

A BRIEF HISTORY OF
THE PROVINCE OF
ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE,
MADRAS



By

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† In Christ

The Citadel,
MADRAS-600010.

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Dearest Confreres,

I am happy to present to you a brief history of the Province written by V. Rev. Fr. Joseph Carreno, one of the charismatic superiors of this province. I hope everyone of you will read through it and take note of the historical facts. May it enlighten us to relive the spirit of Don Bosco and assist us to build up our dear province according to the heart and mind of Don Bosco.

God bless you.

Yours affly. in D.B.

Fr. Benjamin Puthota s.d.b

Provincial



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THE SOUTH INDIAN SALESIAN PROVINCE
Historical Notes by Fr. J. Carreño, SDB

The Salesian Province of South India is not 25 years old as yet, since the decree of its canonical erection is dated 8th February 1934: - another 2 years to go.

Of course, if we are to go back to the prehistory of our Province we must delve into the beginnings of the century and put on record that God's designs have made use of the Padroado Bishops in order to bring the sons of Don Bosco into India.

When the future Patriarch of God, Teutonio De Castro was still a Roman student he shared with his fellow students an ambition: that of visiting Don Bosco and his superiors shared the universal fear prevailing upon ecclesiastical educators: that if the young man went to see Don Bosco he would certainly fall under his holy snares and become a Salesian. Consequently, the permission was refused. However, Fr. De Castro as soon as ordained a priest, went to Turin. Don Bosco was not there and the young priest embarked upon another journey and finally met the Saint. Don Bosco was a worn-out man surrounded by that irradiation of sanctity that was so noticeable in his last days. With tears in his eyes Don Bosco blessed Fr. Teutonio and told him, "You will do very much good." Sixteen years afterwards Fr. De Castro was consecrated Bishop of Mylapore and in 1904 on the occasion of his 'ad limina' visit he went to Turin to plead for a speedy sending of Salesians to his diocese. Nothing was obtained. In the following year the Bishop returns to the attack and finally the Venerable Fr. Rua decides to send Fr. Tomatis at the head of a small batch. As in many other cases the missions profited by the anti-religious laws enforced in France in those years. Fr. Tomatis had been expelled from France after having been a Rector of the famous house of La Navarre. He was at present the catechist of the artisans in Don Bosco's first house, the Oratory of Valdocco. On receiving from Fr. Rua the order to proceed to South India, good Fr. Tomatis went to get some information and advice from the Foreign Missions of Paris and in the following year 1906 he headed the first batch of Salesian Missionaries to arrive in India. They included Fr. Vigneron, Fr. Biebuyck and three Brothers. The choice of Fr. Tomatis proved to be a happy one. He was an exceptionally gifted man. As a boy he had for three years served Don Bosco's Mass - and then his coffee. His 12 years of experience as a Rector, his versatile mind and mastery of

European languages, equipped him for his mission. He was 42 on arrival in India. His first two years were spent in Tanjore after which period he went to Mylapore, to take charge of the San Thome Orphanage where he worked for the Anglo-Indian youth in such a fatherly manner that he well deserved the inscription we read on his tomb stone: "Father of the poor." The members of his batch could not possibly be as successful as their leader. Of course, you could not start a shoemaker's shop just in the Brahmin land of Tanjore. Also the other Brother, who was a smith, did not manage to be successful with his trade there and consequently none of the three brothers was of much help for the inception of a 'Technical School'. Since those distant days, troubles have invariably surrounded the beginning of every 'Technical School'. God knows why!

Fr. Vigneron was a man of deep philosophical and theological preparation, only that his first year in India proved fatal to his health. He was the first Salesian to die on Indian soil on 20th November 1907. He rests not far from his leader in the cemetery of Mylapore.

Fr. Biebuyck rose in popularity to the point of becoming a municipal councillor in Tanjore but very soon he returned home leaving good Fr. Tomatis alone on the field.

Yet that great soul Bishop De Castro who had known our saintly Founder never lost confidence in the ultimate success of the Salesian Mission and still insisted with Fr. Tomatis that he should not confine his activities to Tanjore but take over San Thome's Orphanage in Mylapore as well.

During the last illness of Father Vigneron another great missionary was on his way to the East, Fr. Mederlet, until then the Rector of the Salesian House of Liege. He was on his way to China, but on his passing through Colombo he thought of breaking voyage in order to pay a visit to his confreres in India. Divine Providence so synchronised matters that then the death of Fr. Vigneron was cabled to the Successor of Don Bosco, Fr. Rua cabled back to Fr. Mederlet - "Remain at Tanjore". Thanks to this unexpected reinforcement, it was possible for Fr. Tomatis to accept the Mylapore Orphanage: and so, leaving the new comer in charge of parish of Tanjore, he proceeded for San Thome Orphanage (Madras-Mylapore) where he found a tottering institution of 35 boarders. At his death the orphanage was sheltering 280 boys. Good Bishop De Castro

rejoiced at this development and whenever Fr. Tomatis meekly complained to him of the war that was waged against him, the Bishop used to reply "Father, remember: those around you will one day go, but you will remain."

Bishop De Castro eventually left for Portugal where he was kept for 7 years to return to India as the Patriarch of Goa.

The year 1912 brought valuable reinforcements: they were Fr. Giovanni Mora (senior) and Father Leonida Gatti.

Fr. Mora is still out of range for a historian on account of the principle "post mortem lauda." He is the living representative of the Tanjore days. He was to share with Mgr. Mederlet the golden days of Tanjore, the bitterness of the temporary exile and the joy of the come back.

He eventually helped Mgr. Mederlet and Mgr. Mathias to administer the Archdiocese of Madras as their Vicar General and trained a number of missionaries as the Rector of the Seminary of Poonamallee for nearly two decades.

Fr. Gatti was a man of outstanding qualities and talent, but within 2 years he was struck with an attack of paralysis, had eventually a relapse and died in St. Martha's hospital, Bangalore (not in Tanjore as our Necrology states). He is buried in the cemetery of the parish of the Sacred Heart, of that city.

Now it seems that two extremes are the characteristic of all heroic beginnings: excess of zeal and want of personnel. The parish of Tanjore had a catholic population of 9000 souls. There were some 50 villages scattered in a radius of 16 miles and no sufficient personnel to look after them. Then another man appears on the scene: Rev. Fr. Carpene, a man of splendid qualities again. He could preach in fluent and eloquent Tamil in less than 2 years, and again, whilst he was taking some measurements for the proposed building of the new high school, he got a sunstroke and was advised to leave the tropics.

One most encouraging fact brightened up the work of those pioneers. They were blessed with a discreet number of fine vocations among the boys entrusted to their care. Our venerable Fr. Ignatius Muthu was the first to join the ranks and 2 other bright boys followed suit. Fr. Ignatius must have been seen in Don Bosco's dreams, since he headed that magnificent endless army of Indian Salesians predicted by the Saint. One of the lads was

sent by Fr. Mederlet to do his studies in Home. He was eventually to become the first Bishop of Vellore, Mons. Mariaselvam. His brother very soon followed in his footsteps, and so did other generous lads from the Tamil Nad, the first fruits of the Indian Soil to be received in the great family of Don Bosco.

During this period, missionary and educational activities of Tanjore reached a peak. A high school and Industrial school were built. The weaving, the carpentry and printing sections became very well known. Parallel was to the development of the orphanage in Mylapore.

The year 1922 saw the arrival of the first batch of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who established themselves in Tanjore. Along with them two Polish Salesians arrived, Rev. Fr. Dehlert and Rev. Fr. Piesiur who was to end his life, a victim of expiation of our Province, having borne for four years the heavy cross of excruciating arthritis. He is now buried in our cemetery at Tirupattur. On his tombstone a latin Pauline inscription has been engraved which purports: "We share His sufferings for the purpose of sharing His glory."

The year 1926 greeted the visit of Very Rev. Father Ricaldone, the then Prefect General of the Salesians, on an Extraordinary Visitation to our Far East Missions. On finding that the conditions laid down at the time of our acceptance of the Mylapore and Tanjore Institutions were not being complied with, he intimated to the Administrator of the Diocese of Mylapore that the Salesians would quit both Tanjore and Mylapore in 1928. Indeed when the Visitor was returning from China at the end of 1927 he made this decision irrevocable and ordered the Salesians hand over both institutions to the Mylapore Diocese.

Naturally when the Salesians had to quit the Diocese of Mylapore and especially their work in Tanjore an adequate compensation was demanded for the large capitals invested in those institutions which after so much work they were about to abandon. On the Diocese finding its inability to give an adequate compensation, Monsignor Texeira volunteered to offer to the Salesians the Shrine of Bandel to which the then Salesian Provincial Monsignor Mathias agreed after having secured the necessary permission from Archbishop Perier of Calcutta.

At this stage we may consider the prehistory of the Salesian Province as closed. Now Divine Providence was about to reward the selfless work done by those early missionaries:

they had made a great sacrifice when asked to abandon what they had achieved at the cost of so much labour, but a new era was about to open.

Whilst the hearts of those early Salesians were filled with grief having to leave that field of work which they had cherished and looked after for so many years, there was a remarkable activity in the Apostolic Delegation on account of the revision of the Concordat between the Holy See and the Portuguese Government. Things came to a head in the year 1928 and an adjustment of various dioceses was decided upon.

The old Vicariate of Madras that once upon a time comprised an enormous area reaching out as far as Hyderabad had already been carved out giving origin to various ecclesiastical divisions: but the Archdiocese of Madras which emerged in 1886 was still too extensive for an efficient administration.

In 1928 that fateful year in which the double jurisdiction system was abolished in force of a concordat between the Holy Sea and the Portuguese Government, a new carving was decided which was to bring into existence the new diocese of Nellore and the independent mission of Bellary. But by dint of carving, everybody remembers the fellow who began to make a St. Anthony and ended with a toothpick - the territory of the Archdiocese had shrunk below proportion.

It then dawned upon the legislators that the Salesians had just inherited the mission of the North Arcot from the Archdiocese of Pondicherry: and that its boundaries and those of Madras joined at several points. It could as well be joined to the capital by a bottleneck and made into a new reshuffled Archdiocese of Madras. So it was decided with solomonian opportunity to split the city of Madras now shorn from its dual rule into two territorial jurisdictions, the judicial knife being the winding Coom River: the southern half went to Mylapore and the Northern portion remained to the Archdiocese. And good Fr. Mederlet whose heart had been physically effected by the recent sacrifice of abandoning Tanjore was nominated its first Salesian Archbishop scarcely a month after having settled in Vellore. On receiving the intimation of his appointment, Fr. Mederlet cabled to the saintly successor of Don Bosco, Fr. Rinaldi, his inability to accept: "Indignus sum": but soon the reassuring order came from Turin: "Accept in nomine Domini." Mons. Mederlet was consecrated in St. Mary's Cathedral on the 28th October 1928.

The appointment of Mons. Mederlet to the Archdiocese of Madras was bound to herald a phenomenal development of the Salesian work in South India. In fact it led to the erection of the Salesian province of South India. So far the Salesians had been depending on the Northern Provincial whose headquarters were in Shillong, Assam. It was now evident that the Salesian Family in India was spread over too extensive an area and that the South was going to need an autonomous administration on the eve of its further development. So it was that a decree of the Superior General, authorised by a rescript of the Holy Congregation of Religious dated the 24th January 1934 the Salesian Province of South India giving it for Patron and Titular St. Thomas the Apostle.

The decree of erection was listing a number of houses and residences of which properly speaking only Vellore, Bombay and Tirupattur were Salesian Houses in the proper acception of the name, the rest being missionary outposts, parochial houses and minor seminary.

To steer the rudder of the new born Province was appointed one of the pioneers of Assam who had arrived in his early twenties and had therefore all the knowledge and experience needed for the task, Very Rev. Fr. Eligio Cinato, who was elected to the task by a decree of the 3rd March 1933. He was re-elected to the same post by another decree issued on the 7th November 1939.

Here it might be opportune to recall that this second decree could not extend until the completion of the canonical term by force majeure. Indeed, when it was apparent, towards the middle of the war, that the Salesian Missionaries belonging to enemy nationalities would be interned, Very Rev. Fr. Cinato approached the Salesian Headquarters - then divided between Turin and Rome - and obtained the appointment of an emergency substitute. And although very Rev. Fr. Cinato, not affected by the order of internment, could have remained free and continue to rule his Province, he volunteered to accompany his confreres to captivity. It was in those circumstances that as an emergency measure the Vatican Radio transmitted on the 4th November 1942 the appointment of Fr. J. Carreño to take over the direction of the Province. He in his turn in August 1951 handed over the direction to Very Rev. Fr. A. Pianazzi, a man as acquainted with the depths of the "Summa" as with the hardships of first-hand missionary pioneering, his name being linked both with explorations in virgin fields of Theology as with the first

evangelization of the Garos and the reduction to Grammar and method of their unexplored language. He was appointed Third Provincial of the South Indian Salesian Province by decree of 22nd September 1951.

And now since the history of the Province is the history of every house, it will be enough for us to record here in general the policies and character of the work so far done leaving details for the various chapters.

It can be very well stated that the Salesian Province of South India has kept the characteristics and the spirit most cherished by Don Bosco. First of all it has been a missionary province since the best of its energies have been spent over the missionary field. The transformation of the North Arcot from a spiritually barren district into a centre of flourishing Christian institutions and Christian life is no doubt a matter of legitimate satisfaction for the Province. Even those Salesians devoted to the education of the youth and to the training of Salesian personnel have always devoted a good part of their energies to the care of souls.

The Salesian Province of South India has kept that family spirit which is a tender and cheerful enactment of Christ's command. This Salesian family has done its part to show the outer world how the command of Christ can be brought to reality and has shown the distinguishing mark by which Christ's disciples can be recognised in the middle of the world "in hoc cognoscent omnes." It would be difficult to gauge to what extent this example has influenced both the Christian as well as the non-Christian elements.

The Salesian Missionaries have brought to the field a new tradition of activity and enterprise singling out for their work, of course, the youth of the country. Chapels, schools, orphanages have cropped up everywhere they went.

Following Don Bosco's command the Salesian Province has set about encouraging, cultivating and helping a number of vocations. We can say that 50% of the activities of the Province have been directed to the training of vocations and in particular to the training of the future priests of India, a work so dear to Don Bosco, to the Holy Sea and to the Heart of God.

The second mighty effort as the number goes - of the Salesian Province of South India has been the care of the poor boys. Probably there is hardly one catholic child in the whole

of the North Arcot who can say he has not been given an opportunity to learn his Holy Religion and to do his essential studies. Mostly the inmates of the boarding houses of this Province have always been either aspirants to the priesthood or destitute children.

It will be well to recall at this moment an encouraging incident that takes us back to the days of Mons. Mederlet. Both Very Rev. Father Cinato as well as the Southern Theologians of Shillong heard this account from the mouth of Mons. Mederlet himself. When that good pastor made his last journey to Europe in 1934 he passed through Konnersreuth in order to pay a visit to Teresa Neumann.

The zealous Archbishop wanted to put some questions to her so as to have a guidance for the direction of his archdiocese. But in order to be sure that the seer had really lights from on high, he asked her where was Arni, and what had happened there on 21st December 1933. To the astonishment of the Archbishop she gave a description of the profanation of the Tabernacle and of the Sacred Hosts that had indeed taken place in Arni on that day.

Then the Archbishop made bold to ask her whether the Sacred Heart of Jesus was pleased with the work done by the Salesians in Madras. To his relief the answer was "Yes", to which she added that the Sacred Heart would always be pleased as long as we kept on working for the poor. He must have also been told to hurry up because his end was approaching. That thought seemed to have been ever present to Mons. Mederlet, who in his hurried last hour of the Archdiocese never stopped praying and raising his heart to God.

A great event that gave a mighty push to the development of the Province was the appointment of His Grace Dr. Louis Mathias as the Second Salesian Archbishop of Madras. It was his foresight, his leadership, his prestige and his experience that gave a great encouragement to all the Salesian activities. He steered the way in every enterprise of the Province and was always the best adviser and moral support in every achievement.

Another title of glory for the Salesian Province of South India, is that it was solemnly offered to the Heart of Jesus on the occasion of His feast on the 2nd July 1943. This consecration coincided with the blessing of the new church of the Sacred Heart, the ordination of 6 new priests - amongst whom there were

the three first Indian novices of the Province - and the inauguration of the Aspirantate of Tirupattur. This consecration left such a deep impression on the life of the Province that it can be said that the Province has ever been conscious of its dedication to the Sacred Heart. It was after this that a phenomenal progress overcame the then hard-beaten Province inspite of the war-conditions prevailing outside.

FIRST CELL : VELLORE

Vellore has been the first cell of the Salesian Province of South India. When the Salesians left Tanjore and Mylapore, they were directed to take over the North Arcot as an independent mission. The North Arcot had been detached from the Archdiocese of Pondicherry by force of an agreement entered upon between His Grace Mons. Morel and Very Rev. Father Ricaldone, then Prefect General of the Congregation and Extraordinary Visitor.

A batch of missionaries headed by Fr. Mederlet arrived at Vellore on 31st May, 1928. Their hearts sank on feeling the contrast between their flourishing institution in Tanjore and the desolate new field of labour. They installed themselves in the parish house of the church of Our Lady of the Angels, and their first effort was to look after poor youth in the genuine Salesian tradition.

Strange but true, the house of Vellore which was the first Salesian work of North Arcot, was bound to remain in a stagnant state for many years so far as buildings are concerned, whilst the other Salesian institutions were developing in an ostentatious manner. Immediately a higher Elementary School was started and a boarding house for poor boys was opened. A shed was hurriedly built to house the carpentry shop, and very soon the institution was full of children and of activities.

Inspite of the inadequate buildings, Vellore has always been the centre of varied activities and has always been brimful of boys.

The Salesian institution of Vellore was the Provincial residence till 1935. Partly due to this and partly to being the centre of the North Arcot, that little parochial house which served as the first residence of the Salesian Community was daily visited by some missionary or other.

So the extraordinary circumstance arose that the house which was by all means the most ill-equipped for accommodating people was also the one that gave hospitality in the most generous and abundant manner.

Its walls, seemingly expandable "ad infinitum", have always been crowded with an endless stream of missionaries coming to see their Provincial, parish priests flocking for their purchases in the local market, would-be patients seeking admission in the hospital, weather-beaten labourers of Our Lord's Vineyard coming to fight some odd battle in behalf of their Christians in the Collector's Office or in some bureaucratic trenches of the administration.

For all there was some room, some comfort and a bright welcoming smile. Only for that reason, Vellore deserved to be the hub of the Province. It established a tradition of family spirit and its soul kept perpetually expanding not contained within its shrinking walls. The house of Vellore moreover started in the Province a tradition of charity that has been copied all over.

Its premises have always been people with a crowd of cheerful, noisy youngsters, practically all destitutes. Its carpentry has turned many artisans who now honestly earn their livelihood.

The band has enhanced solemnities and enlivened the routine of the work. Its parish has been a centre of solemn worship and the prayers there offered by the mission, deserved eventually to raise it to the dignity of a Cathedral.

In the year 1938 it was thought already high time for a new workshop, and so the prosperous carpentry was shifted from its thatched shed to a good structure built in steel and asbestos. The inauguration of that new carpentry assumed a great solemnity. It was blessed by His Grace Mons.L. Mathias, in the presence of 3 Ministers of the newly formed Government of Madras.

In the year 1943, chiefly with the help of His Grace Mons. Mathias, a plot of land with its existing bungalow was acquired by the main road side. This building with modification and additional structures was used for housing the fresh started High School, whose recognition was granted by the educational department in the same year. Since then the High School has gained a honourable rank amongst the High Schools of the North Arcot.

This was the peak that Don Bosco Orphanage could in the circumstances reach. It had attained that point under the enthusiastic direction of Very Rev. Father J. Sandanam, one of the first sons of India to become a son of Don Bosco. The Don Bosco band and choir have at times executed pieces that had not

been heard except in concert halls. The carpentry worked at full throttle. Both schools were packed to capacity. The church witnessed the most solemn ceremonies and manifestations of Christian Life. The authorities looked upon that institution with complacency and admiration; and to think that all the intensity of life was possible in an institution without appropriate buildings and accommodation! It was not an unusual sight after night prayers to see the boys with their bed rolled under their arms streaming in different directions towards the verandahs, classrooms and carpentry shop, because there was not a dormitory capable of holding those three hundred youngsters: all the same, they slept soundly under the carpentry benches as happy as larks: the contentment of their hearts in that fine family of Don Bosco was a better comfort than spring mattresses and air-conditioned hotel rooms. However, it was impreative to provide for them a convenient building for the ever growing community and this brings us to the next chapter.

KATPADI ; ST. JOSEPH'S HOME

The real reason why the house of Vellore had to hold its manifold activities in a camp-like institution was that the Salesians were not the owners of the land where they were working. How could they put up structures when they could be asked to quit them at any moment? It was with great effort that the grounds, where the actual High School was standing, were purchased. Also another house by the roadside and some pieces of playground had been bought by the Salesians. But you could not build a Salesian town in a piecemeal manner, on grounds scattered and interspersed all over the area, And whilst the younger sisters of the Vellore institution were going ahead with their building programmes, the first cell of the Province was invariably putting off its schemes "ad kalendas graecas." With a view to achieve independence and eventually start an appropriate building scheme, Very Rev. Father Cinato had already purchased a compact ground in the Officers' Lines, but no opportunity ever cropped up for shifting the institution there.

Providence had another plan in view. In fact in the year 1945 Very Rev. Fr. H. Tuena, one of the first novices of the 1933 batch was appointed Rector of Don Bosco, Vellore. Trusting in our Blessed Lady whose devotion he set to spread about, he started a campaign in his own land Switzerland for the purpose of collecting funds for a worthy house for his orphans. May Mary Help of Christians blessed the efforts and slowly but steadily alms began pouring in.

But where to build when it came to that ? Unexpected developments changed the trend of thought. Astride the main road between Vellore and Katpadi, there is a vast area that had been chalked out by the Cooperative Society for the building of "Greater Vellore." The project went by the name of "Katpadi Scheme." His Grace Mons. Mathias immediately gauged the possibilities of the scheme and hurried to acquire some acres nearby. Those lands were eventually made over to the Salesian Province and by the year 1952 the self sacrificing labours of the good Rector Very Rev. Fr. Tuena could have the satisfaction of starting a mighty structure on those grounds. By 1953 that palace of the orphans was a consoling reality: an imposing and strong building of ferro-concrete, has sprung to existence, in which if you could not exactly hear the ticking of the swiss watches whose makers had generously contributed, you could at least hear the beating of the hearts who have cooperated to the comfort, shelter and education of abandoned youth. God bless them all! That palace of the orphans goes by the name of St. Joseph's Home.

TIRUPATTUR:

One of the first preoccupations of Archbishop Mederlet was that of securing a place for a Salesian Novitiate as to train his missionaries on the spot. It had been recently experimented on large scale by Mons. Mathias, then Salesian Provincial and Prefect Apostolic of Assam, to bring young missionary aspirants to India for their novitiate and ecclesiastical training. It was a bold adventure, but soon it became apparent that it was the best method to have first rate missionaries. Those young men who, in their teens as yet, came to India burning with an apostolic fire, quickly absorbed the necessary knowledge, picked up languages, imbibed the local psychology and got hardened to the excesses of the tropical climate.

The novitiate had been started in 1924 in the North and had proved such a success that Mons. Mederlet thought the time ripe for another novitiate in South India. But where to have it? No doubt Divine Providence had designs of mercy on the poor North Arcot, which was eventually to become a diocese, and in fact the first available chance for a novitiate was offered in the most distant point of the archdiocese: Tirupattur.

Mons. Mederlet motored all his way from Madras to Tirupattur in order to seize the opportunity of buying the so called "Collector's Bungalow" surrounded by an ample

compound of 18 acres. It was being offered for Rs.9,000/-. The hard-pressed owner demanded ready cash on the spot. A local gentleman volunteered to advance the money and the sale deed was executed and duly registered in a couple of days.

In Dec. 1933 the first novices arrived from Europe in order to inaugurate the Novitiate of Salesian South India. The house was in a dilapidated condition. The room chosen as the little chapel had the roof eaten by the white ants, and it was not an unusual sight for the priest turning to the congregation at the "Orate Fratres" to see some huge monkeys peeping through the holes of the roof.

However, the novices were of the militant type and the reconditioning of the building was soon vigorously tackled. (We must now record that all the eight clerical novices of that first Novitiate eventually became priests.) No sanitary arrangements, running water or electricity were available. But the young missionaries gallantly put up with every inconvenience.

Although the novitiate had for all practical purposes started in December 1933 it was not until January 1935 that the first professions were made, just late enough for Mons. Mederlet to see them only from heaven. Indeed Archbishop Mederlet, who had set his heart on that institution, after his return from Europe in 1934 had rushed to the North for the consecration of the Bishops of Shillong and Krishnagar and after an intensive tour of his archdiocese, when he was about to reach Tirupattur on 12th December 1954, the Angel of Death summoned him to heaven in the tiny spot of Pallikonda. He was hearing confessions in the little convent chapel when suddenly his head reclined on the confessional grate and his hand dropped. The Shepherd of shepherds had his faithful to His Eternal reward and whilst both novices as well as the faithful of Tirupattur and Koviloor parishes were waiting for the arrival of their Archbishop, a messenger rushed to announce that His Grace Dr. Mederlet was not of this world any more. The garlands that the novices and people had prepared for his welcome were that very night taken to Madras by the whole community and laid upon his coffin.

In 1935 the novices became of course students of philosophy. Fresh novices arrived from Europe and so the tradition of a regular training Salesian House had thereby been started. Adaptations of all buildings and shy attempts to put up new

structures were every year's features. The house went on normally turning batches of young Salesians for the fast growing fields of activity, until in 1939 the World War broke out and reached with its consequences also the forgotten little town of Tirupattur.

Salesian missionaries of enemy countries were concentrated within the boundaries of the Salesian compound of Tirupattur. This of course only brought an increase in the pitch of activities there. The house found itself a Novitiate, a Studentate of Philosophy and accidentally a Theological College also. It was then felt that the chapel in spite of its various transformations could no longer hold the growing community of Salesians and of the faithful, and then the building of the church of the Sacred Heart was started.

When, at the beginning of January 1943 all the interned Salesians were taken to various Internees Camps in India, both the House as well as the Province were mortally shaken by that measure.

If we could have read into the future, it would have been different. But only God knew what was to happen and what was the fate of all our works. However, the building of the Sacred Heart Church was continued with alacrity and very soon we could see how the protection of the Sacred Heart made itself apparent.

One of the inevitable conclusions to which the Lord compelled us through that ordeal was that we could no longer depend on the yearly arrival of missionary aspirants from the West. The West was lost for all practical purposes and our work had to continue. On finding our house of formation deserted in those moments, we understood that the Master of the Vineyard expected us to fill it to capacity with the children of the land and it was on the 2nd of July 1943 - feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus - that with the greatest solemnity a series of events took place marking a new era in the life of the Province. His Grace Mons. Mathias blessed the new church and consecrated its main altar. Six new Salesian priests were ordained amongst whom there were the first three Indian Novices of the pioneering batch of 1933. All the representative members of the Salesian missionaries gathered together consecrated the Salesian Province of South India to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Joined together in a corner of the new sanctuary there were in those moments a batch of youngsters from South India: they were the

first members of the newly founded official Aspirantate of the Salesian Province of South India: so in a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament the foundation was laid to a movement that was soon to acquire momentum. Since that day the house witnessed a number of developments which have brought it to the present flourishing state: Tirupattur after the completion of several buildings, comprises today one orphanage and a Higher elementary school for the boys and a recognised Matriculation High School, a parish which caters for the spiritual needs of the Catholics of the town. But of all, Tirupattur means chiefly for the Province the "cradle of all its Salesians": it is the nursery of its tender vocations, the hotbed of all its aspirants.

But since Don Bosco wanted his sons to be well equipped for the battle of the school, it was imperative that those boys should be qualified for all engagements. At the request of the Provincial, the University of Madras in March 1951 despatched a commission of Professors to find out whether the institution was fit to be affiliated to the University. Buildings, equipment, library, boarding facilities were scrutinised and finally the verdict passed by the board was highly favourable.

In consequence the Sacred Heart College was affiliated to the University of Madras. There was however a characteristic in the new College: it had by its side a workshop, a mechanical engineering section, with a subservient carpentry: the college had been granted affiliation in a new branch - mechanical engineering - thereby setting a precedent of modern practicality and manual skill amongst the Colleges of India. (The best chemist is the one who knows how to blow his glasses: exclusively "bookish" and "Maya" go together). So the college took as its motto St. Paul's program to Titus: "Ad omne opus bonum instructus": "Ready for any fine undertaking."

If you now visit that training ground of the Salesian Province of South India, you will at successive hours be beset by the intense silence of two hundred boys at study, the deafening din of a youth at play, the rhythmic cadence of a community at prayer, the liturgical chanting at the accompaniment of the electronic organ, the lusty singing of popular choruses, the bee-like humming of the class rooms, the clattering of the linoes, the swarming of the sportsfields, the rattling of the lathes, the acrid fumes of the chemistry lab, --- everywhere a healthy smiling youth eager to bring Christ's message to the youth of India in the Don Bosco way.

SECOND NEST: TIRUPATTUR, DOMINIC SAVIO

In the foregoing chapter, we have omitted one activity of Tirupattur that was eventually to engender an autonomous institution. Although the Salesian House was chiefly intended for the training of the future Salesians yet no Salesian could close his eyes to the sad plight of the children around the place.

A few days after the arrival of the novices, the compound was already crowded with youngsters who came to play and hear a kind word from the Brothers. Very soon 3 or 4 oratories were at work in different villages.

But the return from the oratory was always haunted by the thought of the utter misery in which those poor boys were living. Could anything be done for them? This realisation of every catechist in front of the unfortunate conditions of the Oratory boys had already been foreseen by Don Bosco who in his Rules had already given an organic solution to the situation: "Since it often happens however that boys are found so needy that unless we give them shelter and food our care for them will be of little avail. This Society will open orphanages..."

Those boys of poverty-stricken Anandapetty, Koviloor and neighbouring villages flocked to Don Bosco's shelter. There was one particular village that struck any observer: it was practically a village of widows and orphans. How that? The men had long ago left for the gold mines of Kolar and in those underground galleries where they dug out the precious metal they had left either their lives or limbs or health. A cruel society had not made any provision for the widows and orphans. But the orphans were accepted in our institution and the widows were given work in the construction of our buildings.

A little carpentry and tailoring department and a weaving section were also started and the Higher Elementary School soon obtained recognition from the Education Authorities.

The inmates being over 2 hundred they deserved to be treated as a unit apart. So it was that in the year 1952 the orphanage emancipated itself from the nursing lap of the Salesian House and became "Dominic Savio Orphanage" - a canonically erected Salesian House whose first Rector was Very Rev. Fr. Bernik. It cannot in this case be said that the shadow of a college is lethal for a charitable institution: it rather sped it up into full development. Vivat, crescat, floreat!

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But when the Angel of Death on the 1st Feb. 1944 reaped the young life of Brother Rouiller who in his last months had worked so much for the building of the shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Tirupattur, the necessary permissions were obtained to erect a cemetery in the compound and he did not have to leave the premises of the Salesian Institution even after death. The cemetery of Tirupattur was in this way inaugurated, being built on the same style as the church itself. It has been said - and rightly so - that in Tirupattur everything smiles - even the cemetery.

Next to be called was Fr. Piesiur, who after four years of excruciating sufferings, died in St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore, he died on the 21st April 1945. The body was taken in a special Railway to Jalarpet, where he was expected by all our clergy of Tirupattur. He was buried by the side of his younger brother in religion.

When Fr. Felip, a veteran of our mission was on the 12th May 1950 called to his eternal reward from the last end of India in the Sanatorium of Nagercoil, his body was rushed by car to be buried in the Salesian grounds of Tirupattur, the resting place which is shared by the tiny limbs of some little aspirant. Tirupattur cemetery can be considered as an institution by itself, and as the loving gesture of Don Bosco's family that does not forget her own "qui in Domino moriuntur."

THE SALESIAN GATE OF INDIA - BOMBAY MATUNGA

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They were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Damão, and had their own churches and institutions. Amongst these they had a certain school and boarding house for the training of Goan youth under the administration of a committee of laymen belonging to the so-called "Bombay Catholic Welfare Association." Very Rev. Fr. Freitas - afterwards Mons. Freitas - had been the founder of that school and boarding and, when he was transferred to Poona, he left the direction in the hands of several Goan priests. It was the year 1927 and Mons. Xavier, a brother of the late Patriarch of Goa Don Mateus, was the administrator of Damão. Mons. Xavier, approached the Salesians and invited them to take over the direction of Tardeo Castle School that went by the name of "The Catholic Educational Institute."

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Several years passed on an uneventful Salesian administration during which Fr. Hauber was replaced by Very Rev. Fr. Tornquist. The life of that institution in rented premises was more or less of the routine type until Divine Providence forced the issues. (In the year 1936 when Fr. Tornquist had to return to Argentina on account of ill health, a providential man, Very Rev. Fr. Aurelius Maschio, was recalled from his mission in the wettest point of the world, Cherrapunjee, in order to take the direction of that institution.) It was not before long that one day he was served a notice to vacate the rented premises of his school since the building nothing less than in one of the most fashionable localities in Bombay, Cumbala Hill. The rent was exorbitant namely Rs. 1200/- per month. This huge draining of their finances was an urgent monthly reminder to the Salesians that they should arrange to have their own premises as soon as possible. So a vigorous search was started all throughout the great city of Bombay, and several localities were spotted as perhaps suitable for a Salesian Institution. Finally, by God's grace, a fairly big plot of about 14 acres was found in the locality known as Matunga, and was eventually bought from the Municipality of Bombay. No sooner was the sale deed executed, than the building of the school was vigorously undertaken. All this is very simply stated now, but how many troubles were met, how many difficulties encountered and overcome, how many prayers and sacrifices offered, the reckoning Angels know. A magnificent institution like Don Bosco, Matunga, has always a deep layer of labour and sacrifice at the foundation. Since figures help imagination, we may just state that 7 lakhs were needed - and got - just for a start. All such figures should be multiplied by 4 in order to get the approximate mental picture after devaluation. However, those grounds had a serious setback in so much as most of them were low lying.

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They were flooded during the monsoon and rendered useless even as a playground for months on end.

When the Rector studied a way of levelling the ground he was shocked by the appalling price that would have to be paid for such a herculean task. It was then decided that the filling and levelling of the grounds would be done gradually, namely, that they would eventually take a couple of decades. It was then that the unexpected happened. Whilst the Rector was in Madras attending a meeting of the Provincial Council, the Madras evening papers published the news that a horrible explosion had taken place in Bombay. A ship with a cargo of explosives for the battle front had blown off in the Bombay harbour and had caused an appalling amount of destruction of life and of property, chiefly in the docks area. Fr. Maschio rushed back to Bombay in the fear of finding his institution ashambles. However, Divine protection had been manifest and not a single window pane had cracked. Then the good Rector hurried to the Officer in charge of the removal of the debris and proposed to him that since Don Bosco School was near to the harbour installations that had been destroyed by the explosion, it could be used as an easily reachable dumping ground. The offer was readily accepted and then an astonishing procession of lorries started from the docks heading for Don Bosco School grounds. A service was organised to give some refreshments and cigarettes to the drivers and workers of the lorries, mostly prisoners of war. At no time had the Salesian Congregation spent so much money on cigarettes! The 'smoke' bill monthly rose into four figures! Of course drivers and workers were stimulated by this "Stakhanovism" in such a manner that in a record time some 44,000 lorries had dumped their precious cargo into Don Bosco's compound, which steadily rose and became assuredly one of the best playgrounds of Bombay. A fine and modern three storeyed building was completed by 1942 and a replica of the same building was finished just previous to the untiring Father Maschio's relinquishing office in 1952.

"Don Bosco" of Bombay with its imposing buildings, with the compactness of its compound, with its ample school halls and fine playgrounds, swarming with thousands of youngsters, is the veritable "Salesian Gate of India" and will, when completed, be one of the most remarkable institutions of the Salesian World.

MADRAS - BASIN BRIDGE

The following is the story of an elusive land, hemmed in by most proletarian surroundings, which was chalked out by good St. Joseph to become the Salesian Technical School of Madras.

The story begins, in the year 1928, when Mgr. Mathias came for the consecration of Mgr. Mederlet as Archbishop of Madras, and both went round Madras looking for a suitable place for a technical school. They set their eyes upon an extensive plot of land near Basin Bridge called the "Harness and Saddle Factory." Mgr. Mathias advised the Salesians of Madras to try to secure that land for their Industrial school.

Apparently nothing much was done. In the year 1935 when Mgr. Mathias was appointed to the Archdiocese of Madras, again an effort was done with the purpose of securing that site.

The Provincial, Very Rev. Fr. E. Oinato, approached the Army enquiring about that land. The commander of the Royal Engineers, Madras District, wrote from Bangalore directing him to the Government of Madras, Revenue Department, since the disposal of that property was in their hands. The plot referred to had an extension of 73 acres. The valuation seems to have been Rs. 1,000/- per acre and the buildings are assessed at Rs. 1,53,600/-.

Fr. Oinato kept busy enquiring about this and other lands suitable for an Industrial school.

A letter of the 2nd July 1936 from the Military Estate Office, Madras Circle, to the Archbishop of Madras, who had obviously made again enquiries about the Harness and Saddle Factory, informs His Grace that this offer is too low to be acceptable to the Government of India and is invited to make a final offer: a) for the buildings and 30 acres of land in which they stand: b) for the remaining 109.89 acres.

On the 4th of July, 1936, His Grace is informed that the Government had received an offer of Rs. one lakh for the whole property. They are therefore unable to accept his Grace's offer of Rs. 30,000 for the 30 acres of land on which they stand.

On the 3rd September it is known through private channels, that the land is to be auctioned on the 25th of the month. Again by private information obtained through Fr. Anderson, we are informed that the Government of India have replied to the Military Estate Officer that only Binny & Co's offer could be considered, others being too low for consideration: but that

competition should be stimulated and an effort made to get one lakh for the central portion.

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The land in the Hammas and Saddle Factory had already been used as a dumping ground near Conran - Smith Nagar in Perambur Barracks Road and again the Saddle Factory which was of course considered as a forlorn hope.

In spite of the vigorous interest taken in the matter, it was not possible to secure a convenient ground.

In the year 1947 His Grace went to America to collect machinery for the Industrial School, no matter where it was to be established.

During his absence in America, an opportunity was offered of purchasing 7 acres, 8 grounds and 1,595 sq.ft. of land (here the figures are no trifles) in the quickly growing locality of Shenoy Nagar. In sheer despair, or, we should rather say, trusting in God, it was decided to buy that land for the Technical School since no other was available, and it was indeed bought by the South India Salesian Society at a cost of Rs.59,000 plus fees etc.

At His Grace's return from America with a fine amount of machinery for the Technical school, the plans were completed for the erection of the workshops at Shenoy Nagar. To our dismay, when the Corporation was approached for the sanction of the plans we were informed that the plot was affected by several scheme roads which would not permit the development of the land to suit a technical school. Pressure was made on the Corporation to obtain the cancellation of those roads. The Corporation went so far as to allow the cancellation of one road, but that was hardly any solution. No pressure or influence could persuade the Corporation to drop their road planning scheme.

In a personal interview with the Commissioner, and after having pleaded for the last time for the cancellation, a regret was expressed that whereas we had done serious efforts for a number of years to start a technical school in Madras, the fathers of the city had proved so non-cooperative as to make the scheme impracticable. In the meantime, our machinery was lying idle in some of our old churches turned into godowns. If Madras did not want the Technical School, it should be established elsewhere in South India. Strange enough, the Commissioner then suggested that an exchange could be effected between our land in Shenoy Nagar and some other land that the Corporation had in Perambur area. To our surprise, when the Commissioner displayed the plan of Madras and pointed out the land in question, sure enough, it was precisely the one we had failed to secure for the last 14 years.

The land in the Harness and Saddle Factory had already been plotted out previous to our offer and, by a queer coincidence the central portion comprising several buildings and bound by four roads was found to be nearly exactly equal to our area in Shenoyanagar.

But the city engineer was not convinced of that and consequently complained that the extent of Survey of No 14 of Shenoyanagar land was only 7 acres 8 grounds 657 sq.feet as against 7 acres 8 grounds and 1,595 sq.ft. quoted by us. He claims that the Corporation land to be given in exchange has a sizable excess of area over ours. On our measurements being challenged, Messrs Abbot & Davis, architects, took up the matter, surveyed the land and found out that there was an error in the calculations of the City engineer, and that our Shenoyanagar land was indeed slightly bigger. So the Corporation was compelled to do a slight readjustment of the boundary stones, thanks to which an area almost equal to that of our land at Shenoyanagar was produced by them. (Actually it appears to be only some 69 sq.ft. smaller: but no further readjustment could be done since the Corporation land were bounded on the North, East and West by existing roads and were squirted on the South by a compound wall).

A very reasonable sum of money was stipulated in compensation for the existing buildings.

Immediately an adaptation of the building was started which should provide accommodation for a fine carpentry shop and a mechanical workshop, as well as for the sections of art and printing. A compound wall was erected and the Provincial Office was installed there. The Aspirant Coadjutors who had remained for about two years in Tirupattur came over to Basin Bridge with their staff. St. Joseph's Technical School of Basin Bridge will soon be a Polytechnic for the training of Christian workers and skilled technicians who will eventually hoist in front of the Red slogans of Communism the banner of love and of Christian labour of the Nazareth pattern. (N.B. These historical notes were written in 1950).

HILL STATION - MOUNT DON BOSCO, KOTAGIRI

The history of the Salesian Institutions in the hills is the eternal history of human ingenuousness trying to escape from the scorching sun of the plains in the month of May.

The Salesian Novitiate was started in Tirupattur in December 1933. By March 1934 the novices were still running

about their jobs and sports, climbing mountains and touring the country in their black cassocks! It was a strong experience that suggested that roasting was not exactly indispensable for a thorough Salesian training. By the next months of May and June it had become apparent that there were in India other climates, more appropriate for a house of formation.

However, the first year of the novitiate was bravely spent within the canonical boundaries, since it is known that an absence of a novice from his house of novitiate for a period of over a month renders the novitiate invalid.

The following year, however, the first novices had become students of Philosophy and consequently not bound to remain baking in the premises. This set in motion the ingenuousness of the canonists to find out whether there was a canonical way out from that confinement. A timid solution was attempted by taking the novices to Jalarpet (a far out venture in those days) during the month of May: but even so, in order to be sure of not losing one single day, the novices would daily return to their legitimate domicile. Finally, a permission was obtained from the Holy See to spend the hot months of the novitiate in the Hills. As a consequence the novitiate emigrated 'en masse' to Yercaud and to Bangalore during the successive years. This of course engendered a longing for both places, and efforts were made to secure a locality in either. It would be very long to record how many steps and how much string pulling was done in order to purchase for instance the hill facing the parish in Yercaud which still goes in our parlance under the unofficial and never given name of "Mount St. Joseph."

Gradually the radius of the summer expansion went growing; and it was chiefly due to the paternal interest of our born leader, His Grace Mons. Mathias, that the ideal place was discovered: the green slopes of Kotagiri.

Kotagiri is the uncrowned Queen of the Hills. It has not got the glamour of the mandane life of Ooty nor has it its occasional gloom. Perched on the summit of the Kota Hills at 6500 feet and overlooking the plains of Coimbatore, of whose sight both Coonoor and Ooty are deprived, Kotagiri has an ideal climate all throughout the year. And it also happened that in Kotagiri there was a fine bungalow built on top of a hill that caught His Grace's eye. Just as the priests of the Old Testament

went around Jericho blowing their trumpets until the walls fell, so did our beloved Pastor go round "Glencaye" with a rosary in his hands asking Don Bosco to give it to the novices.

And in fact one fine day "Glencaye" went for sale. But where were there the 50 and odd thousand rupees that were demanded by the owner? Here there is another little proof of the predilection of Divine Providence.

There was in Bangalore a good Father Pinto who after an active life in the service of God went one year on a pilgrimage to Rome and did a little touring in Europe. On passing through Belgium he sought the hospitality of the Salesian Houses and there he spent a few days as in a family. The Prefect of the institution where he was staying on seeing him wearing a very thin cassock gave him a thick one, more suitable for the climate of Belgium. Good Fr. Pinto felt very comfortable and of course very much moved by the gesture; and on leaving the house, he went to give back the cassock and his thanks to Father Prefect. But the Prefect told him he could keep it as a little souvenir and show his Indian friends the kind of cassocks they used in Belgium. Good Fr. Pinto could never forget such a kindness.

On his return to India he informed His Grace Mons. Mathias of his intention of leaving all his savings to the Salesian Congregation for a house of formation. His Grace suggested that charity should rather be done during life than after death. He could give over that money to the Salesians who would make use of it for the purpose of establishing a house of formation or that in Bangalore or elsewhere. As it is not possible to have the novitiate in Bangalore Fr. Pinto agreed that the money be used for the purchase of "Glencaye" at Kotagiri.

"Glencaye" had hardly a few square yards of flat ground, all of it being a slope. So it was necessary to start a colossal work of levelling and filling that involved a very considerable expenditure. Subsequently, an adjoining bungalow and compound were purchased as well as other pieces of land, and hurriedly a structure was put up which became the chapel and study hall. If you add to that the roomy bungalow already in existence you have a picturesque complex which was baptised with the name of "Mount Don Bosco." The novitiate was canonically erected there in the year 1947. And it has already turned out batches of Salesians who whilst working in their various fields of action will ever remember as a pleasant dream

that fine nest of "Mount Don Bosco" perched under the clouds and surrounded by gardens where flowers bloom all year round.

THE RETREAT : YERCAUD

Yercaud had been a favourite summer resort for our young students and novices, the chief reason being that it was the nearest Hill-Station to the North Arcot. Not only during the good Tanjore times those early Salesians had often asked the hospitality of Rev. Fr. Cappelle of the Foreign Mission of Paris to spend their summer holidays in the mild climate of Yercaud.

It was then natural that when the decision was finally taken to shift the novitiate to the hills, the first attempt was spent over Yercaud. And it was a stubborn attempt also, since, inspite of so many adverse conditions, efforts were made in order to purchase from the District Board the hill known to us as "Mount St. Joseph."

When finally all the attempts had been wrecked and "Mt. Don Bosco" was instead purchased in Kotagiri, Yercaud faded into oblivion, although a link was still maintained insomuch as His Grace the Archbishop still went sometimes to His Yercaud "Villa" and the Seminarians of Poonamallee had also in Yercaud their summer resort - a fact which incidentally proved providential since during the war their palatial building of Poonamallee was occupied by the record office first and then by the Military.

It came, then, as a surprise that one day the property known as "The Retreat" and which had been previously refused to the Salesians was suddenly offered for a reasonable sum. His Grace Mons. Mathias who was on the spot negotiated the purchase (and the Salesian Province of South India bought it) knowing that sometime or other it would be useful for many purposes, even if it were only as a vacation resort. We should here record that when Fr. Ricaldone, the then Prefect General of the Salesian Congregation, paid in one of his ramblings to South India a visit to Yercaud, he was so much impressed by the beauty of the landscape and the sweetness of the climate that he wrote in some Visitation Book:- "Yercaud will perhaps one day have a Salesian Novitiate."

'Sed habent sua fata libella'. The 'Retreat' remained uncared for until a chance offered itself. When in 1950 the group of Theologians from the South Indian Province outnumbered their colleagues from the Northern Province, it was found convenient to retain them in the South.

A theologate is a serious thing and much equipment and personnel is required for it. But it could be reasonably expected that the necessary buildings, the library and even the qualified staff could be made available in a couple of years. So it was that the Theologians were that year collected in the "The Retreat."

The buildings we had purchased were wholly inadequate and in a very pitiable condition. But the sacrificing work of Rev. Father Uboldi and afterwards of Rev. Fr. Mauri quickly reconditioned the rickety structure. Much expenditure was involved, but it was worth it, since the situation of Yercaud is really smiling, surrounded by forests and coffee plantations and facing the plains of Salem and the distant hills of Annamalai Range. A new chapel was built, a tiny villa was prepared for the then ailing Fr. Felip - who never occupied it. Electricity was installed and life was made possible for a fairly big community.

The emergency theologate was short-lived, but still it witnessed several ordinations. In the course of events, the theologians were again sent to the central Theologate - although not so "Central" of Mawlai. And afterwards, on finding that the youthful community of Mount Don Bosco at Kotagiri was outgrowing its nest, the Superior had to split it and the novices went to occupy "the Retreat" where new structures had been prepared for them. The Salesian Novitiate was canonically erected in Yercaud in 1953 thus fulfilling Fr. Ricaldone's prophecy. Very Rev. Fr. Sola was appointed its first Novice Master as well as Rector.

BROADWAY - MADRAS

When the abolition of the double Jurisdiction reached Madras in 1928 with its consequences several churches climbed down from the rank of Parish to that of subservient churches. One of them was the Church of Our Lady of Refuge, surrounded by a fine compound, in Broadway. The largeness of the compound in that crowded George Town area was inviting the establishing of some institution there. In fact when in 1936 His Grace Mons. Mathias decided that St. Gabriel's High School - until then housed in a venerable building in Armenian Street should be shifted away from the Cathedral grounds, the grounds of Our Lady of Refuge in Broadway were chosen for the purpose.

The Salesians had been in charge of the school from the year 1928. But the school had not been formally handed over to the Congregation. It was then, on the occasion of its transfer

to Our Lady of Refuge compound that an agreement was entered upon between the Archdiocese and the Salesians, which was eventually sanctioned by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda by a letter dated 7 Jan. 1941, in force of which the Salesians took charge of Our Lady of Refuge's building and compound.

By 1937 a fine concrete structure had been built in the compound of Our Lady of Refuge, where the school had been shifted. The inauguration assumed a great solemnity, being present at the ceremony the Very Rev. Fr. Berruti and Very Rev. Fr. Candela both extraordinary envoys of the Superior General for a visit to all our institutions in Asia. On that occasion a fine bronze statue of St. John Bosco - a near replica of the monument of Turin - was blessed and inaugurated and since then the school has been living its normal busy life. It has turned out hundreds of matriculates and it has won the esteem and respect of the school authorities.

By its side the "Don Bosco Oratory" was started which kept the most cherished lines of Don Bosco's work. The spiritual harvest achieved by the little Oratory has been splendid. Its catechism classes, its feasts, scouting activities, public performances, trips -- have captured the youth of George Town inviting them to the achievement of higher ideals. In 1951 through the untiring zeal of Very Rev. Father Dabove a spacious building rose by its side where eventually the Office of the Salesian Province was shifted. It is known as "Refuge House."

GOLDEN GOA

In the first batch that inaugurated the novitiate of Salesian South India in Tirupattur in 1933 there were two South Indians and two Goans. That was perhaps a hint of Divine Providence suggesting to us that first-class local material for the building of a great Salesian India was available on the spot. But hints are not always at once fully understood, and whereas the gates of the Province were - after 10 years - flung open to South Indian vocations, Goa still remained too distant and inaccessible for a Salesian operation. Yet no place in India had kept such a loving veneration for Don Bosco as Goa. In Goa there Salesian Cooperators of the earliest hour. Even now you can come across old friends who display under your eyes a Cooperator's diploma signed by Venerable Fr. Rua.

As it was, Goa seemed to be more closely in touch with the International Bureau of Cooperators in Turin than it was with the headquarters of the Salesian Province of South India.

Given this atmosphere of Salesianity, you could of course expect a number of attempts being made in order to bring the Salesians to GOA, and that was indeed the case. Friends all over were inviting the Salesians to come and start an institution.

But you should know GOA in order to understand this multiplicity of little offers. Goa lies scattered over prosperous villages. The gentry went to the land. Their proud feeling of independent life scattered them all over the country and seldom allowed of populous agglomerations. Lost under coconut trees and surrounded by paddy fields, you will come across palatial buildings, equipped with all the old-fashioned refinement obtainable in the country. Somebody will play for you at the piano some Brahms's Interlude, will pour for you Porto in Bohemian glasses and show you a spacious dance-hall and of course a devout chapel. (The supreme ambition of a Goan is to build a chapel).

Many times have the Salesians been invited to start some institutions in GOA and the invitation had invariably met with another stereotyped reply: "We have no personnel."

It was necessary that Our Lady should interfere in order to bring the Salesians not to some delightful, hidden spot in the up-country, but straightaway to the heart and capital of Goa for the welfare of this youth. And seemingly since Our Blessed Lady is not bound by objections against Machiavellian methods, she made use of 'War conditions' in India.

We should not forget that about 120 Salesians had been interned by the British during the war, and one of the most outstanding among them was the then Provincial of the North, Fr. Scuderi. When the camp authorities thought it convenient for some purpose to take Fr. Scuderi away from the other Salesians, he was sent to Purander, near Poona, and in this way, when he was finally set free, he had already been brought to the gates of Goa. At first it was thought that the dynamic Father would be allowed to remain in India, but soon the decision of the Government was clearly stated: "Father Scuderi was to quit India for good."

A born missionary, a clean-cut pioneer and an indomitable apostle, he could not reconcile himself to the idea of leaving India, and sure enough, neighbouring and hospitable Goa was offering a temporary shelter.

His Excellency the Most Rev. Jose Da Costa Nunes, the Patriarch of Goa, was an age-long friend of the Salesian. He had been a real father to them when he was the Bishop of Macao, and now that he was ruling the Archdiocese of GOA, he was exultant to offer his welcome to the sons of Don Bosco.

The Provincial and the Rector of Bombay, previous to their flying for an interview with the Home Department, went to GOA in order to find out His Excellency's disposition and see whether a convenient place could be rented for Fr. Scuderi and the other Salesians who might eventually be expelled from India and would be willing to work in Goa. The Patriarch warmly blessed the plan and Divine Providence arranged for a place to be found which would eventually become the permanent seat of the Salesian work. We are referring to the place known as the "Assistencia", an ancient institution which cared for the uncared for. The old and the invalid were living in one of their buildings, whereas the remaining building could be made available for a rent.

Fr. Scuderi arrived in Goa from his internment in Purander and established himself in that rented building. Very soon he was surrounded by a crowd of youngsters who flocked in his daily Oratory attracted by Don Bosco's methods. Soon was it found that there was plenty of scope for the Salesian activities here. In consequence an invitation was extended to those Salesians who were still interned in the camp of Dehra-Dun and who might eventually be repatriated by the British Government. Many volunteered to come and work in Goa rather than quit the missions. Unfortunately, a veto was imposed on some by the camp authorities and consequently when the batch of Salesians arrived in Goa on 17th Oct. 1946, it comprised only the following confreres: Rev. Fathers Ravalico, Moja, Mora, Zola and Colombo. This first batch was received at the harbour by an enthusiastic crowd of youngsters. They immediately set to work chiefly in the Daily Oratory.

Soon was it found, as it happened to Don Bosco himself, that other activities were needed for the welfare of this youth and in fact several orphans were admitted as boarders. A higher elementary Portuguese School was immediately opened and then, considering that none of the existing English Schools of Panjim were under Catholic Management, that they favoured co-education and that no Catechism was taught by them, it was decided that an English High School should be started immediately. At the same

time three oratories were working in various localities. Quite in keeping with the Salesian tradition a small carpentry school was opened as well as a printing press and a tailoring school. All these were possible thanks to the dynamic personality of the Rector, to the phenomenal output of work rendered by the first Salesians, to the most hearty cooperation of the Goan friends, and mainly to the paternal benevolence of His Excellency the Patriarch.

In the meantime, the Salesians were busy looking for a place that they could call their own and in which they could establish their institution. Strange enough, after having been searching all over in the city and in the outskirts, the only ground that appeared convenient for our work was perfectly the one that they were already occupying.

The landlord, a Hindu, told his sons in his death-bed that they should not plot out the land and sell it to different buyers as it had been previously arranged: but that they should sell the whole plot exclusively to the Salesians. In this manner, some 45,000 square yards of land were purchased for our institution. Persuasion and monetary help induced the couple of dozens of tenants to vacate the ground. Hurriedly a building was put up for housing the Portuguese School. A compound wall was built around and a fine chapel was erected as a remembrance of the visit of our Lady of Fatima to Goa. This chapel is the centre of diffusion of piety and especially of devotion to our Blessed Lady. Every 13th of the month it is crowded at noon by devout people who come to remember the happy day when Our Lady appeared in Fatima. The Archconfraternity of Mary Help of Christians was established and all the Marian Solemnities as well as the month of May are celebrated with great splendour.

However, there was a thorn in the structure of the institution. Within the ground the Salesians had purchased there was an enclave belonging to the "Assistencis dos Indigentes": indeed one of their buildings was occupied by the Salesian community. It was then necessary, in order to eliminate that hindrance to the development of the institution, to give in exchange an equal piece of land in a corner of the compound and to build an adequate structure for the inmates of the "Assistencia." This was effected in the year 1953.

BORDERING HOUSE - THE JUNGLE - VALPOI

In the year 1947 the Government of Portuguese India thought of the Salesians in order to run their Trade School

of Valpoi. At the same time His Excellency the Patriarch was thinking of intensifying the Missionary work in the region of Satari whose chief town is Valpoi. His Excellency was consequently requesting the Salesians to take charge of the Parish and mission so as to have the word of God preached in the villages of the jungly Satari where - 25 miles from the body of St. Francis Xavier: - the Gospel had not been preached as yet. So it came about that in a happy conjunction of requests, the Salesians were invited to take up the direction of the professional school as well as the administration of that parish and mission.

Two Salesian Fathers, namely, Fr. Berti and Fr. Mora, were deputed for the task and very soon both the professional school as well as the mission gave cheering signs of activity and success.

At present there is no village in the whole of Satari where the Gospel has not been announced and the professional school is training carpenters and mechanics who have several times given proof of their skill. In fact during the Industrial Exhibition held in Panjim on the occasion of the Centenary of St. Francis Xavier, the work executed in Valpoi by our little apprentices called the attention of the public, both in the carpentry as well as in the mechanical branch.

DESERT BLOSSOMS - SAGAYATHOTTAM

The many years of war and drought made the Province realise that a corporation comprising so many institutions, crowded with youngsters all of them gifted with an excellent appetite should have its own rice fields and not be at the mercy of the vagaries of rationing and whims of rationing officers. Indeed, our orphanages could not possibly be maintained on the rationing pittance, and, on the other side, in the rationing schemes preference was given to the land owner. So it was that those colleges and orphanages which were keeping their own paddy fields found themselves at no trouble for feeding their inmates and were not at the mercy of unimaginative bureaucrats.

On the other side, the Salesians are forbidden by rule to keep big estates and live on their rent. The Salesian rule is a tacit condemnation of the capitalistic way of living. We can own no houses unless we are harbouring our institutions there and we can keep no fields which we ourselves do not work.

It was consequently decided that the Salesian Province would buy some acres of land and grow its own rice; but not in the manner in which coffee estates and tea plantations are run, but in the already traditional way of the Salesians, namely, working it ourselves and giving it the shape of a regular Agricultural Colony or Agricultural School.

But where to find a good number of acres so as to form a sizeable plot? Not in the North Arcot, assuredly - the experts said.

However, by the perspicuity of the then Parish Priest of Uriyurkuppam, Rev.Fr. Amaldoss Anthoniswamy, a large plot of deserted land was found that could perhaps serve our purpose. The elders of the village still remembered that many, many years ago, those deserted barren lands had yielded fine crops of 'Samba'. So the land was bought and a courageous Father was sent to do the pioneering work. Rev.Fr.Codello.

For about one year he had to live in a thatched roofed hut, side by side with the cattle. Summer can be extreme in that vast expanse of barren land of Uriyurkuppam, but everything was bravely borne with faith in the future. Wells were dug, the land levelled, the thirsty fields were brought under irrigation and a first encouraging crop was obtained.

Two years afterwards the crops of the first year would have scarcely been enough for seedlings. Under the courageous and bold management of Fr.Zocchi and his helpers amongst whom was brother Ludwig, Uriyurkuppam, once a desert, is now the granary of the Province. A chapel has been built, granaries had been put up, a tractor with several devices is constantly in action, a number of pumps jet out a powerful gush of water and a fine green velvet carpet of some 50 acres of paddy, waves under the singing the triumph of loving labour over barrenness and drought.

When the groundnut season arrived epical scene take place worthy of Homer's descriptions since they have nothing to envy from the vintage of the Greeks. That land was baptised with the name of Sagayathottam which means the Garden of Mary Help of Christians under whose guard it has been kept.

Incidentally, we should know that when the question arose of the affiliation of the Sacred Heart College of Tirupattur - to the University of Madras, the University demanded, as per rule, the institution for an endowment, the Provincial replied that

we as Salesians and much more as Salesian missionaries in a land of appalling poverty could not freeze three or four lakhs of rupees in the vaults of a bank as a financial backing for our College, whilst so many people were suffering from starvation around us and all our money was indeed used for different enterprises to help our people. Yet not frozen money but living realities could be offered as a guarantee of financial stability. And it was precisely the lands of Sagayathottam that gave full satisfaction to the demands of the University of Madras.

The Missionary outposts scattered all over the North Arcot can hardly be called Salesian Institutions, but they are such an essential part of the Salesian Province of South India, which is missionary to its core, that they must have their separate chapter in this Souvenir of the Jubilee.

The early missionaries who undertook the spiritual administration of the North Arcot were just a handful of pioneers. And very often a missionary had to do many miles on cycle under the extenuating sun of the North Arcot in order to minister to their extensive jurisdiction. A mere look at the 'Elenco' will give even the profane a glimpse of the toils and pains inherent to missionary life in that District. Arni has 61 villages to its care. Chetpet 86 and so with the rest. Just think of the time when four priests had to look after the whole North Arcot.

Chetpet has been called the 'Lourdes' of the South, if there is some wishful thinking in the title it is all prompted by zeal. It is true that Chetpet has a magnificent church, and it was perhaps the sight of churches, like that one that encouraged the extraordinary Visitor Fr. Ricaldone to go ahead and take charge of the independent mission of North Arcot.

To the name of Chetpet, the name of its pastor for many years, Rev. Fr. David, is closely linked. He completed the church, plastering it, enhanced the parochial house and made flourish that Marian outpost with the solemnity of Marian celebrations. The day of the translation of the venerable remains of Rev. Fr. Darras to the shrine was a triumph for Chetpet and for its Pastor.

Arni has witnessed so many initiatives undertaken by its several pastors. The church was thoroughly repaired. The Parochial house was enhanced, the school was built, a weaving section flourished for several years, and numerous other little schools and chapels cropped up in different villages depending on Arni.

Pallikonda is a hallowed place in the esteem of the whole Province since Mons. Mederlet died there whilst raising his hand in Absolution. Side by side with the orphanage run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the missionaries had put up their school and residence.

Tiruvettipuram which up to now was a non-entity from the missionary point of view has now a fine Church, a School, a Residence and a Convent. Its name is closely linked to that of Rev. Fr. Remery.

Polur has always been a smiling centre of missionary activity. Both Polur as well as its depending villages have seen as a normal feature, chapels and schools being built all over.

Other missionary posts have since been passed over to the Diocesan clergy. But those days are not too distant yet, when Pattiavaram meant air-tight isolation from the civilised - or is it sophisticated? - way of life. That good Fr. Albertini - now dead - who spent there years of his already mature life, without seeing bread, meat or vegetables, but once or twice a week (a 'sadhu' would not mind that, but not all of us have been trained from childhood to sleep on a bed of nails.) And if those early missionaries jokingly borne the "comforts" of their missionary outposts, braving especially that cultural and psychological isolation that hurts more than a hot curry, they did so because they passionately loved their missions, their flock, for their poor people.

But the chief achievements of missionaries will always remain unsung in this life for the simple reason that what the world wants is something spectacular and impressive. Only a missionary knows what a new chapel, be it a simple hut with a thatched roof, means to him and to the advancement of God's Kingdom. You cannot compile a Souvenir on such achievements as temporary huts - yet he knows well that he can very well go on building the Kingdom of God with the help of such humble structures. One more village that comes to Christianity, that adores God and loves its neighbour cannot shine on a tricoloured block of a Souvenir: but it is certainly the thickest consolation for a missionary and a motive of indebtedness to the Heart of God.

The North Arcot might not be the most shining achievement of the Salesian Province of South India; yet the reckoning angels must have been very busy recording the amount of labour, of physical and moral suffering, of infinite love and untold heroism that has been poured into the barren expanse of the North Arcot by so many unknown heroes. But God knows them and that is enough. One thing is certain: that whilst once upon a time, the North Arcot was a neglected portion of Christ's Vineyard on account of the scarcity of priests claimed back by the First World War, and then kept back by its consequences, or put out of action by age and ill-health, now it is flourishing with all kinds of institutions exclusively prompted and brought to existence by a self-sacrificing zeal and by a burning love of God and of man.