



SALESIAN SPIRIT

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PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: SUCCESS STORIES

(Part 2)

The previous article showcased the effectiveness of the preventive system in the lives of individuals. It has the inner capacity & power to mould the lives of persons. Because of its inner power to change people for the better, many in power and position took notice of the preventive system, visited the Oratory or the Salesian school to have first-hand experience & see it practised, were convinced of its effectiveness and possibility, desired to implement it in other places and institutes.

MINISTER RATAZZI'S NEPHEW

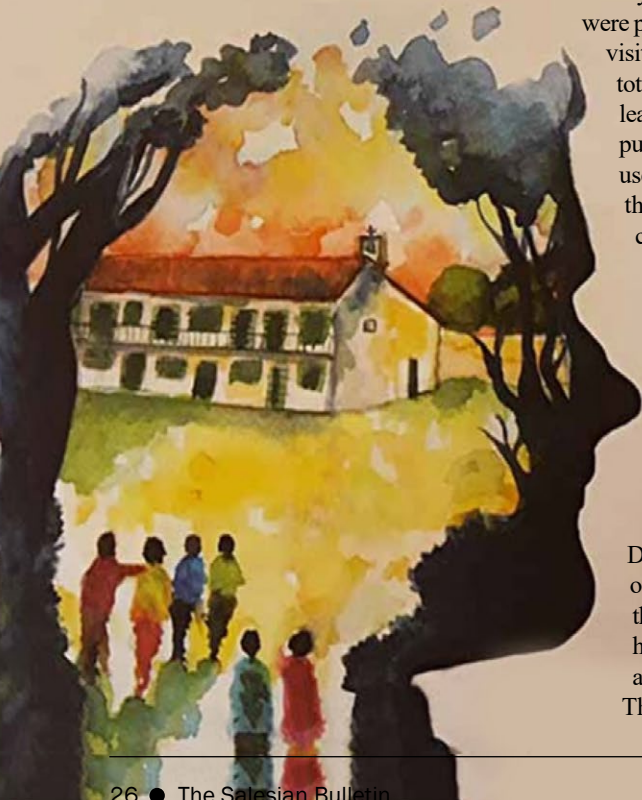
Urbano Ratazzi, Minister of the Interior, had a nephew who was troublesome. He was so unruly that the minister even contemplated placing him in a reformatory! But confident that the preventive system of education which moulded and changed the characters of the prisoners of La Generala would save him, sent him to the Oratory. Don Bosco accepted him. He became a good workman and a fine practising Catholic. That the minister considered entrusting his unruly nephew to the Oratory only proclaims loud and clear that he was convinced of the effectiveness of the educational system that was in vogue there. And he witnessed it transforming his nephew.

ENGLISH CABINET MINISTER

In 1863, a Cabinet Minister of Queen Victoria visited the Oratory. In the study hall about five hundred boys were doing their homework. They were perfectly silent and there was only one cleric assisting them. The visitor was simply astonished at the sight of so many youngsters in total silence attending to their studies. He was even more surprised to learn that the educators did not threaten the boys or resort to physical punishments. He desired to know from Don Bosco what means he used to achieve such a high level of discipline. Don Bosco told him that those means were available only to the Catholics: frequent confession and communion, devout attendance at Mass. Then the minister wanted to know if it was achievable through some other means: "The only alternatives are threats and punishments!" said Don Bosco. That the foreign dignitaries took notice of Don Bosco's Oratory and that they visited it, speaks for the good name it enjoyed in the public opinion. And the dignitaries had first-hand experience and left the place more convinced and captivated.

MINISTER CRISPI

In 1877 Don Bosco met Minister Francis Crispi of the Department of the Interior on behalf of Cardinal Pecci, at the death of Pius IX, was organising the Conclave. After the official business, the minister chatted with Don Bosco recalling his days in 1852 when he was living near the Oratory in Valdocco as a political refugee and how Don Bosco helped him financially and at the confessional. Then he talked about the disorders which plagued the juvenile





prisons and wished that they be entrusted to educators who were trained at Don Bosco's Oratory. He also asked Don Bosco to go ahead with the project of opening hostels for the prevention of juvenile delinquency among boys exposed to dangers, in various places, particularly in Rome.

DON BOSCO ON TEXTBOOK

The Italian Ministry for Public Education adopted Don Bosco's Preventive System in the Education of Youth as a textbook in Teachers' colleges in 1877. To be listed as a textbook, it would have gone through and stood the scrutiny of so many highly qualified people. And such an elite body believed that this system was a good system of education!

COUNT CONESTABILE

In 1878 Count Charles Conestabile della Staffa of Perugia wrote a booklet, *Religious and Social Undertaking* in Italy. In it he described the pedagogical system of Don Bosco. He narrated a personal experience. He went to the Oratory and found Don Bosco mulling over a list of names of boys whose conduct was far from satisfactory. The Count wanted to know what punishment he would give them. Don Bosco said that he did not think of punishment but something else: "I'll approach him at playtime and I'll ask him how he is feeling. He will promptly reply that he feels fine. 'But are you really pleased with yourself?' I shall insist. First, he will show surprise; then he'll lower his eyes and blush. Gently I shall urge, 'Something is bothering you. If your body is well, maybe it's your soul that ails you. Has it been long since you went to confession?' Within minutes this boy will go to confession, and I am pretty certain that I

shall hear no more complaints about him." It is then that the Count realised the secret of his educational system: religion.

PRISON TO DON BOSCO

The authorities were deeply concerned with the unrest in La Generala, the juvenile reformatory. Once they had to open fire during a riot and there were deaths! In 1878, the prefect of the province pressed Don Bosco to take over the reformatory. He even wrote to the Minister of the Interior who wrote back immediately declaring that there was no better solution than to entrust the management of La Generala to Don Bosco! But they could not concede to absolute freedom in imparting religious education, total independence in the management and the removal of the guards, except perhaps at the entrance. To this the Minister did not concede because he feared that Don Bosco would turn all of them into priests! Even if the project did not take off, being considered to take up the management of the La Generala is indeed a recognition of the fame that Don Bosco's system enjoyed.

JULIUS BENELLI

The Department of Public Education was planning a reorganisation of the reformatories. In connection with this in 1879 Dr. Julius Benelli, director of Turin's prison facilities visited the Salesian boarding schools to compile data which would help them come up with new regulations for the government reformatories. He has left behind this balanced encouraging report: "My findings in Don Bosco's schools have shown excellent discipline, genuine affection for superiors, remarkable progress in learning, and an unquestioning, limitless trust in their teachers. ... The discipline in Don Bosco's institutions is not based on fear. One young cleric can handle a large group of boys by himself. The first priority, even before classroom instruction, is the solicitous education of the heart. ... Their constant presence among the boys exerts a great influence for good. Youngsters always model themselves on others, and in Don Bosco's schools the boys have excellent models to follow. This explains the excellent results." A glorious evaluation and admiration by a state official proves that the preventive system of education was practised in the Salesian schools to excellent results. Government was looking for models and they studied Salesian schools as a possible model because of their true worth.

CONCLUSION

The episodes narrated above show that the preventive system of education has been really fruitful in the education of the poor youth. It is an incentive for us to practise it, convinced of its educational capacity. ■