

ST FRANCIS XAVIER'S ORPHANAGE AND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL AT TANJORE, SOUTH INDIA (1906-1928)

JOSEPH THEKEDATHU *

Abbreviations

ACT Archives of Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur

ASC Archivio Salesiano Centrale, Roma

Kappli Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth. History and Relevance of the Early Salesian Presence in India (Tanjore and Mylapore, 1906-1928)*. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publication 1989

SPAM Salesian Provincial Archives, Madras

1. Introduction

Don Bosco had for a while entertained the idea of sending his Salesians to India as early as 1877 or 1878, but his plans did not materialize.¹ It was only in 1906, during the government of his successor, Don Rua, that the Salesians finally came to India. The persons who were chiefly responsible for bringing them to India were Bishop Antonio de Souza Barroso of the *padroado* diocese of Mylapore, and still more his immediate successor, Bishop Teotonio Ribeiro Vieira de Castro, who as a young priest had met Don Bosco in 1885 and received his blessing. Both bishops, but more especially the latter, pleaded persistently with Don Rua for some Salesians, to work in their diocese.² As a result, the first group of Salesians arrived at Mylapore on 8 January 1906 and, after taking part in the solemn celebrations for the third centenary of the foundation of the diocese of Mylapore, which were taking place in those very days in the presence of 15 archbishops and bishops, proceeded to Tanjore (Thanjavur) a week later, to establish there the first Salesian house in India.³

* Salesian, professor of History of the Church - Bangalore (India).

¹ Kappli, pp. 9-12.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-16.

³ There is a certain amount of uncertainty regarding the exact date of the arrival of the first Salesians at Tanjore. The uncertainty arises because Fr. Tomatis in some of his writings says that they reached Tanjore on 14th January, while in some others he speaks of the 15th. See e.g. Giorgio TOMATIS, *Notizie dei Missionari partiti per l'India*, in «Bollettino Salesiano» 30

Tanjore was the headquarters of the civil district of the same name, which formed part of a very extensive province, then known as the Madras Presidency. In the first decades of the 20th century the District of Tanjore had an area of 3727 square miles and a population of about two and a half million. Generously irrigated by the Cauvery river, the region is extremely fertile and rich in agricultural products like rice, sugar-cane, coconuts, bananas and tobacco. The population of the town was about 60,000. The parish of Tanjore counted nearly 8,000 Catholics, half of whom lived in the town and the rest in about forty villages scattered around it. The climate is tropical. In the months from April to October the minimum temperature is 26 degrees Celsius and the maximum 40 or 41, while from November to March the minimum is 22 and the maximum 28.⁴

2. The First Years

The first batch of Salesians who reached Tanjore consisted of six persons: Fr. George Tomatis, a Piedmontese from Beinette, diocese of Mondovi, who was the superior; Fr. Ernest Octave Vigneron, a Frenchman from Gounssainville, diocese of Versailles; Fr. Richard Biebuyck, a Belgian from Ghent, diocese of Flanders; Cleric Mario Balestra, an Italian from Viterbo; Brother John Rostagno, a locksmith; and Hadrian Rovetto, an aspirant who was a shoemaker. The last two also were Italians. The reception organized for the newcomers by the parish priest of Tanjore was really solemn. A long procession of several thousand people with torches accompanied them with music and songs all the way from the railway station to the residence of the parish priest. Since the Salesians had no house of their own as yet, they had to lodge in the presbytery for quite some time.⁵

The bishop entrusted at once to the Salesians the already existing orphanage of St Francis Xavier, which till then had just a few boys only and also the elementary school of the parish with 130 pupils. Within three weeks of their arrival the Salesians succeeded in starting a unit of the Salesian Cooperators and a festive oratory, where in the evenings after recreation the boys had an hour of catechism conducted by some of the new cooperators and a few of the bigger boys.⁶

(1906) 80-81 and the account sent by the same Fr. Tomatis on 8 October 1925 for the second edition of *Cenni storici sulle Missioni Salesiane*. A copy of the manuscript for the latter is found in SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin. Fourteenth January seems to be preferable as it is found in documents closer to the event.

⁴ Kappli, pp. 14-15, where he quotes from several contemporary documents. See also in SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin, a four-page leaflet entitled «Cinquantesenario delle Missioni Salesiane» published at Turin in 1924.

⁵ See *ibid.* the copy of an account sent by Fr. Tomatis to Turin on 8 October 1925 for the second edition of *Cenni storici sulle Missioni Salesiane*. See also *ibid.* a paper entitled «Salesians in Mylapore Diocese», drawn up from earlier documents by Mgr Pereira de Andrade on 5 September 1966.

⁶ Kappli, p. 17.

The Salesians also started two workshops, where they tried to teach the trades of locksmith and shoemaker. These were, however, the wrong choices as crafts in caste-ridden Tanjore. When they realized their mistake, they started a carpentry and a weaving section with the help of Indian craftsmasters. The locksmith and the shoemaker who were, according to Fr. Tomatis, not really craftsmasters but only «apprentices who knew a little of their trade», went back «after spending two years and after making useless expenses».⁷

In the mean time two more members of the original group of six had disappeared from the scene. Fr. Biebuyck who was the manager of St Francis Xavier's Industrial School was operated for a carbuncle at Tanjore and had to go back to Europe in January 1907.⁸ The published histories of this period give us the impression that the return of Fr. Biebuyck to Europe took place some time *after* the death of Fr. Vigneron, but this does not seem to be the case, considering what has been said above and the authorities mentioned in the previous foot-note. Fr. Vigneron's untimely death occurred at the General Hospital of Madras on 19 November 1907 as the result of an operation for hernia. His body was buried at the Quibble Island Cemetery near Mylapore.⁹ In him the Salesian community of Tanjore lost «an exemplary priest and an intellectual, well-versed both in profane and sacred sciences. The confreres were really broken-hearted».¹⁰

At this juncture Providence went to their rescue in a rather unusual way. Fr. Eugène Méderlet who was on his way to China to join the Salesians at Macao, broke journey at Bombay and proceeded towards Tanjore to pay a visit to Fr. Vigneron, his friend. He reached Madras on 7 November and found that his friend was in the General Hospital of that town. Fr. Méderlet was still in India when Fr. Vigneron passed away. On being informed telegraphically of the latter's death, Don Rua cabled back, asking Fr. Méderlet to remain at Tanjore to take the place of the deceased. As Don Rua pointed out two weeks later in a letter to Fr. Tomatis, Fr. Méderlet would be able to help him as much as and perhaps even more than Fr. Vigneron himself. The confidence of Don Rua was probably based on the fact that Fr. Méderlet had already been rector of the houses of Muri in Switzerland and Liège in Belgium before setting out for the missions.¹¹

A building meant for the Salesians and a chapel dedicated to Mary Help of

⁷ SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore, letter Tomatis-Mathias, 19.11.1923.

⁸ This date (January 1907) is taken from the paper of Mgr de Andrade, cited in foot-note no. 5. It may, however, be noted that Fr. Ignatius Muthu, in the notes he dictated to someone when he was a very old man at Tirupattur, says that Fr. Biebuyck was operated at Tanjore for a carbuncle and went back to Europe in *June* 1907. See ACT, no. 128 Tanjore Missions 1906. (Ignatius Muthu joined the Salesians at Tanjore as an aspirant in August 1907, when he was already 28 years old).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Kappli, p. 19.

¹¹ ACT, no. 128; Kappli, pp. 19-20; SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927), letters Rua-Tomatis, 22.11.1907; 9.12.1907.

Christians were solemnly blessed by Bishop de Castro in August 1907. Lack of funds as well as other problems did not permit the Salesians for many years to put up any permanent structures for the technical school. They had to be content with two long sheds with thatched roofs: the one for carpentry in line with the orphanage building and the other for weaving close to the chapel.¹²

3. Under Fr. Méderlet's Leadership

In January 1909 Fr. Tomatis with two newly arrived clerics from Europe went to Mylapore to take charge of an existing orphanage for Anglo-Indian boys, leaving Fr. Méderlet in charge at Tanjore. The correspondence of those years and other documents amply show that the departure of Fr. Tomatis for Mylapore was not merely because of a desire to be of service to more young people, but especially because he and Fr. Méderlet could not agree very much with each other.¹³ Fr. Méderlet was destined to remain at Tanjore for the next twenty years and bring about remarkable progress to the Salesian works there.

In the last weeks of December 1909 and the first weeks of January 1910 Fr. Peter Cogliolo, the provincial of Portugal, made a visitation of the Salesian houses in India,¹⁴ since they were then under the Portuguese province. That was the first and the last visitation by a provincial between 1905 and 1924! Nothing much came out of that visit because the Portuguese Revolution of October 1910 soon followed, with very serious consequences for the very existence of the Portuguese province. One decision, however, which Fr. Cogliolo made when he was in India was of some importance for the house of Tanjore. He made it sufficiently independent of Fr. Tomatis.¹⁵ By the end of 1911 the Salesian houses in India became a part of the Roman province.¹⁶

There were only four Salesians in India in 1910 and 1911: Fr. Méderlet and Deacon Balestra at Tanjore (Balestra was ordained a priest at the beginning of 1911), and Fr. Tomatis and cleric Bede McConville at Mylapore. More personnel was needed especially at Tanjore, where they were eager to take up the large parish and mission in order to give to the Salesian community some direct mis-

¹² ACT, no. 128; SPAM, an article entitled «St Xavier's Industrial School, Thanjavur» by Fr J. Sandanam who had been a boy at St Xavier's Orphanage in those early days.

¹³ SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore, letter Tomatis-Mathias, 19.11.1923. See also *ibid.* an anonymous description of the house of Tanjore, written almost certainly by Fr. Carpené many years later. See also ASC F 189, letters Tomatis-Cogliolo, 4.3.1908; Balestra-Cogliolo, 18.5.1911; McConville-Cogliolo, 18.5.1911; F 186, letters Balestra-Albera, 18.5.1911; Balestra-Gusmano, November 1911; Tomatis-Albera, 24.5.1911.

¹⁴ ASC F 186, letter Cogliolo-Albera, 4.1.1910.

¹⁵ ASC F 186, letter Tomatis-Gusmano, 2.5.1912, where Fr. Tomatis says: «since the time Fr. Cogliolo came this way, I have not had anything more to do with that house».

¹⁶ ASC F 186, letter Balestra-Gusmano, November 1911 and copy of letter Gusmano-Tomatis, 31.12.1911.

sionary activity and not merely the supervision of a small orphanage and technical school. When Fr. Cogliolo had come to India for the visitation, he had said that it was not decent or honourable for the Congregation and dangerous for the confreres to remain in the conditions in which they were. He would either get more personnel for the two houses or call the Salesians back home.¹⁷ But partly because of the trouble in Portugal, nothing was done during those two years to change their painful situation. Part of the blame, however, should rest squarely on the shoulders of Fr. Tomatis, who could be terribly verbose and confusing. In spite of his long letters to the superiors, he was sometimes unable to say things with clarity or precision, and only managed to confuse people.¹⁸ There was at least one instance, when at Turin they understood exactly the opposite of what he wanted to convey! In fact, in his letter of 9th November 1911 to Fr. Albera he complained that his earlier letter and his thought had been misunderstood at Turin and that in consequence he had received a reply from Fr. Gusmano, in which he was told that no one except the two Indian clerics in Italy would be sent to India that year, since he did not want anyone. Fr. Tomatis protested that he meant exactly the opposite and that he wanted more people very urgently in order to take up the parish of Tanjore, without which the situation of the Salesians in that place would be very difficult etc.¹⁹ Fr. Balestra was terribly disappointed to hear that no additional hands would come from Europe that year. He was so discouraged that he begged the superiors to call him back to Europe. He said that he had tried to put up with all kinds of difficulties for so many years in the hope that things would improve. Now he felt so much let down that he was unable to carry on any longer.²⁰ In fact, he left for Italy in a few months' time.²¹

It was only in November 1912 that reinforcements from Europe arrived in the persons of Frs. Leonidas Gatti and John Mora, followed by Fr. Francis Carpené a year later.²²

Those two years were also marked by other interesting developments. Nayna Naidu (probably Narayana Naidu), a Hindu gentleman, offered for the workshops of the Salesians at Tanjore the 10,000 rupees left as a legacy by Soundaravalli Ammal, a Hindu lady who had died about ten years earlier. There

¹⁷ ASC F 186, letters Tomatis-Rinaldi, 16.2.1911; 31.8.1911. See also Tomatis-Barberis, 28.12.1910; Balestra-Cogliolo, 8.3.1911; 18.5.1911.

¹⁸ See e.g. his eight-page (large pages!) letter from Mylapore on 21.9.1911 to Fr. Gusmano in ASC F 186.

¹⁹ ASC F 186. The letter with which Fr. Tomatis managed to confuse Fr. Gusmano must have been that of 21.9.1911. The present writer read that long letter of eight pages very carefully twice and his conclusion was that he too would have understood it the way Fr. Gusmano understood it!

²⁰ ASC F 186, letter Balestra-Gusmano, November 1911.

²¹ ASC F 186, letter Tomatis-Gusmano, 2.5.1912.

²² Cf ASC F 186, letter Méderlet-Albera, 4.12.1912; SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin, letter Conelli-Tomatis & Méderlet 30.10.1913. See also Kappli, p. 20.

were certain conditions attached, which could be easily fulfilled, e.g. that one of the school buildings be named after the benefactress, that her photograph be placed in the parlour and that some poor orphans from her caste and religion be admitted as day-pupils. On 5 November 1912 Fr. Méderlet accepted the generous offering on condition that his superiors would agree. There was also the offer of the government of Madras to give building grants for putting up workshops, and to pay high salaries to properly qualified technical teachers. Here was an opportunity at last to build the technical school properly and to run the workshops without the daily worry for resources.

«At present our workshops consist of two miserable thatched sheds made of bamboo (which winds destroy now and then), in which our young carpenters and weavers work, and a sort of room or portico which serves as class-room, refectory, dormitory etc. Besides, everything is in the open and we have to be always on the watch, lest thieves take away the wood and the tools, a thing which happens here often».

When presenting all these facts and plans by letter to Fr. Albera, the rector major, on 3 February 1913, Fr. Méderlet stressed that he was not asking for any monetary help from the superiors, but only for personnel for the workshops and for the approval of the plan. There would be enough money because of the gift of Nayna Naidu and the promise of the government to give building grants. The letter was signed by all the confreres of Tanjore and countersigned on the following day by Fr. Tomatis and Bishop de Castro of Mylapore. An urgent reply was requested, so that they could give an answer on time to the government. Fr. Albera was at that time in Spain. So after contacting him, Fr. Rinaldi sent a telegram granting permission. It was followed by an explanatory letter from Fr. Gusmano, the secretary of the Superior Chapter, which said that the donation of Mr Nayna Naidu could be accepted without any difficulty. But regarding the proposals of the government, the letter warned that the English expect even more than they say, that they would want things to be perfect, while on the other hand the congregation was short of capable technical personnel, and therefore it was likely that the superiors might not be able to provide the required instructors. Things did not move any further for the time being, mainly because, as will be explained later, the Salesians of Tanjore could not for a long time obtain the land on which they wanted to build the technical school.²³

There was, however, progress on another front. As mentioned earlier, the Salesians were keen on taking up the parish and mission of Tanjore for several reasons. First of all they would have some direct evangelizing work, instead of being cooped up in a small orphanage and technical school. They would also feel

²³ ASC F 186, letters Méderlet-Albera, 4.12.1912; 3.2.1913. See also SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin, a copy of the same letter and a copy of Gusmano's reply of 7.3.1913.

fully free to do all the apostolate they wanted in their own house and not be subject to all the irritating inhibitions and limitations imposed by the parish clergy. According to an agreement reached between the bishop of Mylapore and the Salesians in April 1913, the bishop promised to hand over to the latter the parish of Tanjore, the parochial schools and all parochial works as soon as they would have sufficient personnel capable of taking over those works. The bishop and Fr. Albera, the rector major of the Salesians, officially signed the contract on 8 September 1914. But the bishop had to overcome several difficulties before handing over the parish to the Salesians. The careful and prudent adjustment of those problems took some time. Hence the actual transfer of the administration to the Salesians took place only in October 1915. Fr. Méderlet was made the parish priest while continuing to be the superior of the house. It was felt that this arrangement would facilitate the proper distribution of resources according to the needs of the two sections, viz. the house and the parish. But since as parish priest he would have little time for the house, Fr. Mora, the prefect of the house, was given wide powers regarding the material running of the house. For some years Fr. Carpené and later on other priests such as Frs. Ignatius, Arulsamy and Mariaselvam helped Fr. Méderlet in the running of the parish and the mission.²⁴ Through the zealous ministry of Fr. Méderlet and his assistants the parish and the mission really flourished. But we shall not enter into that, as it would take us too far from our main topic.

The Salesian community of Tanjore had suffered another painful loss about a year before the parish was taken up. Fr. Leonidas Gatti, the prefect of the house, died of paralysis at St Martha's hospital, Bangalore on 30 August 1914. The young missionary of great promise had not even completed two years in India.²⁵

The first World War was already going on when the parish of Tanjore was taken up by the Salesians. There was, therefore, no question of any reinforcements coming from Europe until some years after the end of the hostilities there. Fortunately some Indian Salesians were ordained priests in India or in Italy during those years. Ignatius Muthu became a priest at the end of 1916, Maria Arulsamy in May 1919 and Paul Mariaselvam in December 1922. The last mentioned did his priestly studies in Italy and returned to India only in December 1923.²⁶ In the mean time Tanjore had unfortunately lost the services of Fr.

²⁴ SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin, copy of the proposed contract between the bishop of Mylapore and the Salesians on 23.4.1913; *ibid.* file no. 13 Mylapore, letter Tomatis-Mathias, undated, but most probably of 1923. ASC F 190, letter and contract Teotonio-Albera, 8.9.1914; *ibid.* F 186, letters Tomatis-Albera, 15.1.1914; 7.4.1915. See also Kappli, pp. 44-45.

²⁵ Cf Kappli, p. 21. See also ACT, no. 128 and ASC F 186, letter Tomatis-Albera, 15.1.1914 for the plans of the superiors with regard to him.

²⁶ ASC F 186, letters Tomatis-Albera, 14.2.1917; 25.2.1917; 24.10.1918; Arulsamy-Albera 22.6.1919. SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927), letter Mariaselvam-Mathias 18.12.1923.

Carpené who was compelled to return to Italy in 1921 because of the effects of a sunstroke.²⁷

Towards the end of 1920 and in the first months of 1921 there was a move by the Salesian superiors at Turin to recall all the Salesians from the diocese of Mylapore, in order to have personnel for the vast mission of Assam, which Propaganda was insisting that the Salesians should take up. Bishop de Castro protested vigorously and pleaded with the superiors «to prevent such a misfortune to my diocese». He also made large concessions, giving the Salesians «full freedom to acquire, construct and possess on their own, as it is done in other parts of the world». Seeing the favourable change in their status, the Salesians in India, too, pleaded with the superiors to allow them to stay on; and the danger passed.²⁸

The last group of European Salesians to arrive at Tanjore reached there on 24 November 1922. The group was led by Frs. Tomatis and Mora, both of whom were returning to India after a prolonged holiday in Italy. The new comers were two Polish priests, Austin Dehlert and George Piesiur, and six Salesian sisters. The six sisters were the first of a long line of missionaries of their institute, who would come and work in various parts of India. Frs. Tomatis and Piesiur left for Mylapore after Christmas; the rest settled down at Tanjore.²⁹

Now that the general history of the Salesians at Tanjore up to the end of 1922 has been briefly outlined, a more detailed study of their orphanage and technical school and other works of beneficence may be attempted.

4. The Orphanage

It has been mentioned that an incipient orphanage under the patronage of St Francis Xavier was already existing at Tanjore when the Salesians reached there in January 1906. Fr. Xavier Fernando, a diocesan priest, was the one who gathered funds from Europe for starting the orphanage. With this foreign help, Fr. A. Xavier Coelho, the parish-priest of Tanjore, opened St Francis Xavier's Orphanage in 1903, in an old, vaulted chapel existing from the time of the former Madurai Mission. Shortly afterwards it was shifted to a long, tiled building which served as orphanage, primary school, refectory, study hall and dormitory, and when it rained, also as recreation hall.³⁰

When the Salesians took charge of the orphanage, the inmates seem to have

²⁷ ASC F 186, letters Mora-Albera, 4.6.1920; Méderlet-Albera, 1.8.1920. SPAM, see anonymous description of the house of Tanjore, almost certainly by Fr. Carpené.

²⁸ SPAM, see copy of letter Méderlet-Albera, 23.2.1921. ASC F 186, letters Tomatis-Piscetta, 3.2.1921; Teotonio-Signor D. (without name), 24.2.1921; Tomatis-Albera, 19.5.1921. See also Kappli, pp. 52-60.

²⁹ SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore, letter Tomatis-Mathias, 11.12.1922.

³⁰ Cf «Remembrances of My Past: Thanjavur», by Fr. J. Sandanam, at Salesian Documentation Centre of Chennai Provincial House. See also Kappli, p. 17.

been as few as six. By 1908 the number rose to fifty. A year later, there were 64 orphans and 4 boarders: 36 orphans were undergoing training in the industrial school, 13 in the weaving section and 23 in the cabinet-making section. The remaining 28 orphans and the 4 boarders were attending the higher elementary school of the parish.³¹ Perhaps due to the scarcities caused by the first World War, the number of orphans was reduced to 59 in 1917. But already in the following year the number rose to 74. In 1920 the orphans were more than 80 and in 1924 their number exceeded 117.³²

That the orphanage was a charitable institution meant mainly for poor and destitute orphans is clear from the printed report of 8 December 1909.

«The object of this institution is primarily to provide a house for poor and destitute orphans and to give them all the rudiments of an elementary education, besides teaching them a suitable trade by means of which they may be enabled to earn an honest livelihood. [...] Those boys who show a special aptitude for higher studies are allowed to pursue the same; but this is left to the discretion of the Superior of the Institution».

To be admitted as an orphan, the boy had to produce a certificate from the priest of his parish or mission, stating that he was a destitute orphan and that he was not less than 8 nor more than 14 years of age. Boys who were not orphans were also received into the institution on payment of Rs 3 per mensem in the first year and Rs 2 per mensem in the second year. After two years they would be kept free of charge, if by their conduct and application to work they showed that they deserved such a favour.³³

The fact that Mr Nayna Naidu, a Hindu, offered Rs 10,000 (a large sum of money in those days) for the workshops of the Salesians at Tanjore makes it abundantly clear that the general public of the place considered the works of the Salesians beneficent and worth supporting. In the farewell speech to the Salesians delivered by Mr A. T. Pannirselvam, president of the District Board, Tanjore on 18 April 1928, there are many references to the charitable activity of the Salesians. Some samples are given below.

«The Salesian Fathers certainly work with a view to help the poor, true to the principle with which the great Ven. Don Bosco started the Salesian Society over 75 years ago. The principle is to provide a good number of orphans and defenceless children the means of earning their livelihood. [...] In the Industrial School, you will find a Hindu boy at the wheel, in addition to the training given, earning 8 annas a day and in one corner a Mahratta brahmin youth deaf or dumb working at the *charka* earning a rupee a day and in another corner a Muhammadan in some other task earning a rupee too. That is the good work which the Salesian Fathers have

³¹ ASC F 186, see printed Annual Report of December 1909 by the Director of the Orphanage and Industrial School, pp. 1-2.

³² Kappli, p. 18.

³³ ASC F 186, printed Annual Report of Dec. 1909, pp. 13-14.

been doing. So, I am sure, the whole of Tanjore and people around, of whatever caste, of whatever religion, they may be, would deeply deplore the departure of the Salesian Fathers from our midst».³⁴

In spite of the somewhat rhetorical style of the passages cited above, their essential verity cannot be questioned, because the speaker was addressing the people of the place, who knew at least the general condition of the institution.

In a letter which Fr. Carpené sent from Tanjore to Fr. Albera on 15 April 1915, he says explicitly that none of their 60 orphans paid any boarding fees.

«we have to maintain the 60 orphans, none of whom pay boarding fees, with the charity of our good cooperators. You can well imagine in what straits we are especially this year, considering the fact that those places from where most of our help comes have been transformed into battlefields».³⁵

Obviously the Salesians had to struggle hard at all times to be able to maintain their poor orphans; but this was especially the case during the time of the first World War.

5. The Industrial School

The shaky beginnings of St Francis Xavier's Industrial School have been mentioned earlier. When the trades of locksmith and shoemaker had to be given up because of caste prejudices, carpentry and weaving were started in their stead, with the help of Indian craftsmasters towards the end of 1907. Cleric Mario Balestra «who had rare talents for art and drawings» was placed in charge of the workshop. As early as 7 February 1908 the industrial school was recognized by the department of industries of the government of Madras. From the letter of Fr. Carpené cited above we learn that the government gave its recognition because of its special appreciation for the rational teaching imparted in the school.³⁶

In the carpentry department, under Balestra's leadership several instructors in turn worked, the chief of them being a certain Mr Bappu who had undergone teacher's training in the school of the Brothers of St Gabriel at Tindivanam. The workshop of the carpenters was divided into two sections, one for beginners and the other for seniors. As years went by, the apprentices were able to turn out furniture of high quality, - strong, durable and well finished. It was but natural that in such circumstances the carpentry would gain popularity and win the esteem of the public. It received plenty of orders from government offices, Board schools, the municipality and local bodies, so much so that sometimes the workshop had

³⁴ See copy of the speech in SPAM.

³⁵ Kappli, p. 29.

³⁶ SPAM, Fr. Sandanam's article entitled «St Xavier's Industrial School, Thanjavur». See also Kappli, pp. 27-28.

to work over-time. No less significant was the success achieved by the pupils in the public examinations. Every year chosen candidates were sent for the examinations conducted by the government and generally all of them would come off with flying colours. One such successful candidate with outstanding qualities was Mr Kulandaiswamy, who after his training as a teacher at Tindivanam became an instructor in his own former school at Tanjore and remained with the Salesians even after they left that place and went to Vellore to start a similar school there. At least once there was a big fire in the carpentry-shed, caused, it would seem, by jealous rivals. But the courage and team-work of the inmates of the house saved most of the work-benches and furniture.³⁷

Some months after Fr. Balestra's departure for Italy, Fr. John Mora arrived and took charge of the industrial school as its superintendent. When Fr. Leonidas Gatti passed away, Fr. Mora had also to take up the administration of the house as its prefect. His responsibilities increased still further when Fr. Méderlet became the parish priest of Tanjore and hence did not have much time for the orphanage and the industrial school. Fr. Mora too, like his predecessor Fr. Balestra, took a special interest in the carpentry department. The oft-cited letter of Fr. Carpené to Fr. Albera in April 1915 informs us that Fr. Mora taught

«not only the theory but also the practicals, himself handling for first the tools the boys must learn to use».

At the same time Fr. Carpené pointed out that

«the need for a good European instructor of trades is badly felt, since a priest with all the other cares of his ministry cannot fully attend to a workshop. Only then it would be possible to avail of the salary allotted for a qualified tradesmaster and a general annual grant to the school».³⁸

In fact, the government of Madras had promised to pay Rs 1200 per year to the master of trade if he was a qualified European.³⁹

The weaving department was one long shed having several sections, where different activities were carried out, such as preparation of weft thread for shuttles, the stretching of warp in looms, tape making, carpet making and weaving of cloths of different varieties. There were complicated handlooms with eight or ten pedals and special handlooms for silk saris. The weaving factory which started with just two looms in the first year, had acquired eight European handlooms by 1911.

This department was fortunate in having the services of Mr Deva Irakkam, a fully qualified teacher, who with his extraordinary managing capacity raised the

³⁷ SPAM, Fr Sandanam's article mentioned in the previous foot-note.

³⁸ Kappli, p. 29.

³⁹ SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin, letter Méderlet-Albera, 3.2.1913.

school to be one of the best in the district. He was systematic in his work, honest in dealing and dynamic in action. He insisted on clean workmanship and prompt execution. Hence government institutions, convents and charitable establishments placed big orders that brought in a substantial income. Because of his efficient coaching, candidates appearing for government examinations mostly obtained distinctions.⁴⁰ In 1921 the weaving school won three medals of merit with the highest distinction at Patna, in ordinary pattern exhibits.

From the very beginning an industrial exhibition was held at the school every year. All the exhibits were produced by the students themselves. The articles of furniture and clothing were of excellent design and workmanship and excited the admiration of all the visitors. Mr W. E. Haldwell, District Board Engineer, Tanjore, who presided at the opening of the exhibition in 1918 had this to say:

«The students of this industrial school turn out articles of furniture and clothing second to none, as you will see for yourselves in the adjoining room and as the large number of certificates of merit and medals won by them at various exhibitions throughout Southern India will testify».⁴¹

To provide the hard-worked pupils a pleasant distraction from the monotony of the workshops, a brass band was started with the generous contributions of the cooperators. In course of time the Don Bosco Band became so popular that it was often invited for government functions at Tanjore. It was also in great demand for religious feasts and weddings at many places like Pondicherry, Karaikal, Negapatnam, Trichinopoly, Dindigal, Tuticorin, Mayuram and Kumbakonam. In December 1922 it accompanied the pilgrims of the diocese of Mylapore to Goa on the occasion of the third centenary of the canonization of St Francis Xavier and gave a public concert there in the presence of the patriarch of Goa, bishops from all over the country and more than 20,000 pilgrims.⁴²

Even though things were going on fairly well in the industrial school, there were all the same certain difficulties which worried the management. The weaving department was becoming an attractive place for thieves to try their luck. Several times they managed to enter the workshop stealthily in the night, cut the finished cloth from the handlooms and make good their escape. Besides, there was always the possibility of fire destroying all the workshops, since they were only thatched sheds made of bamboos. A more solid structure for the industrial school was an obvious necessity and from 1913 onwards the Salesians had been trying to acquire a large tract of land adjoining their house for the future de-

⁴⁰ SPAM, Fr Sandanam's article on St Xavier's Industrial School.

⁴¹ See Kappli, p. 33.

⁴² Kappli, p. 40. SPAM, file no.13 Mylapore, letter Tomatis-Mathias, 11.12.1922. See also «A Brief History of the Salesian Congregation in South India and Sri Lanka» (poorly written and unpublished), p. 34.

velopment of the industrial school. For many years, however, the grandiose plans for the new building remained merely on paper, as the municipal council opposed the project, wanting to include that land in the proposed «New Town Extension». There followed a tough and prolonged struggle with the municipal council. We are told that the opposition from the council ceased only when a member speaking most vehemently against the request of the Salesians suddenly fell down and died of a massive heart attack. Towards the middle of 1918 the Collector of the district, by a lease deed gave the land in question to the Salesians for the exclusive purpose of building a high school and a technical school on it.⁴³

The building grant promised by the government was delayed for a long time. Finally, on the personal intervention of the governor who had been highly impressed by what he saw at the Salesian campus during his visit in 1921, the government of Madras, acting on the recommendation of Mr Fifes, the inspector of industrial schools, sanctioned the sum of Rs 40,474 for the construction of an industrial school building.⁴⁴ That was, of course, only half the amount required for the construction. The Salesians had to find the other half. Only in 1926 was work for the proposed building actually begun. It was completed and formally opened by A. Ranganatha Mudaliar, the minister for development, Madras on 18 January 1928.⁴⁵ The report which Mgr Louis Mathias, the provincial of India, sent to Fr. Rinaldi, the rector major, on 7 May 1928 says that before leaving Tanjore the Salesians completed a large and magnificent building there for the technical school at a cost of 800,000 Italian lire.⁴⁶ Its equivalent in Indian money at that time would be Rs 160,000. Perhaps there was some exaggeration in the report of Mgr Mathias. The half grant from the government amounted to only about Rs 40,000, as stated above. The farewell speech to the Salesians by Mr. Pannirselvam on 18 April 1928 also speaks of only Rs. 80,000 as the cost of the building.⁴⁷

In the 1920's several distinguished persons visited the technical school. We have on record the messages left by some of them. Sir K. V. Reddy, minister for development, government of Madras wrote at the end of his visit:

«Rev. Father Méderlet has kindly shown me around this institution. Weaving and carpentry form the subjects taught at present. I am really delighted to go round and see the work of the pupils. The more I see, the more I feel convinced that these should form the nucleus of our scheme of Industrial and Technical education in this country. They have placed us under a deep debt of obligation».

Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, member of the Council, government of Madras wrote:

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32. SPAM, Fr. Sandanam's article on St Xavier's Industrial School.

⁴⁴ Kappli, p. 32.

⁴⁵ SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore, see programme of the opening ceremony.

⁴⁶ ASC F 176.

⁴⁷ SPAM, see copy of the speech.

«It gives me genuine pleasure to witness the work turned out at this Institution and the enthusiastic cooperation which has made it the success it undoubtedly is. The infective enthusiasm of the Reverend Fathers has been a source of inspiration and I account the school one of the really formative forces in the country».⁴⁸

The *Madras Mail*, one of the most important daily papers in South India at that time, adjudged the Salesian industrial school of Tanjore to be one of the best in the Madras Presidency and hence in the whole of India.⁴⁹

6. Don Bosco Night School

Many of the orphans of Tanjore who learned a trade at the industrial school in the first years were found to be not eligible to appear for Technical Teachers' Training Examination, because they did not have the necessary general educational qualification. So Fr. Méderlet started a night school in 1910, in order to give the orphans general education, hand in hand with technical training. After undergoing manual training in the day time, they were required to attend regular classes of general education from 5.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

The night school went on working regularly for a number of years and it was recognized by the educational department up to class V in 1921 and up to class VIII as a full fledged higher elementary school in 1931, under the name «Don Bosco's Night School».⁵⁰

7. Don Bosco Press

Fully alive to the importance of the apostolate of the press, the Salesians started in 1924 a printing press in which they gave training to a number of orphans in the various branches of printing, such as composing, binding and handling of treadles and printing machines. The trade was started in a humble way with all the necessary equipment locally purchased from a press which was being closed down due to bankruptcy. The press improved at a modest pace and earned a name for neatness and promptness of execution. With the help of an experienced person who had been a foreman in one of the big presses of the town, it was able to publish Catholic literature and undertake government jobs, court judgements and railway publications.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See «A Brief History of the Salesian Congregation in South India ...», pp. 32-33.

⁴⁹ Kappli, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Kappli, p. 41. See also «A Brief History of the Salesian Congregation in South India...» p. 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

8. The Last Years

8.1 Further Expansion

The last years of Salesian presence at Tanjore were marked by the construction of several large buildings and the growth of the institutions for which those edifices were meant. Because of the first World War and its immediate aftermath no help could come from Europe. Then Fr. Méderlet got the bright idea of getting permission to hold a lottery every year for setting up the school buildings. In this way several thousand rupees were scraped together. The first building that was erected was meant to house St Anthony's School. The building operations were started early in 1920 under the supervision of Fr. Carpené. It was when he was engaged in this work that he got a sunstroke in May of the same year, which eventually forced him to leave India. When the building was finally ready for occupation, the middle school was shifted there in June 1921. But the official inauguration of the building took place only in October when Lord Willingdon, the governor of Madras, visited the Salesian works in Tanjore. The cost of the building was more than Rs 30,000, half of which came as a grant from the government.⁵²

Soon the Salesians felt the need of upgrading the school into a high school. The lottery went on for a few more years and yielded a substantial profit. Besides, by now help was beginning to come from benefactors and friends in Europe. So Fr. Méderlet could begin the construction of another building which was badly needed for accommodating the rapidly increasing number of students in the school. In 1923 it became a full-fledged high school. The new building was constructed under the supervision of Fr. Ignatius Muthu and it was named «Don Bosco Hall».⁵³ According to the report of Fr. Peter Ricaldone, the prefect general of the congregation and extraordinary visitor to the Salesian missions in the East, there were about 200 students in the middle school and about 450 in the high school in January 1927, when he visited the place. He wrote that both the schools were in a flourishing condition.⁵⁴

In 1925 the government awarded the coveted *Kaiser-i-Hind* gold medal to Fr. Méderlet for the following reasons: development of the industrial school; increase in the number of elementary schools from 7 to 24 in the villages around Tanjore; construction of a high school costing Rs 31,000; obtaining house-sites, roads and wells for people of the depressed classes, without distinction of reli-

⁵² SPAM, anonymous description of the house of Tanjore, almost certainly by Fr. Carpené; ASC F 186, letters Mora-Albera, 4.6.1920; Méderlet-Albera, 5.9.1920; Carpené-Munerati, 8.9.1920. - See also Kappli, pp. 25-26.

⁵³ See Fr Sandanam's «Remembrances of My Past: Thanjavur», written on 28.1.1981 and found at the Salesian Documentation Centre, Chennai. See also Kappli, p. 26.

⁵⁴ ASC F 177, Report of Fr. Ricaldone on Tanjore.

gion; collecting money during the War to help children and orphans in Belgium and Italy.⁵⁵

8.2 *Division of the House*

While all this work of expansion, consolidation and beneficence was going on, some of the confreres of the house, notably Frs. Mora and Mariaselvam were dissatisfied with the leadership of Fr. Méderlet as rector. Fr. Mora complained repeatedly to the superiors that he found it very difficult to work under Fr. Méderlet. On 10 July 1922, for example, he wrote from Borgomanero (Italy) to Fr. Piscetta who was a member of the superior chapter:

«I return most willingly to the Mission of India, but permit me to express my extreme repugnance at having to be back with the present Rector of the house of Tanjore».⁵⁶

To Mgr L. Mathias who was the vice-provincial (*visitatore*) of India since 1923 he voiced his complaints several times. The following lines from his letter of 24 September 1925 will serve as a sample:

«I am convinced that no matter what arrangements are made, they will all be of no use if we continue to have the same Rector. There should be no illusions about this. I say this because of my experience of thirteen years.[...] It is impossible to continue like this. We are like a body without a head. You should have stayed here a little longer with us and you would have been convinced that there is no exaggeration in what I say. Let us hope that we will soon be able to say: "Ecce appropinquat redemptio nostra"».⁵⁷

In spite of all these complaints, there was no doubt at all that Fr. Méderlet was a great worker and a man of zeal, held in the highest esteem by the Catholic population of the town and of the villages.⁵⁸ Hence to put an end to the complaints of some of the Salesians, which were to a certain extent justifiable because Fr. Méderlet was disorderly in his administration and was often not able to maintain smooth interpersonal relationships with his confreres, and at the same time to satisfy all shades of opinion, Mgr Mathias decided in October 1925 to constitute the orphanage and the parish into two separate communities. Fr. Méderlet would be the rector (and parish priest) of the parish community, with

⁵⁵ SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927), letter Méderlet-Mathias, 28.2.1925.

⁵⁶ See Kappli, pp. 58-59, where he has given the entire letter.

⁵⁷ SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927). See also in the same file other letters of Mora to Mathias on 17.7.1923; 23.2.1925; 20.5.1925.

⁵⁸ See in ASC F 177, Fr. Ricaldone's report on Tanjore, in which he gives a critical estimate of Fr. Méderlet. - See also *ibid.* A 905, letter Mathias-Ricaldone, 28.2.1928, which speaks of the positive and negative qualities of Fr. Méderlet. - To have an idea of what the Catholic laity of Tanjore thought of Fr. Méderlet, see the farewell speech of Mr Pannirselvam on 18.4.1928, which is found in SPAM.

Fr. Ignatius Muthu as assistant parish priest. A few days later, at the request of Fr. Méderlet, Fr. Mariaselvam also was appointed as assistant parish priest. The community of the orphanage would have Fr. Joseph Hauber from Shillong as its rector, with Fr. Dehlert as prefect and several brothers and clerics as helpers. Fr. Mora was transferred to Shillong as rector.⁵⁹

These carefully planned arrangements of Mgr Mathias were upset when Fr. Tomatis, the rector of San Thome Orphanage, Mylapore passed away unexpectedly on 25 November 1925. As a stop-gap measure Fr. Méderlet was sent to Mylapore to be acting rector there and Fr. Hauber was requested to remain at Tanjore, where he would be also in charge of the parish for the time being.⁶⁰ Three months later Mgr Mathias visited Tanjore and Mylapore and made permanent arrangements for the three Salesian houses in South India. In his letter to Fr. Rinaldi, the rector major, on 17 May 1926 he described the new changes and the reasons for the same.

«Since I realized that Fr. Méderlet would not last more than a year if I were to transfer him for good from Tanjore, I sent him back to Tanjore as parish priest and rector of the parish community, now separated from the orphanage. Fr. Hauber was sent to Mylapore as rector, to take the place of the deceased Fr. Tomatis. Fr. Méderlet in the parish has Frs. Ignatius Muthu and Mariaselvam as assistants. [...] The orphanage and schools of Tanjore are made a separate Salesian house, of which Fr. Dehlert is the rector. He will be the only priest in the house, but he will have several coadjutors and a cleric with him. The priests of the parish will serve as confessors».⁶¹

8.3 *Difficulties with the Vicar General*

Even before the death of Fr. Tomatis and the arrival of Fr. Hauber from Shillong the Salesians of Tanjore (and Mylapore) were facing a serious problem, viz. the unfriendliness of the diocesan authorities. In a letter to Fr. Rinaldi on 19 November 1924 Fr. Dehlert described the situation like this:

«We are no longer liked and therefore they raise so many difficulties. As long as the bishop was at Mylapore, he protected us and helped us. But after his departure, the things have changed very much, since the vicar general and those around him are not friendly towards us».⁶²

In August 1925 Mgr A. M. Teixeira, the vicar general and administrator of the diocese of Mylapore (the bishop was away in Portugal on important business from 1921 onwards) wrote a very harsh letter to Fr. Méderlet, complaining bit-

⁵⁹ SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927), letter Mathias-Méderlet, 18.10.1925.

⁶⁰ SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927), letters Mathias-Hauber; Mathias-Méderlet, 1.12.1925.

⁶¹ ASC F 183, letter Mathias-Rinaldi, 17.5.1926.

⁶² ASC F 183, letter Dehlert-Rinaldi, 19.11.1924.

terly about the financial burden which the Tanjore parish, according to him, was imposing on the diocese. He ominously added that it would be useless for the Salesians to appeal to existing agreements with the diocesan authorities, in order to justify themselves.⁶³ From harsh words he proceeded to hostile actions. In November he paid only half the amount of the salary bills for the period from June to September. A year later he wrote to Fr. Méderlet that from January 1927 the parish priest and his assistant at Tanjore would not be paid their salary any more.⁶⁴ He was obviously treating the formal agreement between the bishop and the Salesian congregation as a scrap of paper!

8.4 *The Salesians withdraw from Tanjore*

Fr. P. Ricaldone, extraordinary visitor to the Salesian missions in the East, visited the houses of Mylapore and Tanjore in January 1927. On the 18th he met Mgr Teixeira, discussed several matters with him and gave him a memorandum outlining the conditions under which the Salesians would continue to work in the diocese of Mylapore. On the 22nd, accompanied by Mgr Mathias and Fr. Méderlet, he proceeded to Tanjore for visitation and was favourably impressed by what he saw there. In his report on Tanjore he wrote:

«It is certain that if they were to leave us to work in peace and if there were not the danger, at some future time, of getting the notice to quit, we would have a splendid future at Tanjore».⁶⁵

On 1 February he and his two companions paid a visit to Pondicherry, to meet Archbishop Morel who had offered the district of North Arcot to the Salesians as an independent mission. Fr. Desquit, the vicar general, took the visitors for a tour of the district. At the end of it, Fr. Ricaldone was in favour of accepting North Arcot, since it would give the Salesians a mission territory of their own.⁶⁶

When the visitor returned to Mylapore on 6 February, he saw the reply of Mgr Teixeira together with a copy of the resolutions passed at the meeting of the councillors and Board of Administration of the diocese. Fr. Ricaldone replied at once:

«Considering what has happened in the past, the letter, and especially the spirit, of the resolutions unanimously passed at the meeting [...] I think it my duty to let your Reverence know that:

1. On the 1st of April 1927 the Salesians will leave Mylapore.
2. On the 1st of April 1928 [...] the Salesians will leave Tanjore.

⁶³ SPAM, file Méderlet-Tanjore (1922-1927), letter Teixeira-Méderlet, 4.8.1925.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, letters Teixeira-Méderlet, 3.11.1925; 15.11.1926.

⁶⁵ ASC F 177, see Fr. Ricaldone's report on Tanjore.

⁶⁶ Archiepiscopal Archives Shillong, Chronicle of the Assam Mission (1925-1931), pp. 272-273.

3. In case your Reverence would want that the Salesians remain at Mylapore till the 1st of April 1928, they will do their best to oblige you».⁶⁷

Mgr Teixeira had second thoughts about his aggressive stance after getting this letter of Fr. Ricaldone. He had certainly not expected such a drastic decision. On 8 February he wrote a very conciliatory letter to the visitor, acknowledging that the Salesians

«have been working there [at Tanjore] for the salvation of souls, the glory of God and the honour of the Catholic Church».

He promised

«to abide by the letter of the agreement regarding Tanjore until otherwise modified by higher authorities».

He even went to the extent of saying that it would be

«a veritable disaster to the Tanjore Mission if at this stage of its development the Salesians were to withdraw from it».⁶⁸

Before departing for Calcutta and Assam, Fr. Ricaldone agreed to keep the Salesians at Mylapore till April 1928 and to think again about Tanjore and then inform Mgr Teixeira of his final decision. On 1 May 1927 from Saigon he wrote to Mgr Teixeira that after much prayer and reflection he felt obliged to communicate to him in the name of the superior general that:

«we have decided to leave Tanjore and the district on 1 May 1928. As I told your Reverence already, we are sorry to leave the field of labour where the Salesians have worked for so many years, but for the reasons known to your Reverence we think it our duty to take such a decision».⁶⁹

In spite of the decision to leave Tanjore within a year, work in all the sections of the two houses continued as before. The new industrial school building was completed according to plan and was solemnly inaugurated in January 1928, as described earlier. On 30 April Mgr Teixeira took charge of all the institutions at Tanjore from the Salesians. The orphanage and the industrial school were entrusted to the management of the St Gabriel Brothers, while the Mylapore clergy took charge of the parish and the other schools. Fr. Dehlert and Bro. Frasson left for Shillong. The rest of the Salesians at Tanjore were told by Mgr Mathias to go to Vellore after about a month of holidays on the hills, to start Salesian work there under the leadership of Fr. Méderlet.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ A copy of this letter is found in SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore. Another copy is found in ASC F 177, along with the report of Fr. Ricaldone on Mylapore.

⁶⁸ SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore, letter Teixeira-Ricaldone, 8.2.1927.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, copy of letter Ricaldone-Teixeira, 1.5.1927.

⁷⁰ SPAM, Relazione della Casa-Missione di Tanjore by Bro. Frasson; file Méderlet-Tanjore (1927-1928), letter Mathias-Méderlet, 15.4.1928.

The question of compensation to the Salesians for the property and buildings which they would leave behind at Tanjore was gently opened by Mgr Mathias in his letter of 30 September 1927 to Mgr Teixeira. The latter replied that in return for all that the Salesians had spent on various buildings in Tanjore, the Bandel monastery, inclusive of its extensive lands, high school buildings etc. could be given in exchange, since the diocese of Mylapore would find it impossible to find the cash required to compensate the Salesians. He continued:

«I know we shall be giving more than we get in return, but under the circumstances, both sides have to take a broad view of things and take Catholic interests into consideration above all others».

These high considerations were probably not without much hypocrisy! It is most likely that Mgr Teixeira was aware by then that Mylapore was in any case going to lose Bandel, by virtue of the new agreement of 1928 between the Holy See and Portugal regarding the abolition of double jurisdiction in India, negotiations for which had been going on for quite some time. Whatever the real situation was, Mgr Mathias accepted the offer.⁷¹

9. Conclusion

The achievements of the Salesians during their 22 years of work at Tanjore were certainly remarkable. When they reached that place, there was just a large parish with a miserably housed middle school catering to about 130 boys and an incipient orphanage with a handful of inmates. By the time they left, the parish was in a flourishing state through the zealous ministry of Fr. Méderlet and his able assistants. Since the spiritual needs of the villagers were well attended to, there were numerous conversions in the outlying villages. Sodalties and the unit of Salesian Cooperators helped to tone up the life of the parish. A well organized choir rendered the feasts solemn. Young people were attracted by games and entertainments and had regular catechism classes. The passion play on Maundy Thursday night, thoroughly reorganized by Fr. Carpené on the lines of that of Oberammergau, with appropriate songs and with human actors in the place of dumb statues, attracted many thousands of people from far and near, most of whom were Hindus.

St Francis Xavier's Orphanage grew from year to year until it came to have 120 boys in 1927. Most of them frequented the industrial school, while a minority attended St Anthony's High School or Middle School. There was also Don Bosco Night School which was started in 1910 in order to supplement the literary

⁷¹ SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore, letters Mathias-Teixeira, 30.9.1927 (copy); Teixeira-Mathias, 20.10.1927; Mathias-Teixeira, 26.10.1927 (copy).

formation of the artisans. St Francis Xavier's Industrial School gradually came to have flourishing carpentry and weaving departments, which regularly sent up candidates for the technical examinations of the government, with 100 per cent success every year. When a press was bought in 1924, a portion of the industrial school was set apart for it and it published Catholic literature and executed government orders. The various sections of the industrial school were housed in solid buildings at the beginning of 1928. St Anthony's School was upgraded to become a full-fledged high school in 1923-24. Don Bosco Hall sheltered St Anthony's Middle School from 1923 onwards. St Anthony's High School, too, functioned in new buildings built by the Salesians in 1921. The two schools together had about 650 students in 1927.

A large playground, acquired from the government, became the centre for matches and tournaments. The Salesian schools of Tanjore regularly won several trophies and medals in the District School Sports. Don Bosco Band became very popular and it was often invited for government functions at Tanjore. It was also in great demand all over central Tamilnadu for religious functions and weddings. The scout unit of St Anthony's School won the appreciation of the people for the services rendered at public functions. At the rally of all the scouts of South India, convened at Madras on the occasion of the visit of Sir Baden Powell in January 1921, the Salesian school of Tanjore came out first among the 110 schools that participated.⁷²

The achievements of the Salesians at Tanjore were so substantial and so obvious that even a hostile critic like Mgr Teixeira, when he faced the prospect of the Salesians leaving the place, was forced to declare that it would be

«a veritable disaster to the Tanjore Mission if at this stage of its development the Salesians were to withdraw from it».⁷³

It has already been stated that the Salesians, in spite of all their successes at Tanjore and their natural attachment to the field in which they had spent themselves for more than 22 years, and in spite of the last-minute promises of good behaviour by Mgr Teixeira, decided to leave the place in the summer of 1928 and go elsewhere to make a new start. The immediate reason was, of course, the consistently hostile attitude of Mgr Teixeira, the vicar general and administrator of the diocese of Mylapore, to which Tanjore belonged. Teixeira's ill will would not have affected the Salesians so much if their juridical position had been strong. But their legal situation was weak. Up to 1921 they were merely administrators of diocesan works. So they could be sent away by an unfriendly head of the dio-

⁷² Cf p. 5 of Fr. Sandanam's notes on Fr. E. Méderlet, found at Salesian Documentation Centre, Provincial House, Chennai; SPAM, see p. 4 of the anonymous description of the house of Tanjore, written almost certainly by Fr. Carpené; ASC F 177, Report of Fr. P. Ricaldone on Tanjore; Kappli, p. 41.

⁷³ SPAM, file no. 13 Mylapore, letter Teixeira-Ricaldone, 8.2.1927.

cese as soon as the period of contract would be over. Even after 1921 when they began to build with their own resources on land given to them by the government for educational purposes, the land and the new buildings, though theirs, were too close to the parish church. Fr. Ricaldone mentioned this difficulty in his report on Tanjore:

«Even if they [i.e. the diocesan authorities] were to take away only the parish from us, it would be impossible afterwards to live in good relationship with the parish priest and the native clergy, which regards us as invaders and exploiters; the proximity of our works to the parish church increases the difficulty».⁷⁴

It was because of all these reasons, as Fr. Ricaldone was careful to point out once again in his report, that

«Fr. Méderlet himself who has been the soul of all these works and who loves Tanjore greatly is of the opinion that we cannot and should not carry on.»⁷⁵

It may be worth while to discuss a little more in detail the question of the legal status of the Salesians at Tanjore. When Don Rua agreed to send the first group of Salesians to Tanjore at the insistent request of Bishop Teotonio de Castro, he only made sure, through the contract that was signed on 19 December 1904, that the needs of the Salesians and their pupils would be provided for during the first five years. Later on, i.e. in 1914 and 1922, further contracts were made with the bishop; but in none of them was there any attempt to make the Salesian works independent of the diocese. Fr. Tomatis apparently wrote several times to the successive provincials of Rome who were in charge of the houses in India that they should study several problems affecting the two houses in India. For example, in his letter of 14 August 1914 to Fr. Gusmano he says:

«The Provincial should: 1. Study our situation in India and see if it is possible to go on like this. To me it seems very doubtful. As you know, here we are not in our own house. We are at the service of the Bishop and nothing belongs to us. We are like flowers in a vase that cannot set deep roots. [...] You must be surprised at my suggesting for study certain questions that should have been dealt with and decided long time back. It is true but necessary. I had suggested them and I was left without the decisions, and I went on day after day without being sure of the morrow».⁷⁶

The provincials of Rome could never find time to pay a visit to the two houses in India. Fr. Conelli, the provincial, wrote to Frs. Tomatis and Méderlet on 30 October 1913:

«Unfortunately I do not think that it will be easy for me to come and meet you this year and get a clear idea of things, without which I am continually unsure as to how I should judge and act with regard to you and your dependents».

⁷⁴ ASC F 177.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Kappli, pp. 39-40.

Nearly one year later (5 September 1914) he wrote to Fr. Tomatis that it would be impossible for him to visit India that year too, since he had so much important work on hand.⁷⁷ This impossibility went on from year to year during the whole of the period in which the houses in India were under provincials in Italy. It was only natural that under such circumstances important problems like the juridical position of the houses in India were left unresolved.

⁷⁷ SPAM, file no. 10 Letters and Documents with Turin, letters Conelli-Tomatis & Méderlet, 30.10.1913; Conelli-Tomatis, 5.9.1914.