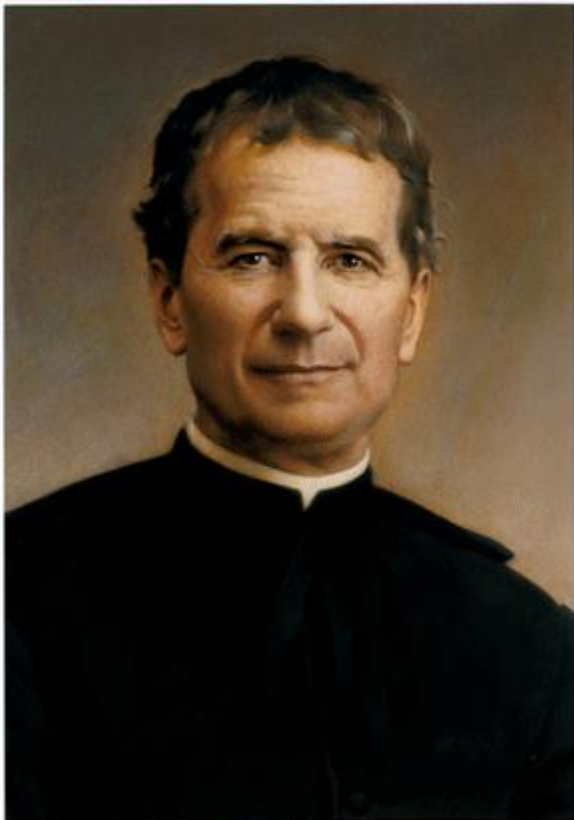
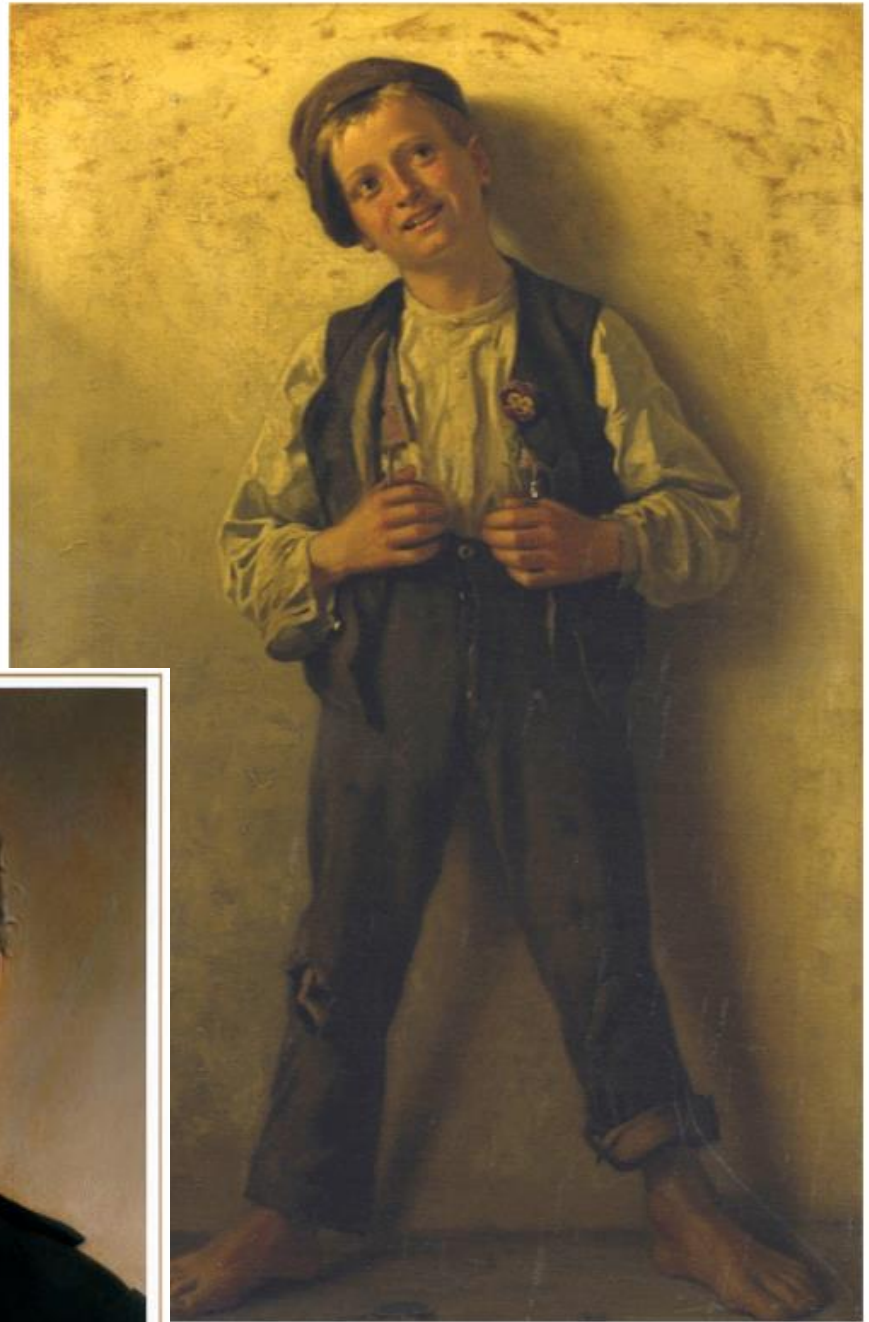


THE TAMING OF MICKEY MAGONE



RETRATTO DI DON BOSCO
Giuseppe Rolini 1842-1901

By
Don Bosco

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CHAPTER I

A STORMY MEETING

“Hey, come on, get him. Don’t let him get out! Wake up, there!”

“Missed him, General! He’s gone!”

“You good for nothing, you! Where are your eyes?”

The owner of the blustering, high-pitched voice dashed out of the darkness into the ring of yellow light cast by the solitary gas lamp at the corner of the railway station. His face was moist with the steadily increasing drizzle that clotted the atmosphere, and his eyes sharply reflected the dull beams as he roared in mimic military style.

“Attention, there! Who let the enemy through?”

He had hardly spoken when a wee, thin cry piped out, “Break it up! Here comes a cop!”

The General’s golden haired head bolted up defiantly. Why was everyone scampering away? He stalked boldly up to the black-robed figure that cast an ominously dark shadow across the muddy side street.

“See here, Mister, who do you think you are, breaking up our game like that?”

“Hello, sonny! Glad to meet you! I’m a friend of yours!”

The boy eyed him. The stranger was middle-sized, well proportioned, and evidently used to work. A thick mass of black, curly hair stole from underneath a wide clerical hat. His face was of the strong, rural type—broad and open—a barely noticeable smile continually playing about his lips. A long cassock told the boy he was standing before a priest. But priest or no priest, figured the leader, he couldn’t break up their game!

“A friend, huh? What do you want with us?”

“I’d like to join your game. What about it?”

“Who are you? What’s your name?”

“I told you already. I’m a friend. But who are you?”

“Me?” the lad’s chest swelled a degree higher.

“I’m Magone, General Mickey!”

“Glad to meet you,” smiled the priest.

“Hello, boys,” he greeted as the little circle of Mickey’s army grew bolder and closed about the pair. Then, turning to Mickey, he continued, “So you’re a general? How old are you?”

“Thirteen.”

“Pretty young for a general. But I’m mighty glad I got a chance to meet you. We’re good friends, aren’t we? Tell me, have you ever been to Confession?”

“Sure, plenty of times!”

“How about your First Communion?”

“I made it already.”

Relations were less strained as the priest kindly asked, “Are you learning a trade?”

Mickey’s face broadened into a grin.

“Sure, Father, I’m an expert at it, already!”

“What is it?”

“Doing nothing!”

That didn’t sound so nice coming from the lips of a thirteen-year-old ringleader. It meant prison, sooner or later.

“What grade are you in, Mickey?”

“Eighth.”

The priest grew more serious as he questioned, “Are your parents still living?”

Mickey’s eyes blurred and his steady lip quivered.

“Dad is dead and mum is killing herself taking care of us kids.”

His army discreetly thinned away to continue their game elsewhere. It wasn’t right, they figured, to see their general softening. The priest put his fatherly hand on the lad’s shoulder.

“What do you intend to do for a living?”

“Dunno, but I guess I can’t keep on playing all my life.”

Here was talent mixed with a certain degree of seriousness, thought the priest; a guiding hand would do the rest.

“I’ll tell you what, Mickey. Supposing you got a chance to quit the streets and set about learning a trade that would support you and your family, would you take it? This lazy-bone’s trade won’t get you anywhere, except to jail.”

“Sure, Father, any day!” burst out the General. But then his chin fell as he remembered.

“But I’ve got no father; and my mother what can she do? She’s too poor.”

"It doesn't matter, son," interposed the priest.

"Look, here comes my train and I must leave. Say a little prayer tonight, and tomorrow go to your pastor and tell him that the priest who gave you this medal is interested in you. I'll do the rest. All right? So-long, and God bless you!"

Father pressed a medal into the boy's hand, hopped on the train, and waved goodbye to the band of street urchins that gazed ecstatically upon the huge iron horse that snorted smoke and fire and took people to the big cities across the mountains. Mickey was too surprised to answer. He shouted, but his voice was lost in the roar of the engine as it strained every bolt and nut in starting. The ecclesiastic smiled when the barely audible voice reached his ear.

"But who are you?"

CHAPTER II

MICKEY FINDS A FRIEND

Mickey could not wait until morning. He lined up his sturdy ranks, dismissed them in truly military style, and then scampered off to the village rectory. Father Joseph looked at the excited little fellow, bedrizzled and gasping for breath, as the youngster managed to blurt out his story.

"All right, Mickey," I answered.

"I'll take care of the message. Now you go home and sit by the fire or you're going to catch your death of cold."

"But who is that nice priest?"

Father Joseph winked knowingly at the General and whispered, "A friend — a good friend!"

Then, after the lad had dashed into the darkness again, he sat at his desk and wrote a brief note, addressing it to "The Reverend John Bosco, 5 Francis of Sales, Oratory, Turin."

"Mickey," he wrote, "is a fatherless boy. His mother slaves to keep the family alive. He himself has exceptional qualities, but he has no one to bring them out. He has an excellent heart, but the streets won't help him keep it clean. His liveliness is amazing and makes him the worst boy in school, while he can easily be the best."

The answer came from Turin a week later saying, "I will accept the boy. He has good stuff in him."

Mickey danced with joy when Father Joseph asked him if he would like to go to the City. Imagine — the City! Where there were gold and wealth, stores and palaces, and where it was rumored among the country lads, the streets were paved with gold! He felt like a king as, a few days later, he sat on the hard wooden bench of the railway coach. A hearty kiss to Mum, a few tears brushed away with his sleeve, a farewell salute to his sorrowful army, and Mickey was off — for the City!

The City

With many a roar and puff, the train rumbled into the Turin depot. Mickey had been in ecstasy the entire trip, gazing through the cinder-coated windows at the new world that unrolled itself before him. As he alighted, his mysterious friend grasped the lad's hand in a friendly grip and conducted him, wide-eyed, through the fabled streets of Turin. So, this was the City, the object of a life's desire! But his hopes fell when he rubbed his hand on the streets and found it was just plain dirt — the same stuff they had back in Carmagnola! The mere remembrance of home brought on a rush of new feelings and a queer lump in his throat, but he bravely swallowed it down, and set himself to enjoying the company of his friend.

"So you're the famous Don Bosco who takes care of kids and takes them from the streets and lets them have a nice time in the Oratory and gets them a job?"

"Right, Mickey, but who also keeps them from sin and shows them the way to Heaven," corrected the priest.

"Are you glad you came?"

"Oh, you bet I am! This is wonderful!"

They turned off the street into a playground literally packed with little fellows and big fellows, all playing and shouting and raising an awful rumpus. But the noise never disturbed Don Bosco. He liked it, because it meant that none of his rascals was up to some sly mischief.

"Here we are, Mickey! This is the Oratory!"

Getting Acquainted

Up in Don Bosco's bare little room, seated at a plain wooden desk, in the midst of extreme cleanliness and poverty, the pair discussed the past and the future.

"Well, General," smiled Don Bosco, "now that you are here, how do you like the place?"

"It's very nice!"

"You're very welcome, Mickey. I want you to enjoy your stay. Just don't tear the roof down."

"Oh, I won't!" laughed the youngster. Then, more seriously, he added, "I wasn't a very good boy outside. In fact, some of my pals are behind bars now. But I promise to behave and never cause you trouble."

"A general's word is good enough for me, Mickey. Now, would you rather study or learn a trade?"

"Whichever you want, Father, only I'd rather study, if I could."

"Fine! Then we shall send you to school. But why do you want to study?"

Mickey turned pink, then vivid red, and stammered disconcertedly, "I'd kinda . . . well, you see, if . . ."

"If what, Mickey?"

"Well, if a wild bloke like me can ever hope to be a priest, I'd ah . . ."

"All right, Mickey. I'll try you out. Time will show whether you have a vocation or not. Now all you have to do is buckle down to business, study hard, play all you want in recreation, be obedient to your teachers, and pray. God will take care of the rest. Now let's go down to the other boys."

As Don Bosco put his foot in the playground, a deafening roar of cheers greeted him. He waved his hand.

"Go on with your games, boys! And here's a newcomer. Make him feel at home!"

Another burst of cheers, and Mickey was soon lost in a cloud of dust, tearing up the field as fast as his tough little legs would carry him. He was once more General Mickey.

But Don Bosco was not finished. He called a boy, a fellow of Mickey's size, a wide-awake looking lad, his pupil for over a year; his face shone with a strange looking light, reflecting his utter peace of soul.

"Here, Tommasso," began the priest.

"See that newcomer? His name is Mickey Magone. He's a great lad, but as wild as could be. You're going to be his Guardian Angel. How about it? Can you see to it that nothing happens to him? Show him the ropes!"

Tommy's eyes brightened. "As you say, Don Bosco. I'll do my best."

Learning the Ropes.

Tommy kept his trust. He and Mickey became fast friends. Every day he was by the newcomer's side, teaching him the schedule of the Oratory. In their class and in the chapel they were together, Tommy trying hard to keep Mickey out of mischief and to teach him the more refined manners of a schoolboy. Mickey found it hard at first, but he liked Tom. Often, when the bell would clang to put away all games and go to the church. Tom would look at Mickey, Mickey would look at the ball, sigh audibly, and then say, "Coming, Tom!"

Once, in a burst of boyish confidence, he admitted, "You know, Tom, if you had only been with me all my past life, I would never have fallen into trouble."

Don Bosco had not forgotten his new pupil. His watchful eye was always on him, and he often smiled to see the infinite care Tommy was taking of him. This system of a human guardian angel had always worked before; now it was going to change Mickey from a dead-end kid into a model of Catholic youth.

CHAPTER III

THE GATHERING STORM

Days rolled into weeks and weeks into months. Mickey was having a great time. Among the lads he was known as the General, and his leadership was sure to lead to victory. The hero of the playground, his name was on everyone's lips. His steady trot around the field, his dashes down the yard, and his happy, carefree laugh were proverbial.

Then, all of a sudden, something snapped! The boys noticed it. What could have gone wrong with the General? He was as gloomy as midnight — not a laugh, not even a smile.

"Tell him something," it was whispered in sport circles, "and you might get a growl for an answer, if not something more dangerous. Generals are tough individuals to handle, especially at times!"

Comments spread like wildfire. Tommy was dazed, but the remembrance of Don Bosco's charge woke him up. He approached Mickey one day as the General was leaning against the side of the house. What a sorry looking General he was! Tommy held out his hand. Mickey wouldn't hurt him, not Tommy.

"Come on, General," he pleaded.

"What's happened to you? Why the sudden gloom?"

Not a word. Tommy changed tactics.

"Come on, Mickey. Let it out. Maybe I can help you. Haven't I always been your friend? What's wrong? Are you sick, or is it something else?"

Mickey's eyes grew wet. Then out came the story with a flood of tears.

"I'm not happy! I can't be happy like you fellows! You are good. You go to Communion. You pray. But I . . ." Another burst of sorrow choked him.

"Oh, come on, Mickey," sympathized Tom, "you don't have to cry for that!"

"Sure I do! You boys are good. I'm bad! I can't go to Holy Communion! I cannot be happy!"

"Of course you can, Mickey. Shake off all those troubles. It's easy!"

"Yeah, easy! It's easy! That's what you say! But, I can't. Oh, go away! You're not my friend!" Mickey shoved the good Samaritan aside to rush into the house. Tom followed him.

"Here, Mickey, you can't run away from me! Wait a minute! I can help you out. Look, I'll show you what to do."

He clutched Mickey by the arm. "Why don't you go to Confession and tell the priest everything? Then you'll get God's pardon, and you'll be the happiest boy in the yard."

"I can't! I can't!" was the smothered response, as Mickey tore himself loose.

A Friend in Need

Tom felt Don Bosco ought to step in. The good priest already knew of Mickey's changed behavior, so, when he heard of Tom's failure, he called Mickey to his room.

"Well, General," he began, "I'd like you to do me a favor. Are you willing?"

Mickey forced a smile. "Sure!"

"It's something very important, and you must not refuse me."

"Anything you want, Don Bosco."

"Mickey," the priest took the lad's hand, "I'd like to have your heart. I want to open it up and learn its secrets. Will you give it to me?"

Strange words, but Mickey read Don Bosco's meaning in his eyes. Two big tears rolled down his cheeks, a lump arose in his throat, and it choked a whispered, "Yes!"

Don Bosco put his hand on the boy's heaving shoulder. "Let's hear it all, Mickey. Tell Don Bosco about it."

Between sobs it all came out. Mickey was in an awful mess. He felt so sinful and dirty compared to all his classmates. They went to Mass and Communion. They were happy because they were clean. But Mickey — the remembrance of his escapades at Carmagnola and his none too sinless habits overwhelmed him. He gasped, “I’m no good. Help me!” and a new rush of tears stopped him. Don Bosco waited. His saintly heart had gone out to the poor lad.

“I understand, my boy,” he whispered, and his voice resembled that of an Angel.

Mickey calmed down and asked, “What shall I do, Father?”

“Your conscience bothers you. It is the voice of God knocking at your heart. All you have to do is straighten out the affairs of your soul by a good Confession. Don’t do it right away; first think it over, examine your conscience. If your former Confessions were sincere, tell what happened since your last. If not, try to recall all your mortal sins since your last good Confession. Then go to the priest and receive his absolution. After that, you’ll be a new boy — and you’ll be happy.”

“But how can I remember that far back?”

“Tell your confessor of your trouble. He will ask you questions, and you will answer yes or no. He will understand. Don’t worry. Now cheer up. Dry your eyes and follow my suggestions. It can’t fail.”

The Unburdening

The brave General left Don Bosco’s room feeling better; a heavy load of doubt was off his mind. He spent the whole day going over his past life; then, after night prayers, he approached Don Bosco.

“Father, I want to make my Confession before I go to bed.”

As he knelt at the holy confessor’s feet, he opened his heart in full confidence and unburdened himself. The gentle Don Bosco helped the lad with opportune questions and, as he raised his hand over the penitent’s head and whispered, “I absolve you,” Mickey burst into tears; but this time they were tears of joy. Oh, he felt so happy, so clean, so light! At last, his heart was at peace with God.

“Father,” he asked, “are all my sins forgiven? If I should die tonight would I go to Heaven?”

“Yes, Mickey. Your soul is whiter than snow now. God has forgiven each sin and forgotten all about them. You are His own dear son now. Go to bed and enjoy your rest. You have nothing to worry about.”

But Mickey couldn't sleep. He was too happy. Midnight struck in the distant city hall, and he still tossed about, thinking of the pure stainless soul that he at last bore in his breast. A moment of sleep came, but a horrible nightmare shocked him into a cold sweat, for before his eyes he saw a gaping pit full of flaming demons. He jumped in terror, but the thought of his Confession eased him. He breathed a short prayer of thanks, and then, chuckling over the devils he had fooled, he quietly fell asleep.

A New Mickey

The next morning found the jolly, laughing Mickey of old. Tommy was delighted at the miracle, especially when Mickey came over himself to explain it all.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," he began.

"Skip it, Mickey!"

"I was in an awful mess, but Don Bosco got me out. Now I feel like a new boy. Oh, Tommy, you don't know how rotten I felt yesterday — I was disgusted with my life. I saw myself as dirty as could be. But after going to Confession — oh, boy, what a change! What a relief! It was as if I had taken a fresh bath and got myself completely washed. And now I feel so happy!"

"I'm happy, too, Mickey," broke in Tom. "At last you're our own General Mickey!"

"Not the old General Mickey, but a new one. Tom, if the boys only knew how a good Confession makes them feel, they would all go. If my gang at Carmagnola could only find out how clean my Confession made me feel, they wouldn't hesitate a minute. And they need it, too, God knows!"

The change worked by Confession in Mickey was marvelous. He was a new boy. Don Bosco felt more than happy as he watched the former ringleader go to Mass with devotion and approach the rail to receive Holy Communion. Another boy on the right track! It was a pleasure for him to see the boy at his prayers. He understood them now and liked to pray. What a change! He went to Confession punctually every week and then oftener, but Don Bosco wisely stopped him. It wasn't necessary and it might cause scruples to disturb that energetic little head. He knew. He had been with boys all his life.

CHAPTER IV

A TURN FOR THE BETTER

Dust thickened the air of Saint Francis of Sales Oratory as hundreds of little feet tossed it about and hundreds of boyish voices shouted themselves hoarse. It was a merry sight; not one was standing still. All were in for fun, and they meant to make the most of it. Suddenly a brass hand-bell banged furiously, swung by an energetic timekeeper. In less time than it takes to tell, boys hopped off swings and see-saws, balls were put away, clothes were brushed, handkerchiefs were busily applied to sweating faces, and order came out of chaos. Bigger fellows – monitors, they were called – huddled their charges into surprisingly straight lines, and chattering went on until a second signal sent them to the Chapel.

“Say, Tom,” burst out Roberto, one of Mickey’s adorers, shoving an insignificant third grader off his feet, “what on earth ever got over Mickey Magone? If he isn’t a new fellow, I’ll eat my hat – when I get one.”

“New is right, Bob,” chimed in a third boy, Patty he was called.

“Why, honestly, you find him in church now when he doesn’t have to go! And before – oh, oh, anything but church for General Mickey! He used to squirm about and shuffle his feet and kick. You could see he was just waiting for the moment to go out and play.”

“He is very different now,” agreed Tom.

“I’d call him a little saint if it wouldn’t hurt his feelings. Do you know, he actually kneels down and waits for hours to go to Confession? Imagine – for hours! Joe, the mason’s helper, tried it yesterday.”

“Did he make it?”

“We had to carry him out after the first hour. He just fainted right then and there!”

“The other day,” volunteered Roberto, “I was playing soccer with him. When the bell rang for class, he stopped on the second. Another kid told him to wait until the goal was made, but Mickey told him flatly, ‘Sure, if you give me what God will give me for obeying!’ That quieted the youngster and almost knocked me off my feet.”

“A smart city kid squawked when the bell rang for Benediction. Mickey heard him. He took him by the shoulder and told him, ‘It’s all right, my friend, I was like that, too, when I first came. I hated church. Now I like it, because I understand what it means. It’s the House of God on earth, and it’s a privilege to kneel before the King of Heaven and pray to Him!’ ”

“Uh, that doesn’t sound much like the Mickey that first came here,” muttered Patty.

A loud clang brought a full silence, and the lines filed into the Oratory church, singing with all their energy. Once seated, the familiar form of Don Bosco rose before them on the rustic pulpit he himself had made. His pleasant stories excited their giggles, while the solid Christian truths he was teaching them sank deep into their boyish hearts. Benediction followed, and then the scramble to get out. Monitors did their utmost, but managed to stem only part of the tide.

“Look, there’s Mickey still praying,” whispered Patty, nudging Roberto on their way out.

“Gosh, that big loon of a bricklayer actually kicked him that time, and Mickey’s not even moving. How does he do it?”

“Don’t forget,” retorted Tom, “he’s a new Mickey!”

The Songster

Mickey Magone had a pleasant voice, a rich soprano. His open-heartedness and limitless energy lent a charm to his singing that few possess. And he liked to sing. That made it all the better. Don Bosco, a born musician, trained his little friend and made him sing in church during services and entertainments on holidays. A full applause was always his. One time he sang a solo during the novena for Christmas. It was beautiful, and outside his classmates cheered the singer. But Mickey wasn’t anything too happy about it. Later in the evening he told Don Bosco why.

“I sang for nothing. While singing, I praised myself and lost half the merit. Now those fellows took away the other half. And here I am with nothing!”

Strange sentiments for an ex-dead-ender. You would hardly have expected him to have reached that degree of Christian holiness. But he was there—and he meant to keep on climbing!

School Days

Mickey was no dull idiot, but his inclinations led him anywhere that was not a school. The playground was his earthly paradise, and he surely enjoyed it. Every inch of the yard had been tossed up by Mickey’s wild little feet. Yet he had a head on his shoulders. He realized what an education meant, and he intended to get the most out of the opportunity Don Bosco was affording him.

In class, Mickey was a lively jumping jack. He did anything but sit still. Yet, in his dynamic way, he applied himself, studied his lessons, followed his teacher's explanations, and handed in his homework on time. Father John Francesia, who taught him Latin and who was later to end his life in Saint John Bosco's Salesian Society at the age of ninety-one, after a lifetime of work for boys, writes of Mickey.

"I never had to scold him. He was lively, very lively, but respectful. He skipped second year and went directly into Sub-intermediate. What is more, he headed the class in diligence and talent. After Don Bosco's work on him, he became a new lad. He was serious, more than it appeared on first sight. There were deep and manly thoughts in that golden-haired head. I taught him Latin, but I must say that he taught me that virtue can exist in young schoolboys. The poet's phrase is well suited to him: "The wisdom of the aged, Neath the fair locks of youth."

"I remember once that I had asked him to scan some newly dictated lines of Virgil. 'I'm not so good at it,' he stammered. Try anyway, I answered. The result was a surprise, much as I knew his ability; it was a perfect piece of work."

The Treasurer

Don Bosco was most practical as an educator. Years of contact with boys had taught him to stick to facts. He knew, for instance, that boys waste time. What could he do to correct them? Preaching on the value of time would be like talking Chinese to his little lads. So, he used the pocket book, *"Every Moment is a Treasure."* He urged very business like, "Lose a minute and you lose a penny. Lose an hour and you lose five shillings. Lose a whole morning and you lose a pound. It piles up. And, don't think you'll ever get those minutes back again. You are preparing yourselves for life; every moment counts. If you waste your time in school, you won't be able to get ready for life in the world. You will be a perpetual 'take-it-easy,' and your moments will be measured in money."

Mickey understood. He set his chin grimly.

"Every moment is a treasure, and I'm not going to throw mine away."

His teachers marveled to see him busily using up every moment of time with his studies.

"He'll get somewhere," his classmates predicted. He did. He got to Heaven!

Bookkeeper

Around Easter, all the boys of the Oratory made a spiritual Retreat, putting aside all their schoolbooks and trying hard to impress upon their minds the lasting values of Life, of the Soul, of Hell, and of Heaven. Mickey made an excellent retreat, and at the end he went to his saintly Director.

“Father, I have learned a lot of things in these few days. Now I’d like your permission to make a vow never to lose a moment of God’s time.”

The straightforwardness of the statement startled the priest. He patted the ardent fellow’s head, and replied, “Not a vow, Mickey. Just give Our Lord your word and live up to it. He will trust you.”

Then Mickey began his bookkeeping—keeping account of himself. Every day he would give himself a mark for conduct. He would constantly refer to it, note the ups and downs, renew his promise, and keep up the struggle. If he got too low a mark, he punished himself by not taking his dessert or by not playing a complete game. That last penance hurt. The dessert he could afford to skip, but the game—his reputation was at stake! Yet he knew how to swallow his pride, check his rising passion, and take the self-imposed penance.

Service with a Smile

When General Mickey first came to the Oratory his schoolmates kept their distance. It might be dangerous to get him upset; one could see that from his eyes. He wasn’t bad, but—well, he was a general, and you can’t ask generals to do certain things. But, after that one Confession to Don Bosco, Mickey personified, “service with a smile.” Whatever went on between priest and penitent will never be known, for a sealed confessor’s heart has carried it to the silent grave, but Mickey was no longer the ringleader of Carmagnola. He lent a hand to everyone who needed it. Little fellows were taught how to play and were befriended against bullies. He was ready to tidy them up in the morning and before class; he combed their hair, brushed their clothes, and even sewed their ripped trousers. Some tiny third grader might come to him asking, “General Mickey, will you please write a letter to my Mummy for me?” That third grader would proudly return to his classmates with a letter nicely written in Mickey’s neat hand.

Mickey was willing to try his hand at everything useful. Waiting at table, patching torn clothing, coaching a team, helping a weak student over tough spots, teaching Catechism —

Mickey did it all, and with his proverbial ear-to-ear smile. He was particularly successful at teaching Catechism to the younger tots. His cheery ways—borrowed from Don Bosco—kept his pupils attentive, while his deeply rooted piety worked its way into their pliable hearts.

CHAPTER V

THE MODERN KNIGHT

Don Bosco had been hearing his boys' Confessions all afternoon, and he now felt tired. A painful throbbing at the temples kept pounding his brain like the blows of a rivet hammer. He needed a moment's rest, so he sat down in his room by the window that opened out into the playground. He felt better when he saw his motley crowd of orphaned or abandoned lads running about and playing like young colts. It did his heart good to see the fun they were having. A few young priests and seminarians, all former pupils and ardent lovers of Don Bosco, were taking charge. The holy educator chuckled. There was no room in that dust clouded playground for some tricky devil

As his eye scanned each group of players he could catch sight of Mickey kicking a successful goal; roars and cheers greeted the victory. General Mickey was at his best! But then—Don Bosco craned his neck to see now what was wrong? A smaller fellow was shaking his fist in Mickey's face and shouting as loud as his lungs would let him. Another scrap. It looked like the opposing team would not grant the victory.

"You cheated us," they cried.

"You can't block our rear guards like that!"

It might become serious, thought Don Bosco, so he shouted to a priest below, "Break it up."

Just then Mickey's hand went up.

"We give it to you! Go ahead, take the ball!"

It was all over. The priest relaxed and smiled. It was not the first time Mickey checked his fiery temper, whetted by years of gang leadership, and had given in.

For My Queen

Later in the afternoon, the playground hero ran up the rickety stairs to Don Bosco's room, politely knocked, and then, seated on the straw sofa, began, "Father, I'd like you to do me a favor."

“Surely, Mickey, but first of all tell me a thing. Whenever someone crosses you like that little fellow did this afternoon, why do you check your tongue? What makes you give in?”

Mickey held nothing back from his Director.

“I do it for my Queen, and I tell Her, ‘All for you!’ If the knights of long ago could do it, so can I.”

“Good, Mickey! That’s the spirit! Now what’s your favor?”

A blush, then a few stammering words, told the secret. Don Bosco smiled. “So you want to give your Queen everything?”

“Yes, Father. I want to make a vow of purity in her honor, like Saint Aloysius did many years ago.”

“The Blessed Virgin is glad, Mickey, and she accepts your homage. But, you are still too young to make a vow. Instead, make a simple promise to be most careful in preserving purity and to become a priest if later on you have a vocation. What do you say to that?”

“All right, Father. Whatever you say. As long as my Queen is pleased.”

The saintly priest patted the boy’s head and then watched him cross the playground to the church to offer Mary his gift of himself. Oh yes, he reflected, what a difference there was in Mickey! He was decidedly on the right track now. He couldn’t go wrong with such a Queen taking care of him. From the day he had found a note from Mickey on his desk, Don Bosco had known Mickey was in good hands. He again took the tiny slip from a desk drawer; it was in the lanky, long-legged script of a schoolboy.

“My Blessed, Mother,” it read, “wishes to take me under her special protection to teach me how to give myself to God.”

To give himself to God, Don Bosco mused. Imagine a ringleader giving himself to God!

“Therefore I will do all I can to be good son. I will forgive every offense for her sake. Heat, cold, hunger—I will offer all to her. And every Sunday I will offer my Holy Communion for that soul in Purgatory who in life was devout to her.”

It was signed *Mickey*, for he had long since discarded his title.

Mickey was faithful to his word. Anything for his Queen—and everything!

When he would sit down in the study hall and open his books, out would come a picture of the Blessed Mother, on the back of which was written in good Latin, “*Virgo potens, studiis semper adesto meis!*” (Virgin most powerful, be always with me in my studies!)

If he got stuck in some “killing” algebra problem, his lips would move in a plea to Mary, and the answer generally came after that. As far he was concerned, he was pledged to the Queen of Heaven and Earth. It took little effort to work for her, because his heart was always in her hands.

An Unspotted Banner

There is nothing as attractive as a pure child. The light of God shines from its countenance; its eyes are reflections of the Divine Brightness. Poets have written multitudes of lines on the beauty of a pure soul, beginning from Solomon, who burst forth with the inspired, “Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!”

However, there is nothing as shameful as a boy who has lost his godlike radiance and has sunk his soul in the mire of uncleanness. Don Bosco knew it, for thousands of souls passed through his hands in the confessional and he could actually feel their wretchedness. He saw moral evil with all its consequences in the forlorn side streets of big cities, in the dinginess of prisons, and in the hovels of the forgotten poor. He pledged himself to rid the earth of its filthiness. He worked to wash those wayward souls of their dirtiness and keep them clean. Every boy in his Oratory feared impurity; they detested its mere suggestions, because Don Bosco’s godlike spirit had entered their hearts.

Mickey was no exception. He loved Don Bosco especially for the unique purity that seemed to radiate from his very person. Time and again, he had seen this father of orphaned youth shed bitter tears in the pulpit over the foulness of an unclean soul; he had heard his inspiring counsels in the confessional; he had seen him wage a relentless campaign against immorality. And, in his own little way, Mickey joined the war.

First of all, he watched himself; not a spot had to tarnish his soul. He had given himself to his Queen. How could he stand before her immaculate person with the taint of impurity?

On To Victory

Don Bosco watched Mickey’s victorious battle for purity. As his confidant, he witnessed the manly spirit of resistance and the sheer determination of the lad to stay as pure as an angel.

“Keep it up!” he urged.

“The victory is all on your side!”

He suggested various weapons to use, all of them simple but efficacious. Mickey has preserved them for us in a letter written to a close friend of his.

“Don Bosco,” he writes, “gave me a slip of paper on which was written, ‘Read and practice these five counsels of Saint Philip Neri to his boys to preserve the virtue of Purity: Flee from bad company. Don’t pamper your body. Never be idle. Pray. Go frequently to Confession and Communion.’ ”

Following the advice of Don Bosco, Mickey made rapid progress in the Angelic Virtue.

Gradually the unhealthy impressions left on him by his looser ways at home were erased from his mind. The fight became easier and Mickey began to understand the happiness of the clean of heart.

With anxious mind, Don Bosco witnessed the struggle; his eye alone could see the skirmish, for Mickey held nothing from his Confessor.

Over and over again, the wise guide offered the proper tactics, like a general following a war he cannot personally fight but can only plan. With keen spiritual insight, he foresaw each push of the enemy and hastened to reinforce the weak spots of the fighter’s soul.

One time it might be a simple, “Good work! Keep it up!” or “Don’t worry!”

“In temptations kiss the crucifix, your rosary, or your medal.”

More often it was, “Avoid idleness! Keep busy! When the devil tempts you, turn your mind to something else, something you like—some hobby or other, a story, a poem, a game. Never let the devil find you doing nothing.”

Faithfully Mickey followed his confessor’s lead, and the way opened to victory, moral victory, a victory too many youngsters fail to gain. But Mickey achieved it. By might and main, he strove to conquer the rebellion of his lower instincts. He knew he was not an animal or a refined brute, a victim to the baser corruptions of the flesh. He knew he had a precious, God-redeemed soul, destined for an eternity of bliss or an eternity of hell, and he knew the decision lay with him. As any general would do, he decided to win—and he won! The banner he fought under was the banner of Mary Immaculate—that glorious, sunlit flag whose whiteness is brighter than snow and whose folds are flung far and wide to shelter every youngster in the world. Boys and girls of all nations can run to this Queen for protection and find their salvation in her. Mickey rushed to her side, and found the Purity he was striving for.

CHAPTER VI

PLAYING A NEW ROLE

Everyone has a bit of selfishness in himself—that unpleasant tendency to keep one’s eyes centered on one’s self, that gives him the twist of a circle, constantly revolving and revolving about a single point—self. Boys have it more than adults, who generally grow out of the circle. Of course, they also manage to break loose sometimes, but it is usually to help a selected few, not others, still less those who are not friends. However, Mickey was determined to break free altogether and give himself to all without distinction. This is how he won for himself the nickname, “Handy-Mickey.”

The best place to begin was the playground; Mickey was at his best there. With surprising patience, he taught them how to keep a soccer ball rolling down the field or how to defend the goal. Then he explained the rules of a multitude of games that only boys can make up. At the swings or on the bars, Mickey was ever ready to boost a youngster up—or sometimes catch him on the way down! Then a gentle rubbing on the sore spot, a joke or two, and a final, “Atta, boy!” would set the victim back on his perilous seat. General Mickey was an all-round hand, and he was liked. Never in the way, but always on the spot.

Schoolwork was none too easy for some country lads, who always found that they couldn’t leap over the hurdles of a Latin declension, plough through a page of poetry, or find their way through a maze of arithmetic problems. Then, Mickey came in handy. By careful questions, he put the student on the right track, helped him over the bumpy spots, and saw to it that the lesson stuck. “Great teacher!” was the simple comment of his admirers.

Sometimes being “Handy Mickey” was a bit of pain. Once, for example, one of his school mates, not used to the rigors of a Turin winter, and unable to get a pair of gloves (they were almost a luxury in those days of political and economical distress), suffered from acute pains in the hands and feet.

“Look Mickey,” he confided, trying hard to keep back his tears, “my fingers are all swollen and they hurt.”

“Those are chilblains,” Mickey answered.

“Here, use these. They will help you,” and he stripped off his gloves, thus exposing his own hands to the icy air. But that wasn’t all. He wrote out his schoolmate’s homework for him, made his bed, and helped him in a thousand ways.

Because of his hot temper, he was often overcome with anger, but in such cases a single word was enough to get him to check himself.

“Mickey is that the way Don Bosco says a good Catholic boy suffers injury?”

“I’m sorry,” would be the response, followed by an apology to his momentary opponent.

At times Mickey would be the peacemaker between other enemies. Though short of stature, he would rush to the scene of the fight, separate the angry pair, and by a few chummy words get them to shake hands and make up.

Teaching Catechism was another hobby of his, as well as visiting the sick in the infirmary. His jolliness did much towards improving the spirits of the depressed little patients.

“Hi, Mickey!” would greet him as he entered the room, and then a hearty, “Thanks a lot!” would escort him out.

Guardian Angel

When Mickey entered the Oratory, Don Bosco gave him to the charge of an exemplary student. Now he himself became one of these monitors whose services greatly aided the saintly priest in his task of caring for five or six hundred boys. His eye rested on a certain small fellow named Francesco, who was evidently out for a good time and nothing else—a program of “eat, sleep, and take it easy.” Gradually, he won the lad over to his side by playing with him, teaching him tricks, and getting into his confidence. Francesco was flattered to be the personal friend of the General and swallowed the bait. Then Mickey pulled in the line.

“Look, Francesco,” he began, “in a couple of days we are going to celebrate the feast of Saint Michael, my name day. Want to do me a favor?”

“Sure, Mickey!”

“I want you to give me a gift—but a good one.”

“If I can. What is it?”

“You can do it, but it will take a bit of backbone.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“I want you to come to Confession and Communion with me. How about it?”

A moment’s pause, while Francesco tried to think, and then he replied, “All right, if it will make you happy, Mickey.”

It was a fine catch, and Mickey was careful not to lose it. He prepared his friend for Confession, and together they approached the altar on the morning of Saint Michael's. Later Mickey told him, "Thanks ever so much, Francesco. You have given me the best gift possible."

"Let me thank you," was the earnest reply. "I understand things better now."

"That's fine, Francesco. Now why don't you keep yourself on the right track? You'll be all the happier for it. Take your duties more seriously, and don't make Don Bosco worry over you because he wants you to turn out a success in life."

Francesco took his hand saying, "It's a bargain, Mickey I promise!"

That night Mickey felt great as he pushed into his sheets. He had done something big for God and Don Bosco.

CHAPTER VII

A WILL AND A WAY!

Mickey was not the politest lad on earth, because the streets of Carmagnola had not required the etiquette of a young gentleman, although it is to his credit that he tried to follow the gentler ways of city life. Sometimes Mickey lost his polish and slipped back into the ways of the streets, especially when instinct told him that gentle manners would not go far.

One time, for example, as Don Bosco tells it, Mickey heard a school fellow talking about things good boys don't like to mention. He edged up to the guilty party, put his fingers to his lips, and whistled with all his might into his ear. Years of gang leadership had developed the art.

"Hey, what's got into your head, you fool?" was the angry retort.

"Where are your manners?"

"Where are yours?" Mickey corrected.

"If you are unmannerly as to talk about such filthy things, I don't see how I'm more unmannerly than you."

Blushes rose to the listeners faces as they slipped away. Mickey's lesson had sunk in.

"Another day," writes Don Bosco, "as Mickey and I went through the streets of Turin, we heard a young worker burst out with blasphemy against the Holy Name. Before I knew what had happened, there was Mickey swinging at the culprit with all his might. The smart cuffs were returned in good measure because the worker was taller than Mickey. Blood flowed from lips

and noses, until I could manage to pull them apart, and show Mickey that such corrections don't go far. He realized his mistake, apologized, and promised not to forget himself another time.

Practical Joker

Once Mickey approached a group of classmates who were talking—of all things—of the pains of hell. The miniature theologians were expounding its sufferings and torments, until one bravado's boast seemed to stop their mouths. "Sure, we'll try to keep out of hell. It's not the best place to go. But if we cannot keep out, well—too bad! Patience!"

Mickey saw his chance. He slipped out while the conversation continued, borrowed a match, and, moving up to the boaster, lit it under his finger.

"Ouch!" was the startled cry.

"That hurts, you fool! Are you trying to burn me?"

"Oh no, not at all," Mickey returned very politely. "I was just trying out your patience. But, I see you haven't got very much. If you couldn't stand this tiny speck of flame, how can you stand the fires of hell?"

A general laugh prevented ill feeling, but the brave hero had to admit, "Hell must be an awful place to go to!"

Donkey Sense

An old friend from Mickey's Carmagnola gang had also found his way over the Alps into Turin, and was lodging in the city, apprenticed to a mason. As often as he could, he visited his former General to talk over past deeds of "heroism" like two war veterans. While talking, Mickey wisely managed to squeeze in a few words of religion.

"Oh, church!" laughed the apprentice.

"What good is church? Why, I know a fellow who works with me who is big and husky and a fine fellow and he never goes to church! He's as strong as an ox."

Mickey laughed.

"Come on, Pietro, let's walk over to the gate," he invited. There a workman was unloading a ton of bricks for a new building, while the donkey, appreciating the rest, was munching at the straw that littered the ground.

“Look, Pietro, see that donkey? He’s big and husky and strong and a wonderful animal. And he never went to Confession or stepped into a church! Is your friend anything like him?”

A laugh from the man covered the boy’s confusion, but the joke went home, for Pietro never brought up such silly arguments to excuse himself from his obligations.

Seeing Through It

While Mickey was walking down the yard one day, a group of classmates strolled up to him and asked him to join their company. They were going out of the Oratory, they said, to go to a distant church in the city for their Confessions.

“Sounds strange!” Mickey replied.

“Have you no priest here to go to?”

“Sure, but we want to go to this priest today.”

Mickey smiled and asked, “Got permission?”

“We don’t need permission for this!”

“Well, you can go by yourselves. I don’t care to go that far for my Confession. I’ve got a confessor right here, and he’s the one I always go to, for big sins and for small ones. If you fellows have to go to some stranger, you must feel pretty scared to go to our own priests, and that means you’ve done something you don’t like to admit. So go right ahead. Besides, I don’t like to sneak off without telling Don Bosco. It’s not right. And, if I were you, I’d stay in the Oratory and go to some of the priests who come to help Don Bosco.”

That ended the discussion.

Dodging the Occasion

From the time that Mickey left Carmagnola to go to the Oratory, he returned home only once, for a few days, and then Don Bosco himself had to force him to go. It wasn’t that he didn’t like to go home. Just the opposite. He dearly loved his mother and family, plus his many admirers. When asked why he preferred staying in Turin, he only smiled in return and said he was having too good a time to leave. However, one confidant got the real answer. “There are too many occasions of sin at home. The old hangouts and friends and long-buried remembrances soon come back and are too strong for me.”

“In that case, all you have to do is follow Don Bosco’s suggestions,” his friend objected.

“A little good will, and everything is fixed up.”

“Good will is like a fog. It hangs around for a while, then it melts into thin air. I try to follow Don Bosco’s advice but a day or two with the old bunch makes me forget everything.”

“So nobody should go home, then?”

“Why not? If they can keep from sin, let them go. But I’m too weak, so I’d rather stay here with Don Bosco. I keep out of mischief, I have a nice time, and I know I’m not in danger.”

CHAPTER VIII

STRANGE HAPPENINGS

Don Bosco appreciated the virtue he saw in Mickey, and was pleased to watch the former roughneck (with characteristic energy) taking giant strides in the path of Christian virtue. Since Mickey did not care to go home, the good priest thought he would take him along for a week’s rest with a group of better-behaved students to the country home of a benefactor of his. So, all packed up, the jolly group trooped along with Don Bosco through the city into the surrounding countryside and heading for the hills that promised health, rest, and loads of fun. Their good humor suffered some dampening when huge black clouds darkened the sky and soon burst over their heads in torrents of rain. Like soaked puppies, they continued along the road, trying to sing away their discomfort, as Don Bosco had always taught them to do. “Rain or shine, smile your way through!” was the Oratory’s motto. So they laughed off the rain.

A few hours’ drenching brought them to a small town where Don Bosco had friends. One of them immediately took the group in, had them dry their clothes, and provided a warm meal and entertainment. Then, after many hearty thank yous, the group marched out again into the glorious sunshine that had succeeded the rain and tramped along the muddy road. Steadily they kept their pace, jumping over puddles, hopping over flooded ditches, singing, whistling, and exchanging jokes with Don Bosco. Then, as they became more tired and the shouts died down, the priest noticed that Mickey was trailing behind. He was walking slowly, his head bent, one hand in his pocket. Don Bosco whispered to the boy next to him, “Find out if Mickey is sick.”

The lad dropped out, and, when Mickey caught up with him, asked him, what was wrong. “Oh, nothing!” was the answer.

“I’m not sick. I was just saying my rosary for the nice gentleman that cared for us. He deserves it!”

Amid the Fun

The week spent by the youngsters at the generous benefactor's home was a happy one and they made the most of it. Hiking, fishing, scouting, games of all sorts in the fields and woods formed their daily schedule, while Don Bosco proved an admirable entertainer. It was on one of these nutting expeditions that Don Bosco came to realize how deeply Mickey's piety had already sunk its roots. As the boys climbed trees, shook their laden branches, and piled up heaps of nuts, they noticed that Mickey had disappeared. On their return to the villa, they found him quietly praying in the chapel.

"Um," remarked one, "you don't have to be that pious, do you? We always pray when it's time to."

"I know it," was Mickey's unashamed response. "So do I, but today I had enough fun, and I knew you wouldn't miss me if I slipped away to pray while you were busy in the wood."

"Besides," he added, half turning away, "you don't need prayer as much as I do."

Later he confided to Don Bosco, "I'm so afraid of falling back into my sinful habits. I've got to pray for strength. I wasn't doing anything wrong by leaving the group, was I?"

Don Bosco's hand went to the lad's forehead and he responded, "No, Mickey, you did all right."

"One evening," the Saint tells us, "while all the boys had gone to rest in the attic, I stepped outside to get a breath of fresh air. Walking along the pathway, I heard a sob at the corner of the house. I hurried over, and there was Mickey looking up into the sky and crying.

"What's wrong, my son?" I enquired.

"Mickey looked up at me through tearful eyes and sobbed, "Nothing. I'm all right. Only . . . I . . ."

"You can't be," I remarked. "Tell me. We are alone."

"I was looking at the moon, Father. See how it comes up every night, perfectly obedient to the laws of God. All the earth obeys God. But I . . . I have to break His law and sin. How bad I am!"

My thoughts brought me back many years to the time my mother would take me out into the starry night and show me the glories that bespeak the power of God. I cheered him up with a word or two and, as he went up to bed, I marveled to see how soon Mickey had reached the level of some of God's heroic young saints. Fourteen years old, yet he had the solid thoughts that few learned men can ever think."

CHAPTER IX

THE LONG FINGER OF DEATH

Generally, no one knows or even suspects his last hour and we are all the better for it. It might be too great a shock to learn precisely when we have to leave this life and face the Judge. Yet, it is hard to explain—some people get a feeling—a sort of foresight—that death is not far off. That is what happened to Mickey. Several incidents, apparently mere accidents, warned him to get ready. Without his knowing it, December of 1858 was to be the last December he would see.

The Novena to the Immaculate Conception, always an A-1 feast celebrated with the greatest possible festivity in Don Bosco's schools, was a grand event in Mickey's last three months of life. He prayed earnestly to his Immaculate Queen, to whom he had long since consecrated himself, and resolved to make it the best novena to the Blessed Virgin he had ever made.

"I promise to tear my heart from all earthly pleasures," he wrote on a slip he kept in his prayer book.

"Then I will make a general confession to prepare for death. Every day I will put aside my breakfast or recite the Seven Joys of Mary to merit her intercession at my last hour and once a day I will tell my companions some story about Mary."

Did he actually see into the future? Don Bosco made him omit the general confession, since he did not need it, and told him not to skip his breakfast but to substitute a prayer for the Poor Souls instead. Throughout the novena he was very jolly, undisputedly holding the title of "General." When, shortly after, the novena for Christmas came along, Mickey spent it with the same enthusiasm and cheerfulness.

Then another little event pointed to death. All the boys of the Oratory knew of Don Bosco's extraordinary sanctity. They would have to be blind not to see it. He clearly foresaw the future; he could read their minds; in Confession he could tell them their sins, and—surprisingly enough—he could foretell which boys were to die at the Oratory. On this particular night—December 31, 1858—he warned all to be ready. Someone, he said, would have to go to the Eternal Judge before the new year was a month old. Mickey looked up at the priest and said, "I understand, Father, I'm next. I'll get ready."

Those near him laughed at his simplicity, but Mickey did not. After that, he did not slump into gloomy fearfulness, but he was decidedly more thoughtful.

Another warning came to him at a meeting of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality, of which Mickey was a member. The sodalists used to draw out a slip of paper, on which was written a spiritual word or two as a good thought for the month. When Mickey opened his, he read, "At the Judgment Seat, I will be with God . . . alone!"

"Look," he told those near him, "I guess there is no way out of it. I'm to go soon!"

He ran to Don Bosco with the slip. The holy priest patted him on the head.

"Don't be afraid, Mickey. It may have been a mere accident. Besides, we must all be ready to die at any time. The slip applies to me as well as to you."

"Yes, but . . ." he stammered. Then in a firmer tone he asked, "Tell me, Father, how much longer shall I live?"

"As long as God wants, Mickey."

"But will I see the end of this year?" he begged, half bursting into sobs.

"Why are you crying, Mickey? Buck up! Our life is in God's hands and He is a loving Father. He doesn't want us to grieve! Of course, you've got to be ready—we must all be ready, for that matter. But you don't have to know the hour of your death in order to go to Heaven!"

The boy jumped to a quick conclusion. "Then I am to die very soon, because you won't tell me!"

"I don't know, Mickey! But even if you were, would you be afraid to go to the Queen of Heaven?"

There was a slight pause as Mickey brushed away his tears. The brave response came slowly through half-strained sobs: "You are right, Don Bosco! No, I'm not afraid of going to the Blessed Virgin!"

CHAPTER X

BEGINNING OF THE END

Mickey was not one to get sick easily. Though not very tall and not particularly muscular in build, he managed to keep fit by plenty of exercise and healthy sport. His dashing and running and constant good humor kept his body trim and mind clear. Hence, Don Bosco was surprised to see him one morning leaning over the top of the stairs, looking at the game. It was not like Mickey to play spectator.

"Sick?" the priest asked.

"A little, Father. My stomach aches, but it's not much I've had it before. I'll be all right in a day or two."

Don Bosco took no chances. He sent him to bed and summoned the doctor.

"No danger!" was the reassuring answer.

"Just see to it he gets this prescription applied, and he'll be out of bed tomorrow."

Mrs. Magone, who had come to Turin for a few days, went to say hello to her son and, learning of his illness, remarked to Don Bosco, "It's nothing serious, Father. He has had the same trouble before. He'll be himself in a day or two."

The doctor proved correct, for the next morning, Thursday, January 20, Mickey arose and went down to Mass with the other boys. He felt better, he said, but he found it hard to breathe, so after services he went up to the infirmary. During the day he was the jolly General Mickey of old, fooling and joking over his "tummy ache." However, the next morning Don Bosco kept him in bed. The "tummy ache" had taken a turn for the worse. The physician, after a hasty examination, shook his head and muttered, "It looks bad, Father. It is not a simple stomach ache."

As the morning wore on, Mickey found it hard to breathe. Soon a harsh cough set in, causing the youngster a good deal of pain. Then, to make matters worse, he began to spit blood. His mother was called, and, noting the evident danger, asked him with genuine Christian motherliness, "Wouldn't you like to make your confession, Mickey?"

"Sure, Mama," was the undisturbed answer. "I made it just yesterday, but I'll make it again."

Don Bosco heard his confession and then asked, "Well, Mickey, here's a proposition for you. Would you rather get better or go to Heaven?"

"God knows what is best. I'll take what He wants."

"Supposing He left the choice with you?"

"Oh, who would be foolish enough not to take Heaven?"

"Would you really like to go to Heaven, Mickey?"

"Sure, I've always prayed so hard for it!"

"When do you want to go?"

"Any time God says."

"Fine, Mickey! God's Will be done. Say it often."

After another careful medical examination the doctor turned to the priest and whispered, "It's a hemorrhage. I'm afraid the boy is through with medicines."

As the hours slowly trickled by, Mickey sank lower and lower. It would not be long now—a few hours, perhaps.

"Don Bosco!" came his hoarse whisper.

"Yes, my son, here I am."

"I want to receive Holy Communion. May I?"

"Surely, Mickey, right away."

Don Bosco left the room to return shortly afterwards with the Blessed Sacrament, accompanied by a group of Mickey's teachers and admirers. The patient quietly received Jesus into his heart, as he had so often done, and prayed with evident fervor. Then he called Don Bosco and asked him to get his companions to pray for him, to pray that Jesus might soon take him to Heaven. After a brief moment of silence, everyone retired, and, as Don Bosco rose to go, he was stopped by a cry from the dying lad.

"Please, Don Bosco, don't go. I don't want to die without you. Please!"

The priest quieted him with a reassuring smile. "I'll be right back, Mickey. I'm only going to my room to say a bit of my breviary. I will hardly be gone a few minutes."

"All right, Father. Go and pray for me!"

Then, as his Director put his hand on the door knob, Mickey called him back. With a smile playing on his lips, and his eyes sparkling with fun, he looked very much like the dashing, energetic Mickey of the past.

"Father," he said, forcing a harsh whisper, "do you remember what that slip of paper that I showed you said?"

"At the Judgment Seat, I will be with God alone!"

"Well, it's not true. I won't be alone. My Queen will be with me."

CHAPTER XI

THE END

"I left the sick room," Don Bosco tells us, "and asked a priest and a seminarian to remain with Mickey, with orders to call me at the least sign of the end. I had hardly entered my room and taken up my breviary, when a hasty knock summoned me to the lad's side. There he lay, his

face marked with the first fatal signs of death, ashy white, his lips purpling, his eyes glazed with the glowing brightness of death. The priest by him administered Extreme Unction. Mickey, surprisingly enough still fully conscious, followed the whole ceremony and joined in the prayers of the Sacrament. Not a tear, not a groan, just a deep, heavy rasping sound as his sunken chest heaved for breath and a calm, almost angelic look of patient resignation.

As the priest touched his lips with the consecrated oil, Mickey prayed, "Lord, had you only paralyzed this tongue of mine, I would never have sinned so often in speech!"

At the anointing of the hands he sadly added, "How many of my school mates have these hands badly beaten! I'm sorry, Jesus, forgive me!"

After all was over, I asked him, "Wouldn't you like me to call mother?"

"No, Father, it's better not to. She would feel it very much to see me like this. She loves me so much." Then he added, "Dear Mama! She is so good! How sorry I am if I have ever given her trouble! God bless her goodness!"

I quieted his rising feelings and urged him to pray while I gave him the Papal Blessing with the plenary indulgence.

He bowed his head and recited the Act of Contrition with such manifest sorrow that he moved us all to tears. Then, as my hand was raised over him in benediction, he made the sign of the cross and gently sank back upon his pillow.

"Sleep," I urged him. "We are all by you and praying for you. Rest a bit."

"At ten-fifteen, he opened his eyes; they were shining brilliantly, but with the glaze of death. His parched lips parted, "Help me, Father!"

"Here I am Mickey! Don't be afraid. Before you depart for Heaven, won't you leave a farewell message for your mother?"

"Yes. Tell her I'm sorry for all the trouble I gave her. Tell her I love her very much. She mustn't cry, because I'm only leaving her for a little while. I'll wait for her in Heaven!"

"And how about your school fellows? What shall I tell them?"

"Tell them always to make good Confessions!" was the decidedly firm recommendation.

"Mickey, my boy, tell me, what gives you the greatest comfort now at the hour of death?"

Slowly, he answered, "The remembrance that I have done something, even a little bit, to honor Our Blessed Mother! How happy she makes me in my last moments!"

After a slight pause, he asked, "Father, what shall I do when my soul is separated from my body, and I find myself in eternity?"

"Let the Blessed Mother take care of you," I answered.

"And when you see her, do me a favor. Ask her to bless this house, your companions, your superiors, and beg her to see to it that no one who lives here may lose his soul."

"His eyes closed slowly, and his little golden head sank deeper into his pillow, while his breath came more painfully and harshly. As I started the last prayer for the dying, he suddenly opened his eyes, his purple lips parted in his usual broad smile, and he gasped, "In a moment I will carry out your request, Father. Tell my companions I will be waiting for them in Heaven! Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul! A last smile, and then gently, without the least groan or cry, he sank back in death. It was January 21, 1859, at eleven o'clock.

"Mickey was scarcely fourteen years old. I would not call Mickey's departure a death; it was a happy slumbering that bore his soul into the bliss of eternal life."

CHAPTER XII

WE MISS YOU, MICKEY

It was a sorry bunch of boys that knelt before the altar the next morning. Many tried to wipe away their tears, others unashamedly let them fall, while Don Bosco told them of the night's occurrence. General Mickey, their own chummy Mickey, whom they had so grown to like, was gone!

As their Director described the scene, each mind saw Mickey gently reposing in the thought that the reward of his good deeds was at hand. They saw his peaceful smile—Mickey's catchy smile; they heard him whisper his last recommendation, "Always make good Confessions!" Many of them contrasted in a moment's flash the tough gang leader before that his general confession with the lovable, chummy Mickey that had woven himself into the fibers of their hearts. Now he was gone!

School was out of the question. The boys sat at their desks, mechanically pulling out their books and thumbing through the pages. Father Francesia came in for Latin, but he looked lost. His eyes fell on the empty seat that spoke so eloquently of its missing occupant. He could almost see the laughing, stocky figure of Mickey dancing before his bleary eyes. But, the place was empty. Father looked at the boys and they looked at him, until one thin, unsteady voice broke the silence.

“He is dead!”

The next morning, the whole Oratory filed slowly out of the gate, four bigger boys bearing the black coffin that held the remains of their great hero. Passers-by made room for them, and marveled to see how tear-stained boys can look so seriously adult. With rosaries in hand and a prayer on their lips, they reached the city cemetery and made ready to lay Mickey in his final resting place. Mrs. Magone wept by the open grave. She keenly felt the blow of her son's early departure. She had wished to see him some day standing at God's altar as His priest. When Don Bosco had given her Mickey's last message and described the lad's edifying death, she had resignedly sighed, "God's Will be done. I loved you deeply, Mickey, and you were an excellent son to me. But, it was better this way! You are with a more precious Mother now!"

The grave yawned gloomily before the weeping boys and then closed its gaping mouth in receiving its youthful victim. A few hurriedly thrown shovelfuls of dirt on the lowered coffin, a soft, low prayer, and all left.

Prayers were multiplied unceasingly, yet—it was an unusual thing—many prayers were not **for**, but **to** Mickey. "General Mickey," they prayed in their boyishly affectionate manner, we were always good friends. Now be a real friend in need to us and take us with you to Heaven!"

That night, after slumber had closed the heavy eyes of his young charges, Don Bosco, alone in his room, opened an official-looking ledger entitled, "Pupils' Record," and, pen in hand, slowly thumbed through the leaves till he reached "Mickey Magone." His index finger traced the numbered record of his birth, studies, marks, up to the last space, "Dismissal." The pen dipped into the ink and ran across the page, sadly closing the lad's record for all time. "Died at the Oratory on the night of January 21, 1859. A most promising lad. Deeply mourned by all. A model for all youth to imitate."

The big book was closed and, as Don Bosco took up his breviary, his mind summed it all up in a flash. That rainy night at Carmagnola—Mickey's boisterous tones—his coming to the Oratory—his energetic, reckless, dashing ways—that ugly period of stormy remorse—then the open-hearted Confession and the rebirth to a life of virtue—it all opened up before him like so many chapters of a book. Put together, they told the tale of a would-be gangster turned into a model of Catholic youth. Mickey, he muttered, dynamic little Mickey, almost bursting with energy, the hero of the playground and classroom, the cherished hope of all who knew him! Mickey, who saw God in the purity of his soul and ran to meet Him. At last, he had caught up with Him!

Mickey was finally Home, Home for good, resting in the arms of his Heavenly Mother.

The breviary fell open, and, as he made the sign of the cross upon his lips, he could almost see the chubby face of Mickey peering up at him through the pages, wreathed in an eternal smile, and telling him, "I'm safe at Home! Thank You, Don Bosco."

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Note: Saint John Bosco, author of this booklet, was popularly known as Don Bosco. He was an Italian Roman Catholic priest, educator, and writer of the 19th century. While working in Turin, where the population suffered many of the ill-effects of industrialization and urbanization, Saint John Bosco dedicated his life to helping and educating street children, juvenile delinquents, and other disadvantaged youth. He developed teaching methods based on love rather than punishment, a method that became known as the Salesian Preventive System.



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