 Reading time: 4 min.

On June 16, Don Bosco gave the boys the spiritual nosegay to pray for the grace of repentance for those with the big ape on their shoulders – boys so few in number that he could hardly speak of them in the plural. Then, at the 2Good Night" on June 18, he told the following little story, or dream of sorts, as he called it on another occasion. His style of narration, however, was always such as to prompt Ruffino to apply to Don Bosco what Baruch had said of Jeremiah: "[He] dictated all these words to me as if he were reading them, and I wrote them down with ink in the book." [Jer. 36, 18] Don Bosco spoke thus:

On the night of June 14 I had no sooner fallen asleep than I was startled by a heavy blow on the bedstead, as if someone had struck it with a board. I jumped up and immediately thought that it was lightning.
I looked about but found nothing unusual. Convinced that I had most likely been dreaming, I again tried to sleep. Hardly had I begun to doze when a second blow startled me again. This time I got out of bed and searched everywhere – under the bed, under the desk, and in the corners of the room – but I found nothing amiss. Commending myself to God's safekeeping, I blessed myself with holy water and slipped into bed. It was then that my mind began to wander and I saw what I am going to tell you.
I seemed to be in our church pulpit, about to start a sermon. All the boys were seated at their usual places, looking up and waiting, but I had no idea what to preach about. My mind was a complete blank. For a while I stood there dumbfounded and dismayed. Never had anything like this happened to me in all my years of ministry. Then suddenly the walls and boys disappeared, and the church turned into an immense valley. I was beside myself and could not believe my eyes. "What's this?" I questioned. "A moment ago I was in the pulpit in church and now I am in a valley? Am I dreaming? What's happening to me?"
I decided then to get going, hoping to meet someone and find out where I was. After a while, I came to a stately palace. Its many balconies and broad terraces beautifully harmonized with the building and landscape. In front of the palace there was a large plaza. In a corner, at the right, a large number of boys were crowding around a lady who was handing out handkerchiefs, one to each boy. On taking theirs, the boys walked up to the terrace and ranged themselves along the parapet. Drawing close to the lady, I heard her say to each lad as she gave him a handkerchief, "Do not unfold it when it's windy, but if you are surprised by a wind, turn at once to the right, never to the left."

I keep looking at those boys, but then and there I did not recognize any of them. When all the handkerchiefs had been distributed, the boys were all lined up on the terrace in complete silence. As I watched, one boy took out his handkerchief and unfolded it. Others followed his example and soon all had them out. The handkerchiefs were very large and exquisitely embroidered in gold. On each, lengthwise, there was written in gold: *Regina virtutum* [Queen of virtues].
Suddenly a soft breeze came out of the north – that is, from the left; gradually it grew stronger, then it became a wind. Immediately some boys folded their handkerchiefs and hid them, while others turned quickly to the right. Others, instead, left them exposed and flapping in the wind. Meanwhile the disturbance gained force while ominous clouds gathered overhead and darkened the sky. Lightning flashed as thunderous, frightening rumbles rolled across the heavens, followed by hail, rain, and snow. Unbelievably, many boys still kept their handkerchiefs flapping in the storm. The hail, rain, and snow battered them mercilessly.
In no time they were riddled with holes, torn beyond recognition.
I was stunned, not knowing what to make of it. However, I was in for a still greater shock. As I got closer to those boys for a better look, I recognized every one of them. They were my own Oratory boys. I hurried up to one and asked, “What in the world are you doing here? Aren’t you so-and-so?”
“Yes,” he replied, “I am.” And then, pointing to several others, he added, “So-and-so and so-and-so are here too!”
I then went over to the lady who had distributed the handkerchiefs.
Several men were around her.
“What does all this mean?” I asked them.
The lady herself [hearing my question] turned to me. “Didn’t you see the inscription on those handkerchiefs?” she asked.
“Why yes, my lady,” I replied. “*Regina virtutum.*”
“Do you understand now?”
“Yes, I do!”
All those boys exposed their purity to the wind of temptation. Some, on realizing the danger, immediately fled. Those are the boys who folded and hid their handkerchiefs. Others, taken by surprise and unable to fold their handkerchiefs, turned to the right. These are the boys who promptly have recourse to prayer when in danger and turn their backs upon the enemy. Others, instead, kept their handkerchiefs open to the full blast of temptation and fell into sin.
Saddened by this sight and the realization that so very few of my boys had kept themselves pure, I nearly lost heart and burst into tears.

When I was able to control myself again, I asked, “Why did even raindrops and snowflakes riddle the handkerchiefs? Aren’t they symbols of venial sins?”
One of the men replied: “Don’t you know that where purity is concerned *non datur parvitas materiae* [there is no matter that is not considered to be grave]? Nevertheless, don’t be downhearted. Come and see.”
He moved to the balcony and, signaling to the boys with his hand, shouted, “Right about face!” Nearly all obeyed, but a few did not budge.
Their handkerchiefs were torn to shreds. I noticed, too, that the handkerchiefs of those who had turned to the right had shrunk and were covered with patches. They had no holes but were pitifully shapeless.
“These boys,” the lady explained, “had the misfortune of losing purity, but they regained God’s grace through confession. Those few who did not stir are those who persist in sin and perhaps will go to perdition.” Finally, she said to me: “*Nemini dicito, sed tantum admone.”*
[Tell no one in particular, but give only a general warning.]
(BM VI, 582-584)