challenge Providence. During that same trip to Nice he realized that the space in his house there was rather restricted, what with many boys seeking to be admitted and being denied admission. Immediately the priest thought that he must acquire a larger house.

A fine villa was pointed out to him but he was quickly informed that it was too expensive – they were asking ninety thousand lire for it.

"And what is 90,000 lire?" remarked Don Bosco.

"Why, that is 90,000 lire! And where are you going to get the money?"

"Do not be concerned about that; Providence will find it."

"It is well for you to say that, but in the meantime you do not have a penny in your pocket which you could put down towards such a purchase."

"I know I have nothing," answered Don Bosco: "but if God wishes to have these Institutions spread on earth, He will provide the necessary wherewithal. Let us draw up the papers."

When Don Bosco gave a command it was useless to argue. The papers were drawn up, the money raised, and the beautiful Gauthier Villa, large, sumptuous, magnificent, was turned over to Don Bosco's work. It had the capacity to house more than 300 people. The following spring saw hundreds of birds in its gardens, all come to sing and bring joy to the new home!

Don Bosco smiled at everyone's fear and at the little faith people have in Divine Providence – "You see that even Villa Gauthier has been placed in our hands; Providence is wonderful and its arms are much longer than our faith!"

"I Shall Save You!"

In 1859 the first recruits who were to leave for the War against Austria were two of Don Bosco's very first clerics" Cagliero and Francesia.

These two boys came breathless to Don Bosco, who with his usual smile and calmness said: "Do not worry – I shall save you. In the meantime, go to the Office of the Bishop and have your name placed on the list those who are to be presented for exemption.

The boys told Don Bosco that they had already been there and have been told that it was too late because the list had already been sent to the Ministry. Thereupon, Don Bosco advised them to go directly to the Ministry and ask to have their names added to the list.

Once more, the boys returned breathless and said that at the Ministry they had been told that it was too late for any additions because arrangements had already been made.

“Very well, go to the Minister of Grace and Justice; present your case as clerics that you must be exempt.”

Again the boys reported that everyone seemed to be against them, that it was too late, that there was a war and everyone must go.

Don Bosco told them they would not leave, that he would investigate, that they must be exempt, that he would save them.....

The boys were moved to tears by Don Bosco’s kindness and told them that he should not trouble himself so much because of them: that if they must go, then they would and Vittorio would have two additional soldiers in his army; that perhaps they would die on the field of battle or would return with epaulettes.

Don Bosco would not listen to their plea but said he wanted to take all that trouble for them because he had promised to save them and meant to keep his promise.

Don Bosco went back and forth to the various authorities. He carefully examined the list of clerics who were to be exempt and found to sons of a widow, who for that reason alone would be exempt. Triumphantly, the saint went to the Ministry of War and was successful in having those two names substituted by those of Cagliari and Francesca.

“Did You Hear That Thunderbolt?”

Don Bosco loved his boys dearly and watched over them at a distance.

One day, the family of one of his benefactors invited one of the clerics to spend the day at their home. The saint, knowing the kindness and goodness of that family, permitted the boy to go.

During the course of the afternoon, Don Bosco suddenly became upset and called for the missing cleric. He sent some boys out to look for him; he could find no peace.

“But do you remember, Don Bosco who permitted him to go out?”

“Yes, I do, but now I wish he were here!”

No one could understand the saint’s attitude because he had always been so calm and even-tempered, but that evening when the cleric returned they soon found out the cause.

The moment they saw the cleric, some of the boys ran up to meet him and told him to report to Don Bosco immediately.

The cleric called on Don Bosco promptly and kissed his hand. Smiling affectionately, Don Bosco inquired if he had heard that thunderbolt.

The cleric answered that he had and that he had been in great danger and that only a miracle had saved him.

“Go and thank the Virgin and vow to her that you shall always be her worthy son.”

The cleric obeyed and that evening the boys gathered about him curiously to hear the significance of all the mystery of that day.

The cleric explained that in that good, Christian home, a stranger who entertained evil intentions, had entered. She had set here eyes on the cleric and placed him in grave danger. She had laid a snared for him and may have attempted to do so much harm if at a certain moment a loud thunderbolt had not been heard. Then the cleric understood that Don Bosco was watching over him and he took leave immediately.

That evening Don Bosco was subjected to a barrage of questions to which he answered jokingly: “There was no storm with the thunder this time. But be alert, my dear boys, because Don Bosco’s thunder-bolts are terrible!”

The New Cap

Don Bosco, even as a youngster and a cleric, had always had an extraordinarily fine soul.

While he was still at the Seminary in Chieri, he had noticed that one of his companions was always ridiculed because of a strangely shaped cap he wore. He went up to this boy and said: “Giacomelli, may I borrow your cap?”

“Certainly, take it.” Don Bosco took it and a short time later returned with a brand new cap and placing it on Giacomelli’s head said, “See if it fits you well.”

Giacomelli, answering in the affirmative, inquired after his own.

“If you do not mind, I should like to keep yours as a souvenir.”

“I should be very happy to let you have it, but...”

“With your cap you looked like a simple chaplain, bit with this one you look like a real pastor.”

Don Bosco laughed as he patted his friend on the back.

Flowers, Flowers! and More Flowers!!

His kindness and firmness of soul led Don Bosco to be loved by everyone who knew him. Excellent proof of this great love for him was much in evidence when he was recuperating from a long and very serious illness that had brought him close to his grace. When he was finally able to be back among his boys there were unusual festivities in his honour.

That morning the boys went out and purchased all the flowers they could find and spread them out on the road from the Shelter to the Oratory.

The second-hand dealers of Porta Palazzo were amazed at the number of boys who came to buy flowers and asked for whom they were,

what feast they were celebrating, what saint's day it was. To all the questions the boys answer: "What saint? These are for Don Bosco! He had just recovered from a serious illness and is returning today!" they ran to spread the flowers along the way to adorn the hedges with them.

When Don Bosco finally did appear, supporting himself on a cane, a loud cry of "Viva" rent the air as his loving boys surrounded him! The older ones got a chair and obliged Don Bosco to sit on it. Then raising it gently, they carried it, the way the Pope is carried, as far as the Oratory, while the rest of the boys preceded or followed, continuously shouting: "Viva!"

Don Bosco laughed with them over this great celebration and over so much love.

The Battle in Mama Margaret's Vegetable Garden!

This happened at the beginning of the series of wars for the Independence of Italy during the period 1848-1849, when even the youngsters were imbued with the spirit of war.

Don Bosco had always the ability to keep moving in the spirit of the times and he permitted his boys to wage their little war using canes, rifles, and wooden swords.

One day the boys organized two armies with a hundred troops on either side. When their commanding officer gave the signal to attack, they went forth with such impetus that, without even realizing, they went beyond the courtyard where they had started and directly into the vegetable garden which Don Bosco's mother cultivated so carefully for the orphans, ruining the place completely.

The hedges had been torn up, the new young plants were trampled upon, and the vegetables where ready to be harvested were laid to waster. It was indeed a sad, desolate sight, to behold. Don Bosco's mother came running out, breathlessly complaining to the warriors and to her son."

Don Bosco said calmly: "What can one do, mother? They are but children!"

The saint was then called the "general," who was in a state of complete confusion over such glories which his army had won, encouraged him with sweet words and handing him a large box of candy and him to distribute it among the victors and the losers alike, but not to tell his mother about it because he was afraid she might give him a beating!

Don Bosco laughed with the boys over their battle and over the unfortunate epilogue.

Bitter Candy

We have already observed that Don Bosco counted among his close friends many important personages among whom were Ministers of State.

The priest took advantage of his close relationship with these people by telling them certain truths, at the opportune moment, which always produces a salutary effect.

One day the saint had to speak to the Minister of the Interior, who at that time was Urbano Rattazzi, Don Bosco was almost the last to arrive at the office, but the minute the Minister knew of his presence he had the priest go right in.

The saint had to pass by a long line of people who stared at him with curiosity. When he reached the office, he said in his simple manner: "There are so many people out there, Your Excellency! They make me think of the long lines that we have at our Confessionals at Easter time!"

"Yes, my dear Don Bosco," answered the Minister. "The only difference is that the people who go to confession bless you on their way out, while these people often curse us on their way out because it is not always possible for us to grant their requests!"

After a long conversation, Don Bosco arose to go and the Minister also stood up and, taking Don Bosco's hand, said: "Don Bosco, tell me something."

The priest looked at him in surprise and then with an air of confidence said: "Your Excellency, think about saving your soul." The Minister pressed Don Bosco's hand, bowed his head and wept like a child.

When he told that story later, he was asked why the Minister had cried and Don Bosco answered, smiling: "Well, I told him something... But bitter candy is always beneficial."

This same Minister once asked Don Bosco a very strange question: "Tell me, my dear Don Bosco, have I been excommunicated?"

Don Bosco, taken by surprise, hesitated for a moment, then said: "I am sorry, Your Excellency, but I can see no good reason why you should be excused."

"Good for you, Don Bosco. You are the first person who has been courageous enough to tell me. Please pray for me and ask your boys also to pray for me that I may not go to Hell."

"Certainly," answered Don Bosco, "but you must change your life."

A short time later the Minister died and the Catholic Civil Authorities of Rome, upon announcing his death, said the Urbano Rattazzi has asked for a priest and that the Lord must have been merciful to him for the mercy he had always shown towards Don Bosco's orphans.

When Don Bosco heard the news he exclaimed: "Do you see how effective the candy was?"

"Our Enemies Are Our Saviours"

The time had come to establish a Society which the saint dreamed of for many years and to this perpetuate his work. But even the thoughts of such a venture in times like those would have seemed folly.

One day, quite unexpectedly, Minister Rattazzi said to him: “My dear Don Bosco, I so appreciate the highly philanthropic scope of your work that I cannot but wish you many long years of life so that you may instruct many, many boys! But after all you are a mortal like everyone else. What would happen to all your work if you were to pass away? Have you ever given this matter serious thought?”

“Your Excellency,” answered Don Bosco, “this is precisely my greatest anxiety.”

Rattazzi suggested then that he institute a society consisting of priests and laymen who were filled with the same spirit of helpfulness and moved by this same zeal so that they might assist him now and carry on his work later.

Don Bosco agreed that this was an excellent idea, but sought to know whether it was expedient in the present circumstances.

Rattazzi assured him that it was very possible provided that he establish a society according to the present needs and following the present laws, paying all the necessary taxes. In other words, he was to found a society of free citizens organized with the common purpose of beneficence.

That was a revelation for Don Bosco because Rattazzi had the reputation of being a prophet in political affairs. Immediately the saint took him at his word and added: “And would Your Excellency approve of such a plan in this form?”

Rattazzi assured our saint that not only would he approve but he would have it approved by everyone else as well.

Don Bosco set to work immediately to draw up a constitution which was readily approved and the Salesian Society was born, lived and shall live, that’s to the very person who, only two years before, had proposed structures against corporations of religious purposes.

Speaking about this to his friends and to his boys, Don Bosco would say jokingly: “*Salus ex inimicis nostris!*” – *Our enemies are our saviours.*

“We owe our Religious Congregation to the enemies of Religious Institutions. Do you see the joke played by Providence?”

Hands over His Ears

Here’s one of the many prophecies attributed to Don Bosco.

One day one of the finest boys at the Oratory presented himself to Don Bosco and revealed that he would like to become a religious and desired Don Bosco’s advice.

“There is much to do here – you will find plenty of occupations here.”

The boy would not hear any of it and told Don Bosco not to mention it again. So saying he placed his hands over his ears as an act of protest against such words.

“Very well,” added the saint, “You will go to the Jesuits and they will turn you away, you will go to the Franciscans and they will also turn you

away and after many sad experiences you will return here and beg our charity which you are turning down today.”

Bewildered and stubborn, the boy left and went on to become a Jesuit and then a Franciscan; he tried other Orders as well, had very many sad experiences just as Don Bosco had predicted and finally returned to the Oratory and begged them for their charity. Of course, Don Bosco accepted him and took care of him as long as he lived.

During those long years, each time Don Bosco met him, he would jokingly place his hands over his ears and ask: “Do you remember?”

“Yes, I will remember that as long as I live but I shall never again place my hands over my ears!”

A Cup-a-coffee from the Executioner

Among the many experiences that Don Bosco had we must include this one also: After the death of Saint Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco became the prison confessor and each week he would go there to carry out his mission.

One day after he had been hearing confessions for many hours, he went out into the corridor so tired and fatigued that he could hardly see straight. Instead of opening the door leading to the street he became confused and entered the home of the executioner. The saint found himself facing a man, a woman and one of their daughters who were having supper.

When he realized his mistake, he changed the expression of his face and quite nonchalantly said that he was very tired and greatly in need of a cup of coffee and would appreciate it very much if they would let him have one. “Why, certainly” exclaimed the executioner.

The man pulled up a chair for Don Bosco while the woman and her daughter began to prepare the coffee.

“Do you know where you are, Father?” asked the executioner.

Don Bosco said he was in the home of a fine man.

“And yet you are in the executioner’s home!”

The priest said that, that did not matter since he knew him to be fine Christian and that was enough. “I want to be your friend.”

The poor executioner was unaccustomed to such words of refinement from any person of distinction and he was moved and did not know what he could do to show Don Bosco his appreciation.

Since they brought only one cup of coffee, Don Bosco asked if he might have another. “You must drink one with me,” he said. The executioner was embarrassed and answered: “But that is out of the question! I, who send people to another world... how could I take coffee with one who sends them to Paradise?”

Don Bosco explained that they worked together and were both accomplishing useful deeds; the executioner towards society and he towards God.

The saint handed the second cup of coffee to the executioner and they drank together smiling over the happy meeting. That was not the last cup they had together, for soon the executioner joined the prisoners and he too went to the Sacraments and finally gave up his inglorious occupation. The saint took great pleasure in telling the story concluding: "So the executioner and I have become good friends!"

His Habit Is Stolen!

One day Don Bosco's mother came to him running breathlessly

"John, John," she said, "Do you know what has happened?"

Judging by her excitement, the saint thought she must at least have won a large sum of money in the lottery.

His mother exclaimed that they had not won, but lost; she had hung Don Bosco's habit out in the sun to dry and someone had stolen it!

Very calmly the good priest said that if it had been stolen there was no use becoming upset. What could they do about it?

Mama Margaret insisted that the thief must be found, but Don Bosco objected that he could not become a policeman.

"You will never change! Nothing ever disturbs you. But how will you be able to go out?"

That was easily solved for Don Bosco, for he was willing to put on one of the overcoats which had been given him by the City Authorities. He would go out dressed as a soldier!

"A fine sight you will make," exclaimed his mother, "Poople will think it is Carnival time!" "That would do everyone some good, I suppose!"

Don Bosco changed his tone and, sounding serious, said that the thief was probably poor and in greater need of it than he was, perhaps he had already regretted his deed, perhaps soon he would come to Don Bosco to confess his sin in which case the saint would be glad to absolve him provided that he repented; and even if he should admit having stolen it, the priest was perfectly willing to give it (or its equivalent) to him as a gift. He added that they should both pray to the Blessed Virgin to send him another one, then they would both laugh over the incident.

The Pastors' Alarm

We have seen that Don Bosco faced a good deal of opposition, much of it unfortunately from the pastors of the city.

Some of these pastors became worried because they noticed the youngsters of the city kept running to the Oratory whereas their churches were practically devoid of youngsters. These priests felt strongly their right to instruct the children of the parish and to prepare them for the Sacraments. They therefore brought pressure upon the Archbishop to instruct Don Bosco to stop his work and to send him to some mountain town where he might become an assistant pastor.

Don Bosco asked the Archbishop to send the most zealous of these pastors to the Oratory to inquire about the number of boys belonging to their parish.

The pastors went, armed with all their zeal and their rights. Don Bosco gathered together all his boys and the pastors began questioning them to discover to which parish the restless boys belonged.

One of them came from Saint Biagio which was in Biella; another from Saint Filomena on Laka Corno; another, from Saint Zita in Genoa, and so on down the line each starting the name of his church and its location. One priest, soon tired of hearing the names of so many towns and not one of them from Turin, said aloud in irritation: "That is enough!" "Where do you live in Turin? To which parish do you belong?"

No one answered.

Some of the boys knew the address but not the name of the parish. Some had changed their address several times in as many months, others slept here and there, wherever it was most convenient, others were not living with their parents either because they had passed away or because they had been separated from them or perhaps had never known them.

Finally this pastor lost his patience and turned the questioning over to one of his colleagues who started out very ambitiously/

He asked the boys to tell him, but one at a time, where they came from. The answers varied: Novara, Sondrio, Pavia, Verona, Bergamo, making it apparent that each of them was a stranger to Turin. In this manner, even this pastor eventually lost his patience and was ready to permit the next priest to ask the questions when they were finally persuaded that it was useless and therefore decided to leave.

There was one however, who was still not satisfied; so Don Bosco sent him all the candidates to be examined for their First Holy Communion.

When he was his large, noisy, group coming towards him the priest was dismayed and asked rather dryly:

"What do you want?"

"We have come to be examined for our First Holy Communion."

"I have no time now, come back some other time," he said. The boys returned to the Oratory and reported to Don Bosco who instructed them to go back and tell the priest that he had sent them.

The boys obeyed but instead of finding the pastor they found two second-curates who, hearing Don Bosco request, sized up the boys from head to foot and notice that the majority were almost adults. Surprise turned to ridicule.

"Shame on you! Do you mean to say that at your age you have not yet made your First Communion? It is evident that you are in no hurry and can wait. We have not time to lose with you now. Come back tomorrow, or next week or thereabouts!"

The boys returned to Don Bosco once more. They felt confused and humiliated and they protested that they would not return to those priests.

Don Bosco reported everything to the Archbishop and as a result obtained many concessions and vast permission to continue with his work. Upon his return he exclaimed: "Just like Saint Thomas, they would not believe until they had seen for themselves!"

Tact and Politics

In his relations with others Don Bosco had always armed himself with tact and politics. These he used while he was a youngster, in his dealings with his fellow seminarians and his superiors, with other priests and even with Protestants, the Masons and the highest authorities as we have already seen in some of the most pleasant episodes of his flourishing life. The instances are legion! But here are a few exceptional examples.

During the days of liberalism the politicians feared the opposition of Don Bosco. They wanted to make him participate in their revolutionary movements and insisted that he and his boys take part in the public festivities which were held in Turin, then the capital of Italy.

One day the famous Angelo Brofferio met Don Bosco and said that for the following day they had reserved a place for him and that he should make sure to be present.

The priest excused himself saying that he was extremely busy gathering funds for his poor little orphans and, of course, that even if he did not go, someone more deserving would occupy his seat, and, besides, one priest more or less did not really matter! Another day Robert D'Azeglio invited him and all the boys

to be present at the parade in front of the Gran Madre di Dio Square to celebrate Constitution Day.

Don Bosco again begged to be excused pointing out that the boys in his Institution were poor and not well dressed and might therefore be laughed at for their very appearance at such an august gathering, which in turn could detract from the importance and grandeur of the celebration itself.

On yet another similar occasion Don Bosco was invited to make a speech but he excused himself thus: "Place me before a whole army of children or among a group of peasants and I will make all the speeches you desire; but before a cultured and picked audience with my inelegant and simple manner, I should be afraid of spoiling things."

One day the saint was called to the Town Hall to explain why he had been refusing all the invitations extended to him by the City Authorities. He presented himself there with the air of a simpleton, with a heavy beard and untied shoes. He answered all questions in a distracted and unintelligent manner. Finally one of those men, who knew Don Bosco only by name, turned to the other men and said: "Let us dismiss him!"

There is very little danger that this type of person might uproot any of our Institutions." So saying, they sent the priest away.

Our good priest walked out slowly and with a cadenced step laughing secretly at those who were laughing at him.

Don Bosco's politics were — no politics at all! His motto was: "Do everyone good, and harm to none!"

Triumph in Barcelona

In 1869 Don Bosco yielded to the pleas of the Salesian cooperators of Spain for a visit there. His coming had been announced in all the newspapers and his arrival at Barcelona was awaited as that of a King.

People had come from all parts to greet him. At the station there were representatives and personages of great distinction.

Outside there was a line of some forty carriages carrying the highest of Spanish Nobility. People climbed atop roofs and trees and walls in order to see him. Extra trains had to be pressed into service in order to accommodate the crowds, every passing day seeing the revival of the people's enthusiasm. From the very early hours of the morning more people arrived — magistrates, ladies, noblemen, priests, and laymen of every description to see this saint at least once in their lives and to receive his blessing from the balcony of the house where he was lodged.

During his stay in Barcelona he cured cripples and performed other miracles on people of all ages and predicted that a certain two-year old child would become a priest in the Salesian Order, the fulfilment of which was later verified.

Our saint received many generous offerings. "If I wanted to reach not only your heart strings but your purses as well, all I would have to say is: People of Barcelona and of all Spain, if you wish to receive graces from Mary Help of Christians, give and you will certainly receive! But I will not say this in order not to arouse too much admiration and to thus antagonize the authorities."

On 15 April the Catholic Society, which counted among its members the cream of the city, held a reception in honour of Don Bosco and presented him with a gold medal and with the emblems of Saint George.

The most enthusiastic speeches were made praising him and his admirable work. Finally, when he was called upon to address the gathering, Don Bosco arose and spoke from the heart. He spoke briefly on the scope of his Society. He said that its main purpose was to free the streets of the numerous young thieves and bad boys by making them realize the sacredness of the home and honouring their country; to make the kind of men out of them that would protect the lives of the people and not take them away at the point of a knife or a gun. "All of this," he added, "is accomplished only through your charity, but it is for the honour and glory of God!"

He then continued in a manner all his own to emphasize how blessed and fortunate was the city of Barcelona adding that he would speak of it to all of Italy; and to the Pope he would show the gold medal and tell him how great is the reverence shown for His Holiness in Spain. In like manner he praised also their kindness towards the needy.

When he had finished, there was an outburst of enthusiastic and almost delirious applause. Immediately following his speech, a "love-offering" was taken for the works of the Salesians, and Don Bosco, thanking everyone for their generosity, gave them his blessing.

The scene that followed was truly moving. People fell on their knees, then they ran forward to kiss his hand and his habit, and it took him an hour and a half to reach the door. When he finally arrived home he was tired beyond words but thrilled to bits.

"Quam parva sapientia regitur mundus!" (How little it takes to win the admiration of the world!)

Courage to the Test

These last few anecdotes, although not in chronological order, happen to be the ones frequently repeated by Don Bosco and most enjoyed both by himself and his listeners.

While Don Bosco was a student of Theology at the Seminary in Chieri, he had become very friendly with Luigi Comollo, a good, holy young man, and they would spend much time together especially during their summer vacation.

One July morning, Comollo went to visit Don Bosco and after John's mother had greeted him and had chatted a while with the two friends, she said: "I would have liked to remain with you but I must attend to the harvest. I am leaving you in complete charge of the house. Later, go out, catch a chicken and have a grand roast!"

The two boys sat and discussed many topics including their studies. Suddenly Don Bosco began to feel hungry. Remembering what his mother had said, Bosco prepared the pot while Luigi built the fire. Then they thought it might be wiser to catch a chicken first so that they could make soup and also eat the meat.

Catching a chicken was a simple matter; but killing it — that was something else and did not appeal to either one! The boys decided to draw lots and Comollo was chosen.

The boy grasped the chicken by the head, encircled it several times and then let it go. The poor chicken landed in front of the mill, quite stunned for a while but then, regaining its equilibrium, began singing gaily and flapping its wings in an air of triumph.

The two boys looked at each other in surprise, then laughed and decided to catch another. This time it was Bosco who tried. He caught a chicken, grasped it by the neck and threw it in midair in such a way that it landed in the branches of a tree that was close to the house.

"Now you will not escape," said the boys. They went for a ladder, rested it against the tree and one of them supported the ladder while the other climbed it, extended his arm, until he reached the prey, but suddenly the chicken freed itself and flew to the roof whence it looked at the boys and sang joyously!

This was a fine joke but, in the meantime the boys were becoming hungrier and they decided to catch a third chicken; this time they used a sickle.

Comollo held the chicken over a stump of a tree while Bosco came down with the sickle. The head was severed from the rest of the body and landed about three feet away. Frightened by the sight of the bloody neck, the boys took to their heels crying.

"How silly we are," said Bosco. "My mother told us to do it. Let us be brave and complete what we've begun!"

Without further fuss or difficulty they took the chicken, plucked its feathers, cooked it and, between themselves, had a merry feast! And, of course, they laughed their heads off many times over when they thought of their hesitation and fear!

Another Outing

During the summer vacations in 1836, Don Bosco accepted an invitation from his dear friend Comollo to go on an outing to Cinzano, a town about three hours distant from Castelnuovo, where Comollo's uncle was pastor. Don Bosco went there and arrived at dinner time with three of his best friends.

When they arrived, hungry as wolves, Madeleine, the housekeeper told them that the Pastor wasn't in — he'd gone to Sciolze with his nephew to a meeting of priests and would not be returning before evening and naturally she could not receive anyone.

The four boys talked the matter over— should they proceed to Sciolze on an empty stomach? Or should they return to Castelnuovo? What indeed should they do?

While the other boys were naturally becoming downcast, Bosco's mind was working double fast, thinking up plans. Nothing quite as simple as that could upset Bosco!

"Is Madeleine here?" he asked. "I know she is like the owner of the house; in fact, she is the Pastor's right hand and a true blessing to him. I should like to become acquainted with her since I have heard so many complimentary things about her."

The housekeeper was flattered and radiantly answered: "I am Madeleine! But who are you? You seem to know me pretty well!"

"I am Bosco from Becchi, Comollo's friend."

Madeline had heard the Pastor praise this "Don Bosco" many times. Was he not from Castelnuovo, she wanted to know. "O yes!" said Don Bosco, as he presented his three friends and then continued his praises

of Madeleine, adding that the Pastor had said there was not another person like her — efficient, active, economical, and, above all, very careful.

By this time Madeleine was completely won over and she began apologizing for the Pastor's absence. Don Bosco told her not to be upset because they would go to a restaurant but Madeline could hear none of that and invited them into the dining room. Of course Don Bosco said they did not wish to cause her any inconvenience, especially considering how busy she must be with her many tasks. The good woman insisted and went about gaily, feeling at least thirty years younger. She prepared a fine dinner for them and even went into the wine cellar and brought up some of their best stock.

Yes! Don Bosco, as usual, had had his way again!

On the first occasion that presented itself, Bosco told all of this to the Pastor, who in turn did not fail to share a really hearty laugh over it with Bosco.

The Chocolate Man!

In all the Salesian houses it is customary to celebrate the feast of Saint Louis Gonzaga with the greatest solemnity and since the very first years Don Bosco accorded it great importance, inviting guests whom he treated to breakfast after Mass.

On one such occasion in 1858, he had ordered coffee, milk, chocolate and cookies from a caterer. When the waiter arrived he carried the package into the Sacristy; then, attracted by the music, he entered the church.

The sacristan who had been left in charge could not resist the delightful fragrance which emanated from the steaming coffee and chocolate pots and the sight of the tempting cookies made his mouth water. He poured himself a large cup of chocolate, and helped himself to a few cookies. He found it all so very delicious that one cup drew another, then a third, and so on.

When Mass was over, the guests seated themselves in an adjoining room. The waiter ran back into the sacristy to get the breakfast, but found that the coffee and chocolate pots were practically empty and only a few cookies remained. Disconcerted, he ran back to relate everything to Don Bosco, who as usual, remained calm and simply told the boy to return to the store and bring another order. But who was the culprit? The answer did not take long to come, for suddenly, a group of boys came running in to Don Bosco telling him to hurry because Viglietti, the sacristan, was dying — he was stretched out in the courtyard, moaning and crying: "I am dying!"

When Don Bosco arrived, Viglietti confessed his guilt and asked Don Bosco to prepare him because he was dying.

The saint assured him he would not die but would remember the experience forever. They took Viglietti into the infirmary and gave him a good dose of castor oil. From that day on he was called by everyone "the chocolate man", a name which never left him, not even after the fifty or more years when he was no longer at the Oratory!

How Don Bosco Preached to His Boys

When he preached to his boys, Don Bosco not only related examples from Holy Scripture but anecdotes and fairy tales as well, in order that they might enjoyably derive some simple, moral truth.

The Market and the Monkeys

A merchant made the rounds with a case full of merchandise on his shoulders. Among other things he had a variety of caps.

Once, in his anxiety to sell his wares, he did not realize that night was falling. As it became darker he found himself at the edge of a wood and decided to rest under one of those trees. He opened his case and, taking out one of the caps, placed it on his head to protect himself from the dampness of the night.

Now, in those trees were many monkeys who had been watching all the movements of the merchant. As soon as they had ascertained that the man was asleep, they rushed down quietly, opened the case, took a cap each, placed it on his head and returned to the tree tops, there to sleep peacefully!

Early the next morning when the merchant awoke, he rubbed his eyes, arose and went over to pick up the case to continue his rounds. To his surprise and anger he found the case open, its contents scattered about and all the caps missing.

Immediately he thought there must have been thieves and bemoaned his ill fortune. As he was thus concerning himself with his troubles, he heard shrieks of laughter from the tree tops and the clapping of hands as of great joy.

What could that be, he wondered, as he looked up. And there, to his amazement, saw the monkeys, each wearing a cap and gleefully ridiculing him. "So, there are the thieves!"

The merchant began throwing sticks and stones at them in order to intimidate them into returning the caps. But the monkeys protected themselves by swinging from branch to branch and from tree to tree.

The merchant began pulling his hair and furiously threw his cap on the ground. That was a very fortunate move, for immediately the monkeys imitated his act and all the caps came down to the ground. He gathered them quickly, placed them in his case and departed happily, giving thanks to the Lord.

Moral: Boys are like monkeys! If they witness good done, they do good deeds; if they see evil done, they do evil. Thus we see the necessity

of setting a good example at all times, and of being extremely careful to avoid every type of scandal.

The Father, the Son and the Donkey!

One day a man set out for the market with his son and a donkey. The people who passed them by began murmuring and laughing because the mule was not carrying a load while they were walking instead of riding.

The father turned to his son and said: "Tony, everyone is laughing at us. You'd better climb onto the donkey's back."

Tony obeyed and in a moment they were on their way with the boy on the donkey's back.

Again they came across people who remarked: "What a strange world this is! Imagine a young, healthy boy riding donkey-back while a poor old man has to walk!"

The father and his son were convinced that those people were right, and so they changed places and continued on their way when they came across some other people who opined that the old man was cruel to ride and let the poor youngster walk.

The poor father told Tony to ride with him and soon afterwards some people said: "Is there any sense in this? They are killing the poor animal by placing such a heavy load on his back!" Finally, the good old man and his young son got off the donkey and decided to carry the animal on their shoulders.

That is what happens when people become victims of their fellow men's views. The world is always too ready to criticize. It is therefore best to heed the proverb:

*"Per star col mondo in pace a
Il meglio si e' di fare
Ciascum come gli piace.*

"To be at peace with the world
It is best for each
To do as one pleases."

Or this other one:

*Laetare et bene facere:
Lasciar cantar le passere.*

"To please and to do good:
Let even the sparrows sing."

What would you have done? Think.....

God Does Everything Well!

On a sultry summer afternoon, two elderly gentlemen were returning from Sunday Service during which the Pastor had spoken of the admirable attributes of God, glorifying especially His Omnipotence and Infinite Wisdom.

In order to rest and obtain shelter from the hot sun, the two men — let's call them Joe and Max — seated themselves in the shade of a mighty oak tree and began discussing various topics. Looking around, Joe's gaze suddenly rested on some huge gourds that were hanging from the tree and which were actually growing from a tiny, frail looking plant that had attached itself and had climbed along the branches.

He remarked that it seemed incredible that such a tiny plant should bear such tremendous fruit. His friend, Max, however, said that nothing was impossible for God, alluding to what the pastor had told them just a short while earlier. Yet, it somehow seemed rather unreasonable to Joe that God in all His Wisdom should have caused such a strong, large plant as the oak to bear fruit as tiny as the acorn while the poor little squash plant had so heavy a fruit as the gourd.

The two men agreed that it would have been more appropriate to have had the arrangement in reverse order and that perhaps the Lord had made an error because, after all, He had so many things to bother about!

While they were thus reasoning (or rather, not reasoning!), an acorn fell and landed pop on Joe's nose! As he rubbed his nose that instant, the realization dawned on him that perhaps God was right in making the acorns so small after all! "Otherwise not only my nose, but my head and perhaps my entire body might have been crushed this morning!"

His friend enjoyed a good laugh. As they were leaving he said: "God knows more than we do! He does everything just right!"

Moral: Some people, who seem to have been born to criticize the good that is done by others, deserve to have so many acorns strike their nose!

Let us at least respect the works of God and His wise dispositions. Indeed, he does do everything well. It is we who spoil things with our rash judgement, influenced ever so often by our ignorance and lack of faith.

We would do well to appreciate God's goodness and adore Him. Let us be humble and become persuaded that God knows more than we do, and that He always works according to His correct judgement, with His eternal principles and His eternal wisdom and love — all for our good.

Be Generous towards God!

One day Jesus called Saints Peter and John and together they began to climb a hill. On the way Jesus told His companions to pick up a stone and take it with them.

Peter, who was more artful, picked up a pebble and John, without even thinking about it, carried a large stone. The climb was rather steep and fatiguing and John began to perspire. Peter teased him saying: "O

what a simpleton you are, John! Jesus merely told us to pick up a stone, not a rock. Look at me! See how I am not a bit tired by carrying this pebble and am not perspiring at all!"

Jesus who was listening carefully, stroked His beard and smiled gently. At a certain point along the road they stopped and he invited them to sit down to rest under the shade of a juniper tree. Noticing that his followers were not only tired but hungry as well, He blessed the stones they had carried and they turned into bread. Naturally, Peter had a very small quantity of bread to eat while John had a large and very tasty loaf. And Jesus smiled!

John marvelled at the miracle while poor Peter was as confused and as hungry as he could be!

Moral: Let us not be miserly towards the Lord, and He will be generous towards us, giving us not only bread but a lot else to go with it.

The Plans of the Chicken-Peddler

When our saint addressed girls he would adapt his subject accordingly, for example:

A young chicken-peddler was going off to market, alone. On her head she carried a basket of eggs and in her arms, a basket of chickens. As she walked along she started thinking: "I shall sell these chickens for ten lire each and the eggs for seven lire a dozen. I shall thus be able to collect quite a tidy sum with which I could buy a goat.

This goat will give me not only milk, but kids as well, which I shall sell and buy a calf. Eventually I shall sell the calf also and purchase a cow and thus I shall become rich and shall be a great lady and then I shall even be able to wear a hat! How lovely I shall look with a hat on! All my friends will be envious and I shall smile happily!"

While so thinking about her future she extended her arms to rub her hands and the basket of chickens fell. In trying to grasp that, the basket of eggs fell, too.

All this occurred as she was crossing a little bridge over a stream. While the eggs became unrecognizable, the chickens fell into the water and were carried away by the current, the poor girl following them with her eyes, crying: "There go my hats!"

Moral: It is best to be content with your lot.

The Hen and the Fox

One evening a rather capricious hen decided that she did not wish to return to the barnyard. She walked along picking up a few grains here, a wormy there, just happy to be free. When night fell she went up into the haystack, found herself a comfortable spot and settled in for a good night's sleep.

A few minutes later she heard a noise. It was a fox that had also climbed up there, discovered the hen and was ready to devour her. Frightened, the hen flew into the branches of a nearby tree.

The fox kept an eye on her.

After about one hour the hen flew to a nearby hedge which the fox tried to climb. Being unsuccessful, he slyly crawled among its branches.

Naturally, the hen became even more frightened and made a last ditch attempt to save itself. However, she could find no other place to perch and landed plunk on the ground. In a moment the fox was upon her! He clawed at her, tore her apart and devoured her.

Moral: Girls, the fox is the devil and you are the hens. You are good but prefer to rely entirely on your own steam, rather than abide by any rules or regulations just like the hen that did not wish to be locked up safely in the barnyard.

Inexperienced as girls are, they probably believe that a few prayers are sufficient and do not realize that the fox or the enemy, a dangerous situation perhaps, is more cunning and overpowering, and they end up by falling into the clutches of evil, with of course, bad results.

The Witticism of Don Bosco

Since the very beginning we have read that Don Bosco was comical and witty. The pleasant tales that follow are further proof.

The Polenta Spoon

During the first days of his Oratory when Don Bosco had difficulty in obtaining a meeting place, he used to gather his young students and tradesmen in the kitchen.

In one corner were found tailors mending clothes; at a bench close by, there were cobblers hammering away; in another spot, binders were sewing books together; elsewhere there were students doing their lessons. Don Bosco was everyone's teacher. Here he taught singing also, and, besides, helped his mother with the cooking.

One day while he was stirring the "polenta" (a kind of Barley porridge), he was teaching his boys a song for Christmas. At a certain point he noticed that they were going too fast, so he turned about suddenly and, lifting the spoon with which he had been stirring the polenta, used it to mark the tempo.

That sudden and quite unexpected act, that yellow and steaming spoon, those boiling jets which landed on the hands and faces of the amateur singers, made everyone burst into peals of laughter.

Unfortunately, snapshots and picture postcards were not yet heard of in those days!

When We Find an Ox.....

That polenta and those meals of dry beans and chestnuts, however, did not appeal to everyone and on different occasions someone would turn up his nose. When that happened, Don Bosco, like a good father, would resort to his store of pleasant tales and in this manner cheered his boys, at least temporarily.

There was one boy in particular who objected to the meals. One day Don Bosco said to him: "Cheer up and be satisfied with these meals temporarily; when we find an ox which no one else claims, we shall kill it and then we shall celebrate with steak, roasts and many other delicious dishes!"

That was all the child needed to encourage him to eat happily!

Bo... Bo... la...la... Makes "Boia"! (Executioner)

Even Don Bosco's mother, Margaret, had always been fond of pleasant jokes.

One day when she was but fifteen years of age, her father left her in charge of the buckwheat which he had spread out in the sun.

During those days there were many German soldiers in northern Italy, who permitted their horses to roam about freely. Attracted by the fragrance of the buckwheat, the horses approached and began to eat calmly.

When Margaret saw them she began scolding them and asked the soldiers to call off their horses. The horses, however, did not pay any attention to Margaret and the soldiers began laughing and imitating her as she spoke in her Piedmontese dialect by answering: "Bo ... Bo ... la... la....!"

"Bo ... la... makes boia (executioner)! And that is what you are because you permit your horses to devour our harvest."

So saying, Margaret courageously armed herself with a pole and hit the horses away!

No Work, No Meals!

One day Don Bosco left his mother in charge of the boys. After having exhausted every bit of patience and her kindest ways to induce one of the laziest boys to do his share of work, she said: "Very well, if you do not work, you do not eat and you will go without supper this evening."

That was enough for the boy to get started with the task allotted to him.

So I Am a Joker!

The following incident occurred in Paris. Because of the great number of people who were anxious to see Don Bosco or speak to him it very often happened that the house where he was lodged became so crowded that the entrance had to be locked.

One day the saint had got delayed in the Sacristy after Mass. When he reached his home the entrance was so crowded that he could not get by. He begged them to let him through or he would be much too late for his audiences. But the people answered: "Rieur! (*joker*) Do you think you can deceive us? You are not Don Bosco! Don Bosco is in there already and we want to be the first to see him!"

Don Bosco, seeing that it was useless to argue with these incredulous people, went around the house and entered through another door. When these people appeared before him in their audience, the saint said jokingly:

"So, I am a joker, eh? Very well, now give me a larger offering to compensate for the unpleasant part you made me play!" No one refused and the money kept pouring in!

Why That Nail?

Each time that Don Bosco happened to meet one of his boys who, either because he was distracted or because he was careless, failed to greet him, the saint would do what is attributed to Saint Philip Neri. He would stop the boy and ask him why he had that nail in his hat.

Immediately the boy would remove his hat and turning it about in his hands would tell Don Bosco that he could see no nail. Don Bosco, of course, would smile and excuse himself saying that he thought he had seen a nail which fastened the hat to the boy's head because he had not been greeted as he passed by.

That was sufficient to have the child become his friend and to teach him to greet the priest as soon as he saw him so that Don Bosco might not see a nail in his hat!

The Lottery Numbers

One day two gentlemen approached Don Bosco and asked him to suggest the lucky numbers for the lottery. The saint tried to distract the men but since they insisted, he said: "Very well, play these numbers: 10 - 5 - 14."

The men thanked him and were about to leave when Don Bosco asked them if they wanted an explanation. That did not interest the men, but the saint said it was necessary for them to know or they would not know how to play them. So he explained: The number 10 stands for the ten commandments of God; the number 5, for the five precepts of the Church; the number 14, for the fourteen works of mercy, both corporal and spiritual. Play them and you will be wealthy!"

They all laughed together over the explanation.

The Large Sausage

One day, while in the company of a number of his superiors and boys, Don Bosco asked aloud: "Of all the things that you have seen during your

life-time which do you like the most?" Very promptly the boys answered: "Don Bosco!"

Everyone applauded and Don Bosco told them the following story:

"During the most recent exposition in Turin many men from my town attended and as they visited the various exhibits there were remarks of surprise and marvel. Only one man remained silent and unmoved.

Everyone wondered whether it was possible that in so varied a selection there was not at least one object that appealed to him.

As they continued walking about they reached a room where, among other things, there was a huge and magnificent sausage on display. This man immediately remarked: "This is really beautiful!"

Everyone, boys and superiors, laughed heartily and they understood that the Saint, with this allusion had repulsed the boys' praise.

He Eats the Starch!

Don Bosco had been preaching at a Mission in a country town. One evening he had remained in church hearing confessions until quite late.

The pastor had waited a long time for him and finally he and the other members of the household decided to dine and retire for the night. No one had thought of leaving some supper for Don Bosco.

When the saint finally entered, he looked for his supper. Over the fire, which by that time was almost out, he saw a pot containing a white substance which looked like overcooked rice. Don Bosco ate it all and went calmly to bed.

The next morning as soon as he returned from the Sacristy the housekeeper came to him with her hands on her hips: "Oh, Don Bosco! What fine things you do! Not only do you keep us waiting for supper but you eat the starch which I had prepared!"

Then Don Bosco understood why that dish had been so insipid and nauseating. He was a good sport and laughed heartily over it with the pastor, the housekeeper and others saying: "Involuntarily they ironed my nerves instead of my linen!"

Epsom Salt

Another time he was in the home of some wealthy people. Coffee was served and, by mistake, someone had' added "epsom salt" to Don Bosco's coffee instead of sugar. He sipped it with apparent pleasure, then taking the last few sips very slowly he exclaimed: "I was seeking the *dulcis in fundo* (after the bitter, the sweet) but I do not find it!"

When the error was explained, many apologies were made and they all laughed heartily.

At the Barber Shop

One day the saint entered a barber shop to get a shave and he noticed that instead of the barber there was a woman taking his place.

Don Bosco quickly left the shop exclaiming as he smiled: "Never let it be said that a woman took me by the nose!"

Good Grenadier

During the last years of his life, a lady once came to pay our saint a visit. Noticing the effort he made to get from one part of his study to another, she tried to support him by the arm. In a resolute but witty tone Don Bosco defended himself saying: "What! Do you think that a grenadier like Don Bosco needs to be supported? Never!" And, doubling his energy he crossed the room without assistance.

The handsome Sum of 400 Lire

One day he was at a dinner where the table was covered with many and delicious food items. When the saint reached the third course, he stopped eating. The host, noticing it, asked Don Bosco if he were ill.

The priest answered that he felt very well but that the sight of the abundance of food before him made him think of his poor boys who had to stint on bread.

One of the guests arose and said: "It is true. We must think of Don Bosco's boys too!" He took a plate, passed it around and collected the handsome sum of 400 lire.

A Weight on His Heart

Don Bosco was having dinner with the banker Cotta. Suddenly Don Bosco looked concerned about something and the banker asked what was troubling him.

The saint explained that in his heart he felt the weight of several thousand lire which he had borrowed from the banker and which he was not yet able to return.

"Cheer up," said the banker, "soon coffee will be served and that will settle your stomach."

When coffee was served, Don Bosco found in his saucer a signed receipt for payment in full for the amount he owed.

.....friendly even with the devil!!

Don Bosco was once asked why he was friendly with everyone — magistrates, noblemen, kings, etc. He answered: "My dear people, I would be friendly even with the devil provided that he permitted me to pass through hell to save a soul."

Carnival Time

When he went to France for the first time he was advised that, since he was going to remain for several weeks, it might be wise for him to dress like the French priests.

He consented and strutted about in that French hat and habit exclaiming: "Well, today is the first day of the Carnival. I suppose one must do something out of the ordinary!"

With an Unreasonable Woman

A very charitable but unreasonable woman had invited Don Bosco to her home for dinner. The saint promised, but was not able to keep the appointment.

Annoyed because the saint had broken his promise, she wrote him a very angry letter, protesting that she would never again give any aid to the Oratory.

Don Bosco waited a few days until the storm had abated and then went unannounced to the lady's home. In his usual pleasant manner he told her that he had come to bring her the letter she had written because he would not want it to be conserved until judgement day.

Hearing these calm and wise words, the woman regretted her action and, having made peace with Don Bosco, resumed her generous offerings.

Appeased Curiosity

While Don Bosco was in Paris he paid a visit to a very wealthy but not particularly philanthropic gentleman who wished to know why Don Bosco had come to Paris.

Some had told him that the priest had come to acquaint the people with his works; others that he wanted to found an institution there; still others that he had come for political reasons.

Tactfully, yet gently, the saint said: "Do you know what leads wolves to enter large cities? Hunger! The only reason why I have come to Paris is to appease the hunger of my poor little orphans. Here there are many charitable and generous people like you, from whom I expect to receive generous offerings."

The gentleman understood immediately and, not wishing Don Bosco to change his opinion, gave him a fine offering which, incidentally, was not to be his last.

The Demon Shall Laugh!

Don Bosco was conversing with some of his boys and the discussion turned to his death and to the general mourning likely to follow.

Very serenely, Don Bosco remarked that the people would say: "Poor fellow, he has died too," and then he would be forgotten. The devil, however, would hold a great celebration, saying joyously: "At last my worst enemy has died. Now there will be no more wars against me, neither will there be anyone to steal souls from here!"

In Trouble

During his last years, Don Bosco had gone to the country for some much needed rest. Perhaps it would have been wiser for him to have stayed at home, for he dreamed of his boys day and night and repeatedly expressed his desire to do more for them. While still in his anxiety, he received an offering of 2,500 lire from a benefactress in thanksgiving for a grace she had been granted. She asked for more prayers for another grace.

The saint immediately wrote her a "thank you" card, assuring her that they would all pray for her. A short time later another offering arrived from the same woman. This time it was 3,000 lire. Again Don Bosco thanked her and promised more prayers.

The third offer, this time one of 10,000 lire, followed in due course of time. The saint turned to the superiors of that house and said: "Please tell me what to do! This is real trouble. The woman will not stop!"

He smiled angelically while two huge tears rolled down his cheeks.

Ten Lire for His Confession

One day a man approached Don Bosco and asked that his confession be heard.

Don Bosco asked how long it was since his last confession and the man answered: "Ten years."

"Well then," said Don Bosco, "Give me ten lire." The man was surprised and said he had always heard that confession was free.

"If confession is free, why have you waited ten years?" In a state of confusion the man looked up and seeing that Don Bosco was smiling, he said: "Yes, Father, you are right. From now on I shall come frequently."

Bertoldo and Bertoldino

Catherine Daghero, Mother Superior in the convent of Mary Help of Christians brought one of the sisters who suffered from scruples, to see Don Bosco. This sister had been tormenting not only herself, but others as well.

Don Bosco listened patiently and then asked the Mother Superior whether she was familiar with the book of Bertoldo and Bertoldino. The Mother answered that she had never seen it.

"Well," said Don Bosco, "I advise you to buy a copy and when you see this sister become pensive again, let her read a few pages of it. The only thing she needs is a little distraction and a little cheer."

Either This Way, or No Dinner!

In 1884, when Don Bosco was a guest of the Bishop of Pinerolo, the prelate once had to go out leaving Don Bosco alone in the house. When dinner time came, the priest called the waiter and the gardener and invited them to have dinner with him.

The two men gave all sorts of excuses in order to escape the situation, but Don Bosco insisted: "Either this way, or no dinner! We shall have to be together in Paradise!"

Titles without Nobility

Don Bosco, friendly by nature, was ever on cordial terms with all, especially with his coadjutors, joking with them and placing them in charge of the small pieces of land owned by his family in his native town. One of them became the "Count of Becchi"; another, the "Marquis of Valcappone"; another, the "Baron of Pian Fichi"; a fourth, the "Commander of Brie Pin" and so on and so forth.

Often he addressed them with these titles even in the presence of strangers who would eye them in surprise and bow deeply before them. When the strangers had left, Don Bosco would laugh gaily with his coadjutors.

Generous as a King!

Although Don Bosco was poor he was always as generous as a king and he taught his boys to be the same.

One day one of his priests had taken a group of boys out on a hike. As noon approached they realized they were lost in a distant town. The pastor of the church in that town, moved to compassion, invited them all to lunch and was very kind to them.

When they returned and related everything to Don Bosco, the saint asked what they had given in return.

"Nothing! What could we have given?"

"You should have put a 100 lire bill in a sealed envelope and handed it to the pastor asking him to say a Mass for you and for the boys. Let this be a lesson to you. Remember that in such circumstances you cannot afford to be stingy. Rather, you must be as generous as a king. This time I shall remedy your error — which he promptly proceeded to do.

The Title of Knight

When Count Cibrario, the King's First Secretary, sent Don Bosco his diploma and news of his election as Knight of the Order of Saints Maurizio and Lazzaro, the saint hastened to Court and said to him: "Illustrious Count, if I were to be called Knight, do you suppose anyone would give me alms for my boys? Besides, I already have too many crosses. I should appreciate having the honour transferred to my boys in the form of a subsidy so that they would be assured food."

A few days later there appeared in the Official Gazette the notice that a fund had been established for a yearly pension of 500 lire to be used for Don Bosco's work.

... And I Would Become a Salesian!

One day Don Bosco was with a group of priests. They were speaking in great admiration of the various Religious Orders, praising their work and zeal. One of the men said that if he were not a Salesian he would become a...

Don Bosco, who had also been praising the different Orders, very calmly but resolutely exclaimed: "And if I were not a

Salesian, I should become one!" Everyone applauded and made a bee-line to kiss his hand.

He Will See!

In various anecdotes we have already mentioned Don Bosco's unusual muscular strength.

As a boy he found no difficulty in cracking nuts or fruit stones between two fingers, and he bent iron rods used for the railing of balconies. Even during the last years of his life and after many sicknesses, he showed that he had lost none of this remarkable strength.

In 1884 the saint was ill. The doctor, having found him in a state of serious depression, wanted to check on the amount of strength he had. Putting his own arm forward he asked Don Bosco to press his wrist with all his strength.

The saint looked at the doctor with surprise and with an air of compassion warned him that he would feel it. "Do not be afraid of hurting me," retorted the doctor.

Don Bosco did as he was asked. For a while the doctor resisted the pain but then let out a sharp cry and, disengaging his arm exclaimed: "Enough, the experiment is over. What an iron grip you have!"

When the dynamometer was presented to him, Don Bosco handed it to the doctor and asked him to press first. It was passed on to the priest who was assisting him and finally Don Bosco tried. Of the three, Don Bosco had the greatest strength, which was the maximum registered!

"What pliers!" exclaimed the physician. "He, who is ill has more strength than we who are well!"

Find Two Bellows for Me!

He maintained this keen sense of humour of his even to his very last days. To the nurses and the superiors who took care of him and had compassion for him as his breathing became heavier, he said, still joking: "Go and get a bellows-maker and ask him to mend mine!"

Don Bosco made an effort to laugh so that he might temper the air of sadness of those anxious hours.

This same serenity and smile which were a part of him during the happiest and saddest experiences of his life, certainly must have accompanied him before God in eternal paradise!

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