

“FOR THE SAKE OF THY
WORDS”

LIFE OF
FATHER ANDREW BELTRAMI
SALESIAN OF DON BOSCO

By
ANGELO FRANCO, S.D.B., D.D.

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Rev. Fr. ANDREW BELTRAMI

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Life of
FR. ANDREW BELTRAMI

Early Years

OMEGNA is a picturesque little town nestling at the foot of the Italian Alps and lying on the shore of Lake Orta. It owes its charm not merely to the unrivalled beauty of its surroundings, but also to historical and religious associations of no common interest. Tradition has it that the whole country was evangelized by St. Julius, a famous missionary apostle of the fifth century, who after having wrought many wonders and built many a church on the ruins of pagan temples, ended his life on the little island that rises in the lake. A stately basilica built on the spot of the Saint's death contains to this day his relics and is the goal of many devout pilgrimages from the surrounding country.

Here on June 24th, 1870, was born Andrew Beltrami, the eldest son of a family of ten children. To what extent the natural beauties of the place and its religious associations influenced his character will be seen later. For the present it may be enough to observe that right to the end of his days he had an intense love for his native place.

His father, Anthony, was an honest, industrious tradesman, a good Catholic of the old type and a man highly esteemed by every one. But faith and devotion in his family was best exemplified in his mother Catherine from whom all the children received their main formative influence. We learn

that she offered her children to Our Lord as soon as they were born and that it was one of her principles to pray every day that God might take them back from her rather than let them grow up without also growing in the love of His Commandments.

Not born a Saint

Andrew was not born a saint, far from it. His first teachers all agree that the child had a quick intelligence but had also a very lively disposition, and was not at all easy to manage. He wanted to know the reason for everything; blind acceptance of fact was not enough. He often got into trouble with his little pranks and escapades. We have also the testimony of his brother that Andrew had an impetuous nature—that he would not brook any opposition. Once one of his school teachers scolded him for some act of disobedience. “If you play any more of these tricks,” she told him, “Our Lord won’t take you to Heaven.” Quick came the reply, “Then I’ll go to Our Lady.”

“And do you expect Our Lady will take the part of a naughty little boy like you?”

“Well, then, I’ll go to St. Aloysius and tell him I want to be good like him and he will help me.”

This little incident is not without its value. It gives us an insight into the soul of the child. It reveals its native pride and independence which in after years with God’s grace he was to turn to good account. Furthermore it gives us a glimpse of his instinctive confidence in Our Blessed Lady and of the early impression which the angelic figure of St. Aloysius had already stamped in his mind. His words were prophetic. Andrew Beltrami was to be in many respects the Aloysius of the nascent Salesian Congregation.

The protective influence of his mother

His sister contrasts his natural vivacity with the earnestness with which he joined in the family prayers and prepared himself for Confession as soon as he was admitted to the Sacrament: evident proof that his mother's teaching went beneath the surface and that God's grace was working in his soul. At the age of ten he made his first Holy Communion and soon after he received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

By that time having completed his elementary schooling he went for two years as a day pupil to the high grade school in the Conti College of Omegna. This was most unfortunate. The College was under secular management and its moral tone was far from being good. Discipline was lax and bad example was rampant. To what extent Andrew then in his most impressionable years of his boyhood was affected we shall never know, but it seems certain that his virtue suffered. Though we need not accept the exaggerated picture of these two years which he as a fervent novice gave us later on, the fact must be admitted that the delicate and impressionable soul of the boy received many a shock from the loose behaviour of irresponsible companions. Happily the gentle and protective influence of his mother was at hand and this proved the salvation of the precocious and high-spirited lad.

We do not hear that the priests of the town ever made any real contact with the boy. They were satisfied that he should not miss his religious duties and they left it at that. Such were the accepted methods of those days. The priests lived an austere life, delivered polished sermons, were conscientious in imparting religious instruction. On the whole they kept aloof from their flock, and showed nothing of that kindly interest and solicitude that makes the priest stop the boy passing by, asking some simple question, and conclude with that word which, to use an expression of Don Bosco, "does one good."

Frank and Truthful

There were other traits in his character which guaranteed that the boy would be all right in the end. He was frank and truthful. *Yes* for him meant *yes*, and *no* meant *no*: he disliked any kind of insincerity. Again, he was attracted to the poor and he was visibly happy when he had an opportunity of giving them any alms he could lay aside for that purpose.

At the end of the scholastic year his report was most gratifying. The boy showed remarkable intelligence. Why not transfer him to a better school where he could be given a classical education so necessary for a professional career? For Andrew was already building castles in the air, evidently encouraged by his father whose ambition was to make a doctor of his eldest son. In their search for a secondary school his parents did not find it hard to make a choice. Being regular readers of the *Salesian Bulletin* they knew of the Salesian College at Lanzo near Turin: so they decided that Andrew should go to Lanzo at the opening of the new term in the autumn 1883.

A Boy Leader

ANDREW entered the Salesian school at Lanzo on October 24th, 1883. On that day he must have had a dim perception that the dawn of a new era was breaking for him. This is clear from his first impressions which in later life he confided to a friend. His mother had accompanied him to Lanzo and it was late in the afternoon when Andrew bade her goodbye and made his way to the school's playground. Recreation was in full swing. A young brother who was chatting with some boys noticed the newly arrived pupil and invited him to join his group. This put him at ease at once. "To see all those boys and priests mingle freely in conversation,—he wrote afterwards,—to see them join happily in all the games was a revelation to me." In the evening at the conclusion of the short night prayers said by all the boys and priests under the open portico, father Director mounted a little stool and talked to the boys for a few minutes. The simple and homely words, concluded by a hearty 'good night boys' and the even heartier response 'good night, father,' impressed him deeply.

What a change from the chilly atmosphere of his former school. It was like leaving a place of shadows for a sunlit world. The boy intelligent, keenly sensitive, now on the threshold of adolescence (he was then 13 years old) grasped the contrast and the reaction was immediate. "I like the school,—he wrote a few days later to his parents.—I really intend to show

my gratitude to you for all you have done for me." In the same letter he characteristically asked for his rubber ball which he had forgotten to take with him.

Began with a bad mark

But if his intention of settling down to a life of discipline and study was genuine enough it does not appear that results were at once evident. In fact Andrew's student's life at Lanzo began with a bad mark. It can still be seen on the Lanzo school register. Fortunately the bad mark led to a providential meeting. The Prefect of Studies sent for the boy and after pointing out what must have been some common breaches of school discipline stressed the importance of taking things seriously. The words of encouragement even more than the mild reprimand impressed themselves on the boy's mind and Andrew, when back in the study-hall, wrote down the advice given him by the priest. He wrote it down because he intended to carry it out.

A few days afterwards Andrew had the good fortune of making contact with Father Catechist, another man of encouragement. The priest noticing the boy's good dispositions urged him to strengthen his will by a more regular frequentation of the Sacraments.

Vis unita fortior

Some time later Fr. Catechist gave a talk on the Sodality of the Blessed Sacrament stressing the great privilege of serving at the altar. This impressed his mind so much that he asked to join the Sodality. Now one must not jump at once to the conclusion that all the boys at Lanzo would feel enthusiastic about the idea. It should be remembered what Italy was in those days. It was still in the throes of a long-standing anticlericalism that chilled any sort of religious enthusiasm: even youth was affected. Though ready to practise their

ordinary religious duties most boys would fight shy of taking part in any external show of piety. The red cassock and the immaculate surplice had little appeal to the average Italian boy. Don Bosco had faced this problem also and solved it in his usual incomparable way. He insisted that religious functions should be carried out with dignity and splendour and sought every opportunity of impressing upon the mind of his boys the solemn beauty of the liturgy. When he had won over a few to his cause he grouped them together in a Sodality. *Vis unita fortior*. The corporate spirit of the Sodality and the mutual good example gave them a sense of strength and enabled them to trample upon human respect.

The rule of these Sodalities were very simple, but the spirit was what really mattered. It was not a question of adding to the ordinary practices of piety of the school. The Saint asked the Sodalists to lead the other boys in the exact observance of the rules of the house, in keenness in work, and to show in a practical way that a more regular frequentation of the Sacraments far from having a dispiriting effect rather added zest and gaiety to the school's life. The joyous life of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone and other Salesian boys was clear proof of that. The examples of these lads as described with charming simplicity and touching affection in the Saint's little books were on and off put before the Sodalists by their Superiors and the result was not long in coming. Their piety and industry became contagious. They developed an apostolic spirit, a sense of leadership. This was in fact what the Saint wanted to see in his boys.

Dropped a hint and led the way

We are told that even in his first school year at Lanzo Andrew had already acquired a remarkable influence over his companions. For instance when it was a question of making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament—a practice much encouraged at the School—he always managed to entice a few of his companions to accompany him. He just dropped a hint and led

the way. One of his fellow students remembers how one day during recreation — it was the carnival season and there was plenty of fun going on — Andrew mentioned to him that in the nearby parish church there was the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Would he join him for a visit? "At first I demurred," his companion writes, "for fear of missing some of the sports, but finally I agreed. I have never regretted that little act of self denial. It did me good to kneel near Andrew and to see his earnestness at prayer."

In other ways Andrew gave proof of his good influence over his companions. During the Easter retreat the pupils 'according to custom' had been asked to spend one recreation in silence. A giddy boy on the first day openly disregarded the admonition. He started singing in a moderate tone a funny tune: "Rataplan! rataplan!! . . ." causing not a little commotion in the group around him. The assistant was soon on the spot, for he thought that the disturbance might be contagious and therefore should not be left unpunished. But the culprit had already made himself scarce. The situation becoming critical Andrew who knew the delinquent approached him and in a whisper advised him to own up. "You have made a fool of yourself," he said, "You had better own up. I am sure it will be all right if you do so at once." The boy plucked up courage and confessed. The assistant looked at him severely but let him off with a slight punishment: and even this through the good offices of Andrew was soon revoked. On another occasion it was the case of a boy who found an uncanny delight in playing tricks on the old porter of the school. The game was very mean and Andrew told him so. The boy saw his foolishness and apologised.

Refined lad

There were also some fine natural traits that accounted for Andrew's ascendancy over his companions. He is described as of manly appearance, broad forehead, large penetrating eyes. Always neat in his dress, even a bit smart, he had refined and

engaging ways which made his presence welcome everywhere. He had not a good voice, but he was a good actor. Add to all that his exceptional intellectual gifts and you will understand why his companions looked up to him as a leader. But he never posed as such. One evening it was rumoured in the school that some boys of the lowest form as they came back from their walk had lost the way in the woods and failed to return with the group. The Superior began to grow anxious as darkness was falling and he knew that it would be very difficult for little boys to find their way back in such mountainous country full of ravines. Andrew offered at once to go to the rescue. With some of the more agile lads and a few Coadjutors he climbed up the mountain scouring it in every direction until voices in the distance told where the poor little fellows were. On the following day all the boys who had a part in the adventure were boasting about their feat; but it was noticed that Andrew kept quiet about it.

In the arena of studies

It is beyond doubt that Lanzo was fortunate in its Superiors. All trained by Don Bosco they had learnt from him the art of stimulating their pupils by word and above all by the compelling power of example. At Lanzo character training had its due and consistent emphasis.

"On Sunday evening, — writes a fellow student of Andrew, — Fr. Borio, the Prefect of Studies, would come to the study-hall during the last hour to read the weekly marks, both for conduct and for study. That was the great event of the week and much importance was attached to this solemn proclamation of the 'victors' in the arena of studies. The boys were classified as excellent with the mark 'optime', fair with 'tere optime' and unsatisfactory with the strange mark 'bene'. The latter were very rare and if no reform was noticeable they were eventually asked to leave. The reading of the marks was concluded by a brief talk intended to rouse the laggard and to stimulate the steady. The priest used often to set before us the example of

men who had achieved success not so much by quick intelligence as by grit and perseverance. I still remember the vivid description which he once gave us of the life and character of Benjamin Franklin whose attainments were mainly due to the strict use he made of his time. On another occasion he urged us to imitate a distinguished Italian, Vittorio Alfieri, who also achieved a great distinction in the field of letters by sheer will power. The secret of his success had been: 'I willed — I willed at all times — I willed unflinchingly.' These brief exhortations and the fact that they came from a man who himself set the example of what he said made a deep impression upon the students rousing a keen spirit of emulation. Noticeable to a keen observer was their effect on Andrew. During the Easter Retreat he wrote down as his chief resolution '*Serva tempus* — "I will make good use of my time": a singular resolve for one of his age, an age at which as a rule boys are content with generic and mostly sentimental resolutions. Remarkable indeed was the ingenuity which he displayed in order to make strict use of all the bits of time. He always had a book in his pocket, and thus during free intervals was able to learn by heart many pages from the best Italian authors. On one occasion the teachers of Italian literature suggested a contest amongst his pupils: they were to learn by heart the best passage of Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*. Andrew came off first in the contest: he had been able to memorize no less than sixteen pages of the famous novel. On the other hand faithful to the principle '*age quod agis*' in his recreation time he threw himself with his characteristic energy into every game, especially the organized games in which the whole school took part. "When Andrew left Lanzo," wrote one of his old superiors, "we somehow felt that the moving spirit of every recreation had gone: his departure was in this respect a real loss to the School."

What a change in one year

A visit to Turin at the end of the year, on the occasion of the feast of Don Bosco, left a lasting impression on his mind.

He had been chosen to read an address on behalf of the school and the Saint was so delighted with it that he asked him to read it again: and then beckoning to him that he had something to tell him he whispered in his ear some confidential words. For the whole day Andrew seemed absorbed in one grand idea and nothing around seemed to interest him. Another date which he always considered a red letter day in his life was the 16th of July of that year: when he consecrated himself to Our Lady by being invested with the Brown Scapular. This shows that devotion to Our Lady was already an important feature in his devotional life.

In August he went home for his usual summer holidays. "I could hardly recognize him," remarked his mother. "What a change in one year. He had acquired good habits. He had turned into a serious-minded and studious boy. He had a fixed time for walks, religious duties, and he found leisure for much reading. His influence for good on his brothers and his companions was noticed by all in the town. What many still remember was the regularity with which every Friday invariably he went to Confession in the parish church." But the marked change which astonished his mother and all who knew him should not lead us to the conclusion that the boy's high spirits had entirely lost their fire. Far from it. We are told that on his arrival home there was a quarrel between him and his brother: and it was no light quarrel, it ended in a fight. Andrew was determined to destroy some books of the family library, a couple of sentimental novels of dubious character; Joseph objected on the plea that those books were partly his own property; hence the quarrel. This incident should not be forgotten. More than any other it reveals Andrew's self assertive temperament and the efforts that it must have cost him to bring it into subjection.

The first spark

When after a well enjoyed rest he returned to the College in October he was allowed to skip one grade: and all were

surprised to see that in spite of that he was soon again at the top of the class. He was to keep the same place next year when he would move again from three to form five. Undoubtedly he was not merely a clever student, he was brilliant. But success and human praise did not turn his head. Indeed, his heart was gradually becoming fixed on higher ideals. Nor should this cause surprise. The atmosphere of Lanzo was not only one of intellectual keenness. Don Bosco from Turin was urging his sons not to be content with forming good christians and good scholars, he asked them to aim higher: "The Church,—he said,—is in need of saints and apostles." Hence at Lanzo every opportunity was seized upon and used to that end.

One of such occasions which caused at Lanzo an unusual stirring of the waters was the visit of Fr. Cagliero just back from America and about to be consecrated Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia. The valiant missionary addressed the boys and described in vivid colours his apostolic adventures and extolled the nobility of the missionary life, a life utterly dedicated to the service of the great King. Even the indifferent and apathetic were roused and much more the ardent and generous nature of Andrew Beltrami. It has been well said that "the yearning for some apostolic destination, the missionary impulse, is a well known element in the youth of ardent natures." After that day the missions were for long the topic of many a conversation; and some one adds that even the geography class threatened to be converted into missionary propaganda. One of Andrew's friends remembers the keen interest with which he began to read the missionary letters in the Salesian Bulletin. That event was no doubt the first spark which turned his thoughts in the direction of a religious vocation.

Spurring, encouraging, coaching youth

It was during the second year of his school life that his piety began to be markedly eucharistic. He began to frequent the Sacraments more regularly and during the month of May

he went daily to Holy Communion. Every Friday he performed some special act of devotion in honour of the Sacred Heart. Saturdays were marked by an act of self denial in honour of Our Lady : he usually deprived himself of his dessert which he gave to some one of his companions whom he wanted to be friend — a practice evidently inspired by the example of Dominic Savio. The success of his apostolate amongst his companions, he attributed to Our Lady's help. He always spoke of it as a favour which he had received from her. Of such apostolate we have already mentioned several interesting facts, but one more should be added.

There was in his form a boy whose behaviour was reckless and well nigh incorrigible and the superiors were concerned about it. As a last resort they placed him near Andrew in the room. Andrew's tactics was to be understanding and patient — and to take none or little notice of his companion's fits of thoughtlessness. Eventually the boy fell under the spell of Andrew's goodness and steady example and he mended his ways. He joined the ecclesiastical career and became a worthy priest — a Canon of the Cathedral Church of Biella. Time passed quickly at Lanzo and so also this second year soon came to an end. That year, 1885, Andrew's form carried away the largest number of distinctions and awards in the whole school. Such triumphs, it was whispered by many, could not be explained but by the lead which Andrew gave to all his classmates.

During the following vacation Andrew managed to master the elements of Greek grammar. His ambition was to skip a form yet again and to complete in three years the whole course of humanities. The privilege was granted him and in October 1885 he joined the upper form. During his last year he was particularly fortunate in benefiting from the tuition of Fr. Guidazio, the new superior, a classical scholar who had the rare ability of making literature real and alive. His last year's work was crowned with signal success. The rhetoric form had been told that they were to sit for their matriculation at the D'Azeglio High School in Turin. They were to spare no pains

in their preparation as the honour of Lanzo depended upon them. Of this preparation Andrew was, we are told, the animating spirit. He went about spurring the laggard, encouraging the timid, and patiently coaching any one in need of help. Above all he led them all in fervent prayer that God might crown their efforts. Expectations were amply fulfilled ; and Andrew not only came out ahead of his fellow pupils but topped the whole list of candidates. When the news of Andrew's brilliant achievement was made known to the boys, they rose to their feet and greeted the announcement with an endless acclamation. Lanzo could be proud of its pupil.

III

His Salesian Vocation

WHAT doth it profit a man?' The words once fallen from our Lord's lips and often re-echoed through the centuries have stirred many a Xavier to momentous decisions. They are the favourite text of many a preacher and must, no doubt, have reached more than once the attentive ears of Andrew Beltrami.

"What is my life going to be?" This is a question which he is sure to have soon put to himself. That the Hound of Heaven was busy in the pursuit of his soul, that mysterious and vague aspirations after something better than a medical career were already arising in his mind became clear before the end of his second School year. The visit of Fr. Cagliero had left a deep impression on him. At the end of that year he asked as a special privilege to be allowed to make a Retreat at San Benigno with the Salesians. There he prayed fervently for light, made a general confession to Don Bosco and resolved to give his heart to God completely. But with regard to his future career he had not yet reached a decision. The fact was that a conflict — and a severe one — was going on in his soul. It seemed clear to him that he was called to the priesthood; this had been in his mind for some time.

Where will He find full peace and contentment?

But was he to be a secular or a religious? Strong attractions turned his mind in the direction of the diocesan priesthood. For one thing his parents, and especially his father, would not oppose his vocation, but took it for granted that he would join the diocesan clergy. The parish priest was also pressing in that direction and had offered to make the necessary arrangements for Andrew's admittance to the diocesan seminary. All sorts of plans were in the air and a young cousin had already signified the desire to have reserved for her the privilege of embroidering the chasuble for his first Mass! But Andrew was reticent. Secret whisperings which had been going on for some time in the depth of his soul intimated with over increasing insistence that only religious life in the Salesian Congregation could bring him full peace and contentment. Not that the Salesian life was, from the human point of view, particularly attractive, in those days especially. It was rather the reverse. It was considered a hard, rough form of life. It was thought by many that only the hard peasant reared on the land could stand it. Salesian poverty was proverbial. The respectable set found an uncanny delight in contrasting the refined appearance of the neatly dressed parish priest with the shabby look of the hard working Salesian, well known for his fast fading cassock and well patched shoes. Indeed it was whispered in presbytery circles that these modern religious had not sufficient regard for priestly decorum. How could they be expected to command respect when their mode of life bound them to run about all day long in the playgrounds of their Oratories followed by a crowd of noisy and grubby children? It was also observed that the conditions under which these young men attended to their studies were simply forbidding. Just fancy these poor clerics obliged to pour over their theology books while keeping an eye on their charges in the workshops amid the din of hammers and the perpetual screeching of saws!

In any case it would not do for a brilliant young man to join this new Congregation: what sort of prospects would there be in store for him? In the diocesan seminaries there were far



OMEGA .. a picturesque little town nestling at the foot of the Italian Alps.
Here was born Andrew Beltrami.

better opportunities and, if one had talent, it could not be easily hidden in a napkin. These remarks, freely whispered even in the circle of friends devoted to Don Bosco, were sure to reach Andrew's ear and make an impression upon a young lad who at the age of 16, flattered by recent brilliant success had to make a momentous decision. And yet in spite of all these considerations the voice which called Andrew to give up all and choose the 'better part' was growing stronger than ever. Since the first day he had entered Lanzo his soul had been able to breathe freely. He had found the atmosphere he needed. Besides, he had seen Don Bosco, he had had a heart to heart talk with him : the Saint had given him one of those searching glances which had completely won over his soul. He felt that to be a son of this great father would fulfil the highest ambition of his life. The chief obstacle was to part with his parents to whom he was greatly attached. It meant a heart breaking wrench; but the sacrifice had to be made. God was demanding the unreserved surrender of his heart. This he felt especially during the Easter Retreat of his last year at school, during which he fervently prayed for light and talked over his vocation with the preacher. Yet he still hesitated to take the plunge.

In a flash he saw

One day at the end of the term he went to see the Rector, determined to seek his advice and reach a final decision. It was a hot July after-noon and recreation was in full swing down below in the playground. As he unburdened his soul to his Superior the confused noise of 200 boys engaged in all kinds of games broke, now and then, upon the quiet of the room. Fr. Guidazio listened sympathetically to what Andrew had to say; then in reply he went to the window overlooking the playground, flung it open, and with a gesture of his hand pointed to the scene below.

It was a scene worth looking at. To see such exuberant youth at play under a sunlit sky in the bracing mountain air

and hear their joyful laughter was nothing short of thrilling. Rubber balls (a favourite plaything with Italian boys) were flying in all directions while bands of youngsters were racing the length and breadth of the field in lively contest. There were cheers when one of the contesting sides reached the goal. And who were the animating spirits of all this life and movement? Just a few young priests who, with soutane tucked up, their brows moist with sweat, forged ahead of their teams and led them in turns to victory amidst the shouts of a jubilant crowd.

Andrew looked on for a while, his mind absorbed in deep thought. It was a familiar scene for him but now it took on a deeper significance. Here was a throng of carefree, merry boys away from every moral danger, enjoying themselves to their heart's content: and in their midst, as protecting angels, these young priests living the most strenuous of lives and yet so radiantly happy . . . Surely it was a grand ideal that had captured their hearts. Surely such a life was worth living: in a flash he saw the meaning of it all. Leaving the window and turning to the Rector: "I have understood now," he said, "I am going to be a Salesian." It was the end of all wavering.

There was just one practical difficulty. How should he break the news to his parents? Fr. Director advised him to write first to his mother. For the time being it was better not to let his father know about it. The reply from his mother was not slow in coming: she would not go against Andrew's decision if it proved to be lasting and not the outcome of passing fervour. To make sure that the decision was not such a one Andrew made a final retreat at San Benigno before going home for his vacation.

He left the retreat resolved not to look back, whatever the opposition he might meet with. He was so sure that the battle had been won, so determined to join the novitiate in the following year that he said to one of his friends: "These are my last holidays and I intend to make the most of them." He kept his word so faithfully that he was late in arriving at the novitiate house!

The array of obstacles

Eight years later in a letter to his spiritual director, he revealed with the utmost candour the array of obstacles that he had to overcome in following his vocation. This he calls a singular grace, an efficacious grace in the strict theological meaning of the word.

This letter is eminently biographical and worth quoting in extenso.

"The Lord," he wrote, "inspired me with the firm conviction that there was only one way open to me—to become a Salesian. It was an intimate, imperative voice that admitted no hesitant reply, that swept away every obstacle: a voice which I had no choice but to obey. To follow this voice I was prepared to face every imaginable difficulty even if it had been a question of passing over the bodies of my parents as St. Jane Frances de Chantal passed over the bodies of her children. You know, dear Father, that God gave me keenness of intellect. I was always at the top of my class in school, my matriculation at Turin was a veritable triumph. Of course, I have to thank God for the success, for it is to Him I owe whatever gift I have. If I speak of success it is only to show how the world enticed me with the prospect of a brilliant career; and yet the voice was always there, as imperative as ever—you must become a Salesian. There were other inducements. A professor at the Royal Academy, Vincent Gioberti, having heard of my success, urged me to attend his lessons at the Academy. A priest in the family circle, highly esteemed and influential, advised me to enter the diocesan seminary at Novara. Two Salesian clerics not, alas, of the genuine stamp (they left the Congregation later)—did their utmost to dissuade me from entering the religious life. In the college there were amongst the boys all sorts of odd notions and prejudices against the novitiate and I shared them myself. Yet the inner voice was saying as cogently as ever: you must become a Salesian. I was the eldest in the family and a prime favourite with everybody. When my mother first heard of my desire to

join the Salesians she burst into tears: afterwards when grace had got the better part of her nature she always gave me encouragement. My father reluctantly gave his consent but afterwards being influenced by some men in town who poisoned his mind against the Salesians he withdrew it at the last hour: and painful as it was I had to leave home in my mother's company only. Later on my father came to see things in a different light and gave his consent. There were other enticements. I was offered a scholarship if I decided to enter the public school at Novara. But even this advantageous proposition failed to shake the conviction that I was called to religion. So strong was my determination that at San Benigno when I made my retreat I at first avoided an interview with Don Bosco being afraid that the Saint would read in my soul and seeing the misdoings of my past life would refuse to allow me to join the Congregation. Eventually I went to see Don Bosco. He looked at me, read into my soul, put his finger on my weak spot, but his advice was: 'become a Salesian.' When I entered the novitiate, for the first two days and nights I went through untold mental suffering. I was continually in tears and Father Bianchi was much concerned about me but powerless to help me. Yet it never entered my mind that I should give up my vocation. Eight years have now passed since that day and never have I experienced a temptation to turn my back on religion. True, there were other difficulties. A battle, and a severe one too, had to be fought continually as the flesh was trying to swamp the spirit; I had to break a fast-knit chain in order to change into a new man. But grace again prevailed. 'The chains were broken and I was set free.'

The letter concludes with a hymn of thanksgiving to the unspeakable mercy of God who "broke his bonds and drew his soul to Him." Once more he asserts the firm conviction that his vocation has been "an exceptional grace, efficacious grace, which, though not interfering with free will yet has infallibly achieved its effect." (1)

(1) This is perhaps the best place wherein to warn the reader that he must not take literally certain expressions of the Servant of God in which he

This letter is of extreme value to the biographer. It reveals in brief the history of a soul:— the dramatic history of a struggle between nature and grace and the magnificent victory of the latter. The vocation of this young man was indeed no ordinary one and we can easily agree with his biographer Fr. Barberis that Andrew Beltrami was one of the choicest gifts that Divine Providence bestowed upon the young Salesian Congregation.

Disciples were wanted

For we must not lose sight of the fact that the task which the Founder of the Salesians had to accomplish was simply beyond human strength. Disciples were wanted of no common mettle if the work was to have solid foundations. And the disciples came. The mysterious ways by which these men gathered around their Founder and decided to throw their lot in with him cannot but fill with wonder any student of the early history of the Salesian Congregation. The vocations of Michael Rua, John Cagliero, Vittorio Alasonatti, Paul Albera, Louis Lasagna — to quote only a few names — defy a simple human explanation. And what about the young priest from Genoa, yearning for the religious life, who heard one day, while at prayer, a distinct intimation to pay a visit at once to a certain place where he would find the future guide of his soul? He followed the voice, went to the place (a village away in the country) and there he met for the first time Don Bosco, an occasional visitor of the parish priest, and decided there and then to become a Salesian. A similar story is told of another Salesian, Father Cais — an ex-member of the Piedmontese Parliament and a

refers to the 'misdoings of his youth.' All his biographers concur in this warning. We know well how even the greatest saints spoke very disparagingly of themselves. St. Francis of Assisi called himself the greatest sinner on earth. The explanation is to be found in the fact that when a saint gives himself or herself wholly to God a new light shines in his or her soul. "With this greater light" remarks Archbishop Goodier "they see more clearly themselves and all their worthlessness. They see their failures and their faults in the light of Him in whose sight the very angels are not clean." And nobody should question their sincerity. At least in their own eyes they are guilty of no alleviation or exaggeration.

nobleman — who at the age of forty felt an impulse to embrace a life of heroic poverty in the Salésian Congregation after witnessing the instantaneous cure of a crippled child as he was waiting to be introduced to the Saint. Again there is the case of Father Francis Dalmazzo who while a boy at the Oratory was dismayed by the too Spartan life and was on the pinnacle of leaving it for good. On that very day he saw the Saint multiplying the breakfast rolls and decided to stay. Finally we may mention the police inspector who gave up a good career in order to become a Salesian after a visit to the Oratory to enquire about some alleged disturbing predictions of Don Bosco.

Indeed the history of the mysterious attractions which won over to the cause of Don Bosco so many and invaluable helpers would fill more than one volume of the History of the Salesian Society.

One of the "Giants"

And now we are confronted with the singular case of a young man who, apparently destined to a brilliant career in the world hears in the depths of his soul a clear intimation that he must give up all and embrace the humble, hard life of a religious — an intimation which he regards as an 'irresistible grace.' Will this young man have a mission to fulfill in our young Congregation? Is he destined to be one of the 'giants' — perhaps one of the 'conquistadores' who are to lead in the evangelization of those immense mission fields which the Founder is constantly seeing in his dreams? That he is destined to play an important role in the Salesian Apostolate is clear enough. But the future will give the full answer: let us not anticipate.

IV

The Heights

OF ANDREW'S last vacation at home during the summer of 1885, we have only scattered records but they are not without interest. Andrew had told his friends that he would make the most of his holidays before going to shut himself up in the novitiate and he kept his word.

Omegna with its ample range of breezy mountains and the cool waters of its lake offered a boy all the exercise and sport he could possibly desire. Little wonder if Andrew's chief diversions were boating, swimming and mountaineering. "He could swim like a fish", remarks one of his friends, "and in steering a boat he could beat a professional. Such daring feats as pretending that the boat was on the point of upturning and then by sudden manoeuvre restoring its balance to the-alternate dismay and hilarity of his companions are still remembered."

Mountain climbing

But his favourite sport was mountain climbing. The heights with their open vistas, massive spurs and bracing air fascinated him. In later years he used to speak of the mountains in strains of lyrical admiration stressing the benefits of mountain climbing not only as a training of the body but as a schooling of the soul as well. "How small one feels," he wrote "in the presence of those immense mountain masses

which rise up like giants to hide their snow capped peaks in the perpetual clouds. Our imagination is lost when we consider that these colossal masses have weathered thousands of years without any notable disfigurement of their massive flanks: . . . indeed it would seem that God created them to be a reflection of his grandeur and eternity."

"It can be hardly imagined" — writes one of his friends — "what enthusiasm such natural beauties roused in Andrew and with what eager delight he sought their enjoyment. Sometimes he would rise as early as three in the morning, to climb one of the mountains whence he could watch the splendour of the rising sun."

These excursions never interfered with the regularity of his devotions which he always carried out with exemplary fidelity. He would never miss Mass. On one occasion when he and his party was overtaken by a sudden nightfall Andrew walked the whole night in order to reach the church of the nearest village in time for holy Mass.

One of his favourite resorts was the Sacro Monte di Orta, a hill shrine dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. In his popular life of this Saint, which he wrote later, Fr. Beltrami speaks with touching affection of the Holy Mount — the most resplendent gem in the crown of mountains which encircle his beloved Omegna. "Nature and art," he writes, "have showered their beauties on this spot and made of it an earthly paradise. On the summit of the hill stands the church and Franciscan monastery and around them as a white garland, eighteen chapels rising amidst groves of beeches and maples. These chapels are famous for their pictures and statues representing the life of the Poverello in different tableaux. Particularly striking is the fifteenth chapel with its fine statuary portraying the scene of the death of St. Francis. The Holy Mount presents a particularly pleasing spectacle on the second of August when pilgrims from far and near climb up the winding and shady avenues to pray in the chapels. After completing their devo-

tions in the main church on the summit they sit down in picturesque groups upon the grass for a cheery meal. It is hardly possible to imagine a more impressive sight than that of the summit of the hill where the solitary church stands. Not the faintest sounds of the outside world ever reach this secluded spot. Here the pilgrim at prayer seems to hear only the echo of heavenly strains as they come from afar."

A mystical experience

These last lines in which the writer recalls the stimulating beauty of this sacred place and the emotions which they call forth in the devout pilgrim may perhaps supply the clue to an extraordinary experience which once occurred to Andrew during one of his excursions on the Holy Mount. His brother Joseph related it at length in the Canonical Process of enquiry.

As they were strolling around and enjoying the sights, Andrew left the company of his brother and friends and when the time came for returning home he could not be found anywhere. At last his brother found him in the chapel of St. Francis. "He was on his knees," he relates, "and completely absorbed in prayer. I called him twice and touched him on the shoulder but he seemed unable to perceive my presence. At last I nudged him harder and only then he turned round asking whether it was time to go. His face was strained and pale. As he followed me he was so abstracted that he left the chapel without genuflecting or even making the sign of the cross." His brother records the conviction that Andrew had been there at least three hours. What can we make of this story? Was it a mystical experience? At the very least we can see in this prolonged absorption in prayer one of those moods in which the soul, wooed by its Divine Lover, feels the utter vanity of earthly pleasures and yearns for that joy which alone can give it rest and contentment.

Back from these rambles Andrew would retire to his room and there give much time to reading. His mother recalls how he

used to spend hours at his desk upon which there was always a crucifix and a picture of Our Lady. Unfortunately he often read far into the night and his health certainly did not benefit by it. We learn from his friend Felice Cane that during those holidays he read some of the most outstanding German and English dramatists as well as other European poets making copious notes and extracts of all he read. Oriental legends in verse and prose had also a fascination for him. It was unfortunate that there was no one to curb his intense craving for reading at a time when a complete rest was indispensable to his health. But his piety did not suffer. He began to give some time to mental prayer and his mother remembers him making his way every day to the parish church for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Not wrapt up in himself

This religious fervour, easily explicable in an aspirant to the religious life, as well as his interest in books and in mountains should not however leave us under the impression that young Beltrami was just an enthusiast of the mystic type, wrapt up in himself, and altogether out of touch and sympathy with the little world around him; far from it. His affection for his dear ones was not only undiminished, but became more expansive. He would spend hours in conversing with his grandmother or in reading to her. Again, as at Lanzo, he found means of giving vent to his apostolic zeal. He had been taught by his masters that a good Catholic should not be merely content with reading good literature, but should find opportunities of spreading it. He practised literally what he had been taught. In the hope that his sister and some of her devout companions should develop a religious vocation he procured for them edifying books and also tracts on the religious state. This he did — we are told — with great tact and zeal. His charity toward the sick is still remembered. "At that time" — writes his friend — "there were in the town some invalids who for years had been unable to go out of door. Andrew knew them all and often used to visit them."

Remarkable also — considering his youth — were his interests in the spiritual and material welfare of the town. One of the most distinguished sons of Omegna had been the late Father Zanoia, an outstanding architect: and his merits — perhaps because he was a priest — had not had sufficient recognition from his fellow — citizens. Andrew wrote a few articles in the local paper with the result that not long after the memory of the distinguished ecclesiastical was honoured by naming a street after him. Other articles in collaboration with a friend secured special advantages for the town from the civic authorities. Moreover, noticing the increasing indifference in matters of religion caused by Protestant propaganda and the growth of socialism, he took the initiative in procuring and distributing Catholic and other literature of an instructive nature. Not content with this he endeavoured to organize a circulating library for the benefit of the whole population: a project which eventually materialized thanks to the help of some Salesian co-operators whom he was able to enlist in his cause.

Catholic Actionist

Such an enterprising spirit showed the kind of education which Andrew Beltrami had received at Lanzo. Had his superiors and masters failed to develop in him that practical zeal which impels one to spread goodness wherever he is, they would not have fulfilled Don Bosco's ideal of education. The word Catholic Action had not yet been coined: but its spirit was fully understood and carried out both at the Oratory and at Lanzo. To combine precept with practice, to show furthermore that Catholic Action meant preeminently practical charity, St. John Bosco had already in the sixties established in his Oratories in Turin a branch of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of which boys were effective members — a unique example in Italy. The sixteen-years-old Beltrami could then be regarded as a finished product of Salesian training: and, indeed, his Alma Mater was proud of him. This was made clear shortly afterwards when at the end of his holidays, previous to going to the novitiate,

he paid his last visit to his Lanzo School. One of his fellow-students still remembers the enthusiastic send-off he was given on that occasion. "As if by magic, all the boys suspended their games and accompanied him to the school gate where the farewell took the shape of a loud and hearty cheer. This was a genuine tribute of affection and esteem and the more remarkable because it was entirely spontaneous and took all by surprise."

He arrived at the novitiate on the same day accompanied by his mother who entrusting him to the Superior uttered words really worthy of a Christian mother: "Father, it is a big sacrifice; but I make it gladly. Will you make Andrew into a holy priest and pray that I may bring up my other children well. I have no other desire on earth."

Andrew was ever grateful to his mother for such generosity. Indeed, between the two souls there was always identity of aspiration as their correspondence recorded in these pages will clearly prove.

Foglizzo

ON November 6, 1886, the Salesian house at Foglizzo was "en fete." Bunting and flags were waving in the breeze and even in the village there was considerable excitement. Don Bosco had arrived from Turin; he had come to pay a visit to the new novices and to bless their religious habit. Many circumstances contributed to make that day a memorable one. The novitiate had just been transferred to its new home — Foglizzo — a village a few miles distant from Turin, and there was always something romantic about the beginning of a new foundation in those years, occurring as they did in an atmosphere of joyous simplicity and evangelical poverty reminiscent of the early days of the Oratory. The house, an old disused mansion purchased but a few weeks before, had to be adapted in that short space of time to accomodate about a hundred people. The attics became improvised dormitories and were at once nicknamed "Paradiso." The largest room was transformed into a chapel where all knelt down (at least for some days) on the bare floor as there were no benches. A partitioned room nearby was the temporary sacristy and a couple of planks resting on a few trestles the only furniture. There was no kitchen and the meals for several days had to be cooked in an improvised fireplace made of bricks in the rustic courtyard. Even on the day of Don Bosco's arrival there were only a few chairs available, and great was the amusement of Don Bosco and of the other guests in watching the novices constantly moving those few chairs about from the parlour to the church, from the church to

the refectory and to the other places where the guests were entertained. It was the joke of the day and the Saint enjoyed it immensely. "This gives me great joy," he was heard to say. "Oh, this is a good beginning."

Don Bosco's arrival

The villagers on the previous day had given the Saint a great reception. The bells had pealed out, the brass band had blazed forth, nothing had been spared to show their joy in welcoming the man of God. The village boys had gone a long way to meet the Saint's carriage; and at a pace which was more like a gallop they had escorted it, in their bare feet, right to the entrance of the village. Here were waiting the authorities and a large crowd. The mayor had made his little speech and was visibly in the third heaven when Don Bosco asked him to get into the carriage and sit on his right. Because of the crowd it took some time before the carriage could reach the Salesian house.

The Saint possessed the art of endearing himself to the simple country folk. He spoke their own dialect and entered at once into the topics and interests which they had at heart. A witness writing for a provincial paper left in writing his impressions as he watched the Saint, passing one day along the village streets on his way to the parish church. "It is impossible," he writes, "to describe the scenes of enthusiasm which the holy priest aroused among the country people both young and old. The young were mad with joy and the old could not restrain their tears. It was truly pathetic to see Don Bosco borne on the arms of his Salesians slowly making his way towards the church, stopping now and then to say a word or two to those around him, smiling, joking, waving his hand in salutation or blessing. The holy priest could hardly stand erect and was very tired; but apart from that he looked as young as ever. He has a pleasant face, eyes still lively and scintillating, a clear mind and steady memory, and is delightful and brisk in conversation.

Don Bosco is amiability itself, his hair is just beginning to take on a tinge of silver."

All eager to sail...

One can easily imagine the thrill of joy of those young men as one by one they knelt to receive their religious habit from the hands of the Saint. They knew that it was likely to be the last time that their aging father would perform that ceremony. We have no record of the words which the Saint addressed to this new legion of Salesian Aspirants. But it is easy to surmise what the burden of the exhortation was. "I am just back from Foglizzo," he wrote a few days afterwards to a Salesian Co-operator, "where I have blessed the clerical habit of a hundred young men all eager to sail for Patagonia and help in evangelizing the Indians there. Pray that they may all grow in learning and sanctity, ardour in acquiring solid zeal, alacrity in their scholastic pursuits, zeal in fitting themselves for missionary work." There were invariably the ideals which the Saint set before his new recruits on such occasions. How thrilled his soul must have been on that day when his weary eyes rested on these eighty-odd ardent young men, the first to commence their new life in this happy new Bethlehem of the Salesian Congregation. To his penetrating vision the fields beyond were indeed looking white and the harvest promising.

... exactly 1960 francs!

The novitiate house at Foglizzo was to the end of his days the Saint's special solicitude. A good beginning had been made. He had seen his Salesians 'abounding in joy' in the midst of their poverty, and was sure that Divine Providence would watch with special care over the new novitiate. He was not to be disappointed.

Some months later the Superior of Foglizzo, Father Bianchi, arrived in Turin on urgent business. He needed at once the sum of 1960 francs to fulfill an important obligation. The Prefect-General, Father Durando, confessed his inability to satisfy Father Bianchi's demand. "I have just been to see Don Bosco," he said, "and he gave me all he had. Nothing is left in the house." The priest, though disappointed, was determined to see Don Bosco himself. The latter after listening to his anxious tale said: "I really do not know how to help you. I gave all I had to Father Durando this morning. But... perhaps something may have arrived since he left, though it cannot be very much." He then went to his desk and looking over his correspondence found an envelope containing some cash. Both began to count it. It was exactly 1960 francs!

Fr. Giulio Barberis

For the practical running of the novitiate and its fine spirit the credit was due to a small but devoted staff at whose head was Father Bianchi, Superior and Novice Master, who, however, being young in years, did his work under the direction of Father Barberis, still the effective Novice Master of the whole congregation. Of this zealous Salesian—whose name will occur repeatedly in these pages—something has better be said at once.

Giulio Barberis from his earliest years had bound himself heart and soul to the saint and had been the *'apis industriosa'* that had studied the methods and ideas of his spiritual father with such loving diligence as to deserve from him the enviable words: "few understand me as well as Father Barberis."

As had been the case with many other Salesians a magic word from the saint had on one important occasion given a definite direction to his life and aspirations. On the day of his profession he had asked Don Bosco for a counsel, for a word that would be the guiding principle of his life. And the Saint had replied: "Let this be your motto: — "to toil and to suffer

without counting the cost, whenever it is a question of gaining souls to Our Lord," and prophetically had added: "My dear Giulio, I count on you to be the staff of my old age."

Don Bosco knew that he could count on the unstinted devotion of this young spiritual son of his and none was surprised when as soon as he was ordained the Saint confided to him the training of his new recruits. There are still extant some notes with which the Saint used to encourage the young Novice Master whose task was not always easy. "Tell your novices that they are my crown and my joy, '*gaudium et corona mea*.'" On another occasion, "Tell them I expect great things of them . . . I want at least two who can work miracles, otherwise I cannot carry on. . . ."

The young Novice Master threw himself heartily into his delicate and difficult task. With a magnificent simplicity of soul, with an obstinate optimism that believes instinctively in the native goodness of man and refuses to quench the smoking flax, Father Barberis practised the "*omnia sustinet et omnia sperat*" of Saint Paul with a consistency and a persistency which to many appeared, if not purposeless obstinacy, at least unenlightened zeal and exaggerated indulgence. The fact is that he chose to carry out ad litteram his spiritual father's recommendation to "suffer all". And there were not wanting occasions when under provocation he could have been justly severe. But no: his pupils tried on the day of his death to recall just one word of his which was not prompted by the sweetness of charity: they failed. What untold service this humble priest rendered to his congregation! How often young novices, suddenly plunged into despondency because of temperamental blunders, because of the hardness of the life, or the lack of sympathy, were on the point of turning their back on the plow, and then thanks to a forgiving word, an understanding look or a reassuring smile from this man of encouragement they stuck to their task and emerged triumphant. These Salesians are legion. In reality under sweetness there was strength, and Father Barberis, the gentlest of priests, was a true molder of characters. (1)

(1) Father Bianchi also deserves at least the short notice of a foot-note. His

Three distinctive trends

In what did his teaching consist? In other words what was the spirit of Foglizzo? The question is not out of place if we wish to understand the spiritual growth of Andrew Beltrami.

The spiritual teaching at Foglizzo was the result of three distinctive trends of spirituality which had their source in St. Ignatius, St. Alphonsus and St. Francis of Sales respectively, the three masters who played a great part in the ascetical formation of Saint John Bosco himself.

At the foundation of the training there could only be the bedrock of the spiritual combat: the *'agere contra'* of St. Ignatius. St. Francis himself carried Scupoli's little book for twenty five years (so he tells us) in his pocket. A moral reform of some sort is the business of the novitiate: a task which the novice is asked to undertake with a courageous heart (*"animo volenti"* as St. Ignatius puts it) under the guidance of the Novice Master. The Salesians of the first generation still remember the characteristic way in which Father Barberis used to urge the necessity of self-conquest. He had a favourite Biblical quotation *"Regnum Coelorum vim patitur et violenti rapiunt illud"*

vocation was remarkable. He had been for some years a diocesan priest in central Italy and in 1881 he was touring the country in a visit to the principal Italian cities. At Turin he called on Don Bosco and the meeting left such an impression on him that there and then he decided to join the Salesians. After his retreat at Lanzo, he proceeded to San Benigno where he made his novitiate and was professed. In 1887 we see him novice-master at Foglizzo, a few years later superior of the Philosophy house at Ivrea, and in 1914 in Palestine, where he spent the rest of his life. His merits as an educationist and organizer of a model agricultural school at Beitgemal were recognized by the British Government with the O.B.E. reward. General Gordon was his friend. Jovial, deeply pious, large hearted, he helped Father Barberis in bringing up many generations of Salesians who still remember his cheerful optimism, his enlightened indulgence, his sympathetic understanding of young men's difficulties. His past novices were always in his mind and prayers. He held in his breviary a number of markers bearing the name of each of his novices followed by a sign with some special significance. Every evening before retiring he invariably collected the markers, arranged them on his pridieu, and gave them the ritual blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

which, as the refrain in a melody, would often recur in his exhortations. This sentence he used to utter in a slow deliberate voice, stressing the syllables one by one with determination but with such sweetness that the hard saying would lose its bitter sting and would yet sink into the mind.

From Saint Alphonsus, St. John Bosco learned the value of Eucharistic Piety. This was in his mind the most practical way of fostering in his boys a personal love for Our Lord. It is Eucharistic Piety that has to turn the 'striving after perfection' into a labour of love. Thus a Salesian novice is urged to make Holy Communion the pivot of his daily life and the Tabernacle the object of frequent visits, the center of fervent aspirations. The well known prayer 'Visit to the Blessed Sacrament' by St. Alphonsus, so rich in dogma and so moving in its tender simplicity, was inserted by Don Bosco in his "Youth Manual" and is said daily in every Salesian novitiate; it is followed as a rule by the examination of conscience.

But the rigid discipline of the Jesuit and the ascetical fervor of the Redemptorist would not make an ideal blending for a Salesian unless seasoned by another ingredient—the spirit of St. Francis of Sales. It was in fact to the Saint of Geneva that St. John Bosco turned for that family spirit, that genial and warm atmosphere, without which souls, particularly the souls of the young, cannot expand and grow.

To him he turned for that '*esprit de cordialité*,' that mutual confidence and happy familiarity which was to characterize the relations between superiors and subjects. With what loving insistence did Don Bosco urge the novices to open their hearts to the father of their soul. "Let each one of them"—he insisted, making use of the words of Saint Francis de Sales—"open his mind to his superior with the same sincerity and candor with which the child shows to its mother the scratches, bruises and stings of the wasps." Candor and confidence are indeed such a vital element in the Salesian training that lack of them would spell failure.

"Be merry, not giddy"

Again — and this was perhaps Don Bosco's special contribution to the training — this atmosphere was to be encouraged by an atmosphere of visible and unrestricted joy.

Like all great educators the Saint thought that pruning and guiding could go together with that holy freedom of spirit which while it controls the exuberance of nature does not stifle it. "Be merry, not giddy" — once said a visiting Bishop to the young aspirants of a Salesian juniorate.

For this reason the Saint desired that festivals even in the novitiate should be such in the full sense of the word. We have already referred to the music and waving flags which greeted Don Bosco at Foglizzo on clothing day. True, a Venetian lamp, a bit of colourful bunting, the flourish of an orchestra or a comic song to end a festival's dinner are small things, but what a difference they make to young people. They mean a break from the daily humdrum monotony, they serve as a safety valve for high spirits, they are a substitute for home joys, they are a relaxation from the spiritual tension caused by constant concentration on things of the spirit, and, not least, they encourage self-expression. This also can be turned into a means for gaining souls for God.

The writer still has a vague recollection of a delightful surprise during his novitiate days when one morning (probably the Rector's day) he was awakened by the shrill sound of a couple of brass instruments played by an improvised band of a few clerics and lay-brothers under the dormitory window. It was the 'reveille' announcing the rising of a happy day. These old traditions have not all survived, and there may be reason for it, but it is to be hoped that the spirit underlying them will never die.

Salesian Piety

One more word should be said about the character of Salesian piety. The Saint desired it to be expansive and apos-

tolic. If you love God you naturally feel the impulse to make Him loved. When Don Bosco was a seminary-student it was his custom never to let a day pass without relating to one of his companions a fact or a saying of a saint. During holiday-time he resolved: "I will speak of God to my mother."

This accounts for another feature of the Salesian novitiate: the "Spiritual Talks." They are carried on in the most informal way, usually during the evening recreation, as a stroll is taken in the ambulatory or along the garden lanes. In these talks points are raised about religious and Salesian life, the topics being usually suggested by the conferences, lectures, private readings or Superiors' letters, or other Salesian literature. The Saint attached much importance to these talks. If the novice is convinced that his paramount business is to understand and assimilate the spirit of the Society, he is sure not to lack the necessary incentive to make these talks interesting, real and vital.

To complete the picture of Foglizzo in 1887, it should be added that owing to special circumstances a certain amount of secular studies were still allowed. There were regular classes in Latin, Greek, Italian and Logic. It was not until 1900 that Canon Law excluded most of such studies from the curriculum of the novitiate or reduced them to a minimum. This brief description of the Life at Foglizzo has been necessary in order to understand the spiritual growth of Andrew Behrami. From the nature of the soil we can understand better the growth of the tree.

VI

Self-conquest

FROM the first day of his novitiate — writes Fr. Barberis — “Andrew began to take things seriously.” He was not one to be aimless in whatever he undertook or to be content with vague aspirations and half measures. He set to work at once with a clear purpose.

First of all he resolved to place himself completely in the hands of his Superior so that he might have the benefit of sure guidance in the first steps of his religious life. He determined to see God's holy will expressed in his recommendations as well as in the rules of the house.

“In his first talk with me” — says Fr. Barberis — “he humbly begged to be advised and freely corrected, a charity, — he said, — which he would repay with infinite gratitude.” “It is the first step that matters, says an old adage. “It was this initial act of candour and humility” — continues Fr. Barberis — “that drew upon the young novice the countless graces which were to lead him along the way of sanctity.”

What his vocation meant to him

“What I admired most” — continues his Superior — “was the ardour and perseverance with which he strove after an absolute purity of intention in all his actions. He confessed

that this cost him unremitting watchfulness and hard effort; for too often did vain glory and self-pleasing and other unworthy motives intrude themselves into his mind."

Allowing for the usual exaggeration of the fervent novice we can easily accept the statement. Temperamentally he was inclined to be self-assertive. From childhood he took the lead amongst his companions both in studies and in games; at Lanzo he had always been at the top of the class. He was aware that both his Superiors and fellow novices held him in high esteem; before his arrival at the novitiate he was already spoken of as the brilliant student who had carried away all distinctions in the public examination in Turin. How could he then help entertaining a feeling of marked superiority over his companions? One of his first notes in his spiritual diary embodies the following resolution: "Whatever my success in studies or in anything else I shall ascribe it to God alone."

But as days went on Andrew felt that the mere acknowledgement of his indebtedness to God for all His graces and gifts was not enough. He began to feel that he owed to God the homage of a deeper and truer humility. Since the first day of his novitiate, especially since the day in which he had received the religious habit the realization of what his vocation meant to him of the great mercy it involved, grew more vividly upon him.

The state of his mind is best described in his own words taken from a page of the life of St. Stanislaus Koska, written by him in later years. Speaking of the day in which the young Jesuit Saint had been clothed with the religious habit, he says: "Stanislaus always cherished a loving reverence for his habit; he regarded it as having been received from Our Lady Herself, as the livery of Her heavenly court. He prized it more dearly than monarchs prize their purple." And then alluding to the difficulties which the Jesuit Saint had to overcome in order to enter religion, he continues: "Stanislaus was now like a shipwrecked sailor who after having long struggled through stormy seas, has

finally entered a haven of peace and security. Stanislaus could now in the solitude of his cell recall the past storms and, realising his marvellous escape, break forth into a joyous song of thanksgiving."

Singing a song of thanksgiving

These words are indeed a window through which we can look into the soul of Andrew. In these lines he tells his own story. He too now was singing a song of thanksgiving. Had not he also been at the mercy of stormy and dangerous waves? Had not his entrance into religion been a marvellous deliverance? Now more than ever as he looked back on his past life it was borne in upon him that his vocation had been an inestimable grace which he had done nothing to deserve, and of which he was utterly unworthy. Too late — so he said to himself — had he begun to love God, too long had he waited before offering his whole heart to Him. The years of his boyhood, the first fruits of his life — so he thought — had been denied to God. And yet in spite of that ingratitude how merciful God had been to him. At the age of 13, as he was actually on the point of making shipwreck of his life, an invisible and merciful hand had suddenly pulled him out of the morass of a corrupting world and led him into the serene and bracing atmosphere of a Salesian School. What would his future lot have been, had he not then met the sons of Don Bosco? had he been left a little longer to breathe the contagious air of his former school? Indeed the bonds had been broken and he had been delivered. A marvellous deliverance, he believed.

The sudden realization of so great a mercy filled his mind with a new purpose and a new determination. He began now to consider himself a sinner, a big sinner, a prodigal who had but lately turned to God. He began to feel that what he really owed to God was a sorrowful, repentant love, a life of expiation, the daily homage of a "humble and broken heart." Yes a humble heart. Humility will be from now on the centre

of his desires and efforts: it will be the dominating aspiration of his life. Henceforth the reader should know that we are writing the life of a Saint.

The book he picked up

Fr. Barberis declares: "Humility was very likely the virtue which he strove to acquire with the greatest earnestness." One day he picked up on the shelves of the novices' library the golden booklet of Leo XIII 'Humility in practice.' This booklet was for long his favourite companion. His spiritual notes reveal the ardour with which he strove to advance in this virtue. "I clearly see that the chief obstacle to my spiritual progress is pride. I will try to overcome it in class and everywhere else. I will never speak of myself: during recreation I will refrain from asserting my opinion. I will not argue with my companions but rather fall in with their view even when I think I am right. In my Holy Communion I will earnestly and perseveringly ask for this virtue. My favourite ejaculation will be: "Jesus meek and humble of heart make my heart like unto Thine." - In giving an account of myself to my Superior I will reveal with candour all my faults against this virtue. I will maintain absolute silence whenever I am humbled - I will ask my Superior to correct me even in public, without mercy. I will ask God contempt of self and for humiliations and these I will accept as a favour from Heaven."

It would be tedious to enumerate all the rest of these resolutions which show that his desire for humility was no more beautiful and romantic aspiration but genuine endeavour to seek means to the end. "This love of humility—" says Fr. Barberis—"gave him such a hunger and thirst for humiliations that it lasted all his life never losing its ardour and intensity."

It should not be thought however that such desire for self-effacement cramped Andrew's soul and made it the prey of pusillanimity and dejection. True humility is based

on truth; it springs from self-knowledge and above all from God's knowledge: and this, St. Theresa tells us, enlarges and ennobles the mind. Andrew was perfectly aware of his intellectual powers and other gifts; these he valued and traded with an ardour that is truly astonishing. "His humility was manly" — says Fr. Barberis: "When speaking of what he called his sins and failings he never indulged in sterile lamentations such as one notices in weak souls. He accused himself of his faults with frankness and without affectation."

Said he "I know that I am a frail creature"

His humility was of that type which is so dear to St. Francis de Sales — the type that begets generosity. This is a powerful sentiment and to be found only in great souls. St. Theresa of Lisieux felt that because she was only a 'little flower' God could work wonders through her littleness. And generosity for Andrew Beltrami meant this: "I know that I am a frail creature and full of failures; but I know also that God can make my weakness strong and thereby enable me to give Him all the glory that is within my power."

And indeed as he looked back in retrospect, he began to see that his very faults and past failures, if viewed in the light of God's Providence, could supply the incentive for a greater generosity — for a stronger determination to give God the maximum of glory. To quote Fr. Barberis again: "Andrew's soul kindled as the Rule and aims of the Congregation were day by day explained in the conferences. He could now appreciate more and more the nobility of the salesian vocation, the opportuneness of Don Bosco's providential mission. What nobler work could be imagined than caring for and instructing the Lord's little ones, especially those in danger of spiritual ruin?" And as he thought of the dangers which he himself as a boy had incurred, he resolved to spare no effort that he might fit himself for such work. "If God gives me grace to become a Salesian Priest" — he protested — "it will be my ambi-

tion to concentrate my care and affection on the poorest boys amongst the poor, on the most uncouth, the most uncared for." He rejoiced in the thought that the Salesian Congregation catered not for the boys of the upper classes but for the poor and middle class and he thanked God daily for being a Salesian. "His love for the Congregation" — concludes Fr. Barberis — "grew so strong that he would have been prepared to face any trial rather than leave it."

Another trait of his humility which endeared him to all was the esteem he cherished for his fellow novices. As compared with himself he thought they were saints. "True there were some excellent youths but none," — says his novice master — "could come near to Andrew."

"There was nothing affected about his piety" — observes one of his fellow novices. At first sight he seemed ordinary in everything he did. But as you spoke to him or worked with him you were at once struck with his more than ordinary virtue. One who eventually left the novitiate testifies to the frankness of his character and his capacity for making friends. "We differed in character and temperament" — he remarks — "but I always admired him: he was both loyal and sincere."

After the great patterns

It has already been pointed out that there was a good deal of St. Ignatius in the spiritual training at Foglizzo. It was only natural that such models as St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. John Berckmans, St. Stanislaus Koska, who gave themselves to God in their youth with such great generosity, should be proposed for the admiration and imitation of young salesian aspirants. One of Andrew's friends writes: "He used to speak with wistful admiration of St. Aloysius, St. John Berckmans and other youthful saints. Once I heard him say: 'Ah, would it not be grand if it were given us to come near them? And he began to suggest various ways in which a Salesian could imitate these

young saints." He was often seen reverently taking off his biretta whenever he passed the Superior's room. He had read in the life of St. John Berchmans of that act of devotion to the Superior as God's representative and he had felt the impulse to supernaturalise his obedience by the same homage.

To St. Aloysius he always had a special devotion even as a child. Now that he followed him in religious life he felt more and more drawn to him.

The power of the austere asceticism of St. Aloysius in moulding modern youth has often been questioned but the objection is really based on a misconception: on the inability to distinguish in his sanctity the substantial from the accidental and passing. The fact is that intense natures in which divine grace has already begun to act unhindered, cannot but be moved by the fixity of purpose, the splendid obstinacy with which this young man, like Longfellow's young hero, waving away allurements, trampling upon all obstacles, moves serenely towards the peak of his vision. It is this magnificent persistency that gives an insight into the true Aloysius and is capable of rousing our high minded youth to emulation.

Such master quality of his character was no doubt in Pius XI's mind when he spoke of Aloysius as preeminently a 'voluntaire' — a young man of strong will — and reaffirmed the claim of the Church to propose him as pattern and patron of Catholic youth. (1) True, this strength of character in our Saint should never be considered apart from his steady gaze on the Crucifix and the unconditional offer of his heart to his Master. Otherwise it would be only sounding brass: but, if actuated by love, what a splendid possession!

Andrew Beltrami shared with St. Aloysius an intense nature and it is no wonder that under the influence of grace he came to cherish his ideals. At Lanzo he had already taken as his

(1) From the "Vocation of St. Aloysius" by Fr. C. C. Martindale S.J.

motto 'I will — I will always — I will strongly.' At the beginning of his novitiate he wrote to his mother that he had resolved "to become a saint at all costs, for countless are the graces which God has given me." In later years he wrote a small book '*Volere é potere*' to prove that if you really will, you can : if you will with tenacity you can become a saint for divine help is never denied to him that is ready to receive it with promptitude and trades it with care.

With grit and perseverance

He began to imitate St. Aloysius in the diligence with which he made his meditation. If there is an exercise of devotion that demands grit and perseverance this is certainly the daily meditation. Unless the powers of the soul are all employed systematically and kept under control meditation can easily become an unprofitable reverie. Andrew would not be caught into this snare. It is remarkable how he was able in a short time to learn the difficult art of meditating. Fr. Barberis writes : "Andrew soon reached the conviction that meditation and the examination of conscience were the two indispensable means by which to attain a true knowledge of himself and of the means by which to order his life. Before the year was over he acquired such control over his imagination that he could go through his meditation without a single distraction." "With remarkable penetration he would search the inmost recesses of his soul and seek to discover its most subtle movements, and impulses, in order to bring them all into subjection to the movements of the Holy Spirit."

"He confessed that he had at times been granted to understand such and such a truth with vividness as though he had seen it with his bodily eyes: that he had come to know the greatness and purity of God in such a way as to be overwhelmed."

It would not be surprising if such intensity of concentration put a strain on his mental faculties. That his novice-master

saw such danger and urged freedom of spirit it transpires from some of Andrew's spiritual notes. "I will avoid anxiety. I will keep in mind that the Lord is to be served in gladness." Indeed the impression left on many of his companions was one of constant serenity. "I never saw him perturbed. As I observed him constantly I was reminded of the calm and self possession so characteristic of Don Bosco and Don Rua."

It should also be remarked that the active and care free life of the Salesian Novitiate with its variety of interests (studies were still allowed) and its animated recreations would have proved a sufficient antidote against any tendency to exaggerated concentration of spirit. There was no room at Foglizzo for a novice who would walk about abstractedly, who could only look inwardly and not outwardly: he would have easily been a square peg in a round hole.

The verdict

Let us conclude the account of these first six months of his novitiate with a sober estimate of Andrew's progress as we find in the half yearly report of his novice-master. "Andrew Beltrami heads the list of all our novices, both in virtue and in knowledge. His health is fairly good; he applies himself to all the subjects with equal ardour yet in such a way that piety has first claim. His remarkable advancement in virtue during these months shows that he has received abundant grace from God and that his response to divine inspirations has been equally generous. He takes great pains in his observance of the Holy Rule and in Keeping a watch over each of his actions: he notices the least imperfections. His obedience is most exemplary and it guides him in the practice of the other virtues. He is always seeking ways and means of humiliating himself. He has made great progress in the exercise of the presence of God especially by means of ejaculations to the Sacred Heart and to Our Lady. His confidence in his Superior is all that can be desired. At the beginning he was beset by scruples; but he soon got rid of them

by his entire obedience to the advice of his Superior. The Lord has permitted that he should pass through many and severe trials : from these he suffered and still suffers a great deal. But with the assistance of divine grace he has overcome them all and continues to fight his battles with unflinching courage."

Andrew Beltrami learned virtue from battling. This is the verdict of his Novice Master. It dismisses the notion at once that he found virtue easy and that he was a "plaster" Saint.

VII

The "Better Way"

THE well-known phrase "agere contra" gives an indispensable aspect of the spiritual life but it is after all only a negative one. We really begin to tread the path of sanctity when we begin to fall in love with God. This is indeed true self-improvement — when our efforts become expressions of love, when Christ, through our increasing union with him becomes the animating principle of all our thoughts and actions. "Love and do what you wish," was wont to say Saint Augustine. "Love and do what you wish," repeated Saint John Bosco to his young apprentices and to the chimney sweeps of Turin.

Indeed it will never be sufficiently emphasized that it was at the school of love and at no other that the Saint trained the thousands of boys who came under his care. "He was wonderful," commented all those who lived with him, "when he spoke of God and of his love for us: how we should love Him in return with a love without measure: how sin is a terrible evil just because it hurts God's infinite love."

And how well did those boys understand the Saint. How readily did they respond. The unaffected simplicity with which these peasant boys spoke of heavenly things, their joyous life of communion with Our Lord and his Blessed Mother will always be the special charm of the early records of the Salesian Oratory. In truth the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady were to these lads the great realities of their life, round which, from

morning till evening, centered their thoughts and affections. These boys, we are told, would not lie down to rest before turning to the little Oratory Church to send their last loving message to the solitary Tabernacle. And only after asking Our Lady for a last blessing they would compose themselves to sleep, sure with a sweet certainty that their heavenly Mother, would watch over them, shielding them from harm, warding off their nightmares, just as during daytime she followed them at prayer, at work or at play, guiding them, smiling approval or correcting them gravely as the case might be. This might seem poetry or legend: yet it is pure history — that history which made Pius IX speak of the Oratory as the 'famiglia prodigiosa.'

The twin flames

That Foglizzo also boasted of such a beautiful spirit can be doubted only by one who does not know the ardour with which its Superiors, and Father Barberis and Father Bianchi in particular, threw themselves into the task of implanting in their novices the living ideals of St. John Bosco. Foglizzo would have to be a second Oratory of the early days: that and nothing else would satisfy them. But the best proof is perhaps what we know of the interior life of Andrew Beltrami. His life, especially in the second part of the novitiate, is described by Father Barberis in terms of love: love of the Sacred Heart and love of Our Lady. "These two loves," says Father Barberis, "are enough to account for the marvelous progress of Andrew in the ways of the Lord. They are the two lights which henceforth will illumine his path, the twin flames which will so consume him and his soul as to impair even the strength of his body."

It can truly be said that the Tabernacle was the center of Andrew's life. He confessed to his spiritual father that he had a very simple and effective way of placing himself in the presence of God, especially when at prayer. He would fasten his gaze upon the Tabernacle and with the eyes of Faith look on Our Lord as He opens His breast and discloses His Heart burning

with love for men. That glance of Faith assured concentration in his prayer so effectively as to prevent any distraction. "No matter where I am" — we read in his spiritual notebook "either in study or recreation or refectory or dormitory I will often turn my thoughts to the Holy Tabernacle and to Our Lady's altar. From whatever place in which I find myself I will set up, as it were, a telephone system by means of which I will send messages of loving ejaculations to Our Lord and Our Lady."

His communions were to him the vivid consciousness of God's transforming power: of that power which is at once purifying and quickening, which "burns the reins and creates a new heart." He longed for this transformation and with tears he begged for it. He believed that a Holy Communion could work this miracle. "When Holy Communion," he wrote later, "does not work this miracle, it must be that it is not received with the proper dispositions." His thanksgiving after Communion was in fact the action of his life that most moved those who watched him. "When he rose from his knees," says a witness, "his face, usually pallid, was suffused with a deep colour and his eyes were not seldom wet with tears."

His desire for holy intimacy with Our Lord and His Holy Mother led him to pray for an extraordinary favour: that during the night he might wake up at least every hour in order to send his message to His Beloved in the Holy Tabernacle and to His Blessed Mother. This desire, it seems, was granted; his novice master demurred at first as he feared his night's rest would be disturbed. But Andrew assured him that this would not happen: "I have asked the Holy Souls to wake me just for a moment: I send my message, then I fall asleep at once."

"His prayer" — notes Father Barberis — "did not consist of vague aspirations. There was much petition in it and the right sort of petition. He constantly asked for Our Lord's and Our Lady's virtues. After Holy Communion, to use an expressive phrase of St. Theresa, he was always negotiating.

For instance on Monday he would pray for Holy Purity through the special intercession of Saint Aloysius. On Tuesday he pleaded for the grace of a missionary vocation through Don Bosco's intercession. On Wednesday he asked for St. Joseph's virtue—purity and humility. Thursday was reserved for a special appeal to the Sacred Heart of Jesus that he and two of his companions might become saints. On Saturday he asked for purity and fidelity in little things.

During the months of grace

The month of May and of June in every Salesian house and especially in the Novitiate house are months of grace. During these months the last spiritual battles are fought and won, and the last tie, if any, which binds one to the world is broken asunder. The motto of May is: "*Dignare me laudare Te Virgo sacrata.*" All that youthful ingenuity can devise, flowers in choice variety, music and songs, open air sermonettes on Our Lady's lawn—there is nothing which is good enough to give expression to the praise and love of the Mother of God. There is an unaccustomed air of gaiety in the house, there is more animation during recreation time, more zest in the ordinary routine work of the day indeed even the daily round of work must share in the "*Laudare Te, Virgo sacrata.*" The month of June reflects, if we may say so, a different spiritual mood. It calls for love and reparation. June as well as July is the remote preparation for Profession, something like the thirty days retreat of the Jesuit novices. There is no unbroken silence as with the Jesuits but the Salesian novices are urged to cultivate a deeper spirit of recollection: this is to enable them to attain a deeper penetration of the mind and heart of Our Lord, of His life of self immolation and of his corresponding demands on us. The motto of June is "*oportet illum regnare.*" Our Lord must have absolute dominion over the hearts of those who are about to dedicate themselves to him. Only on these conditions can they prepare themselves to make his Sacred Heart known and loved in the world.

It was probably during the month of May that Andrew Beltrami wrote down for his own use and the use of a few intimate friends a chain of acts of devotion in honor of Our Lady which he calls "A Day With Our Lady."

A Day with Our Lady

A selection of these acts of devotion, culled from the large bouquet, will give us an idea of what Andrew meant by a day spent with Our Lady.

"We should love Our Lady with a love truly filial. '*Mater mea*,' this endearing title should often be in our heart and on our lips. On waking in the morning we should greet her with the words '*Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria*.' At night as we go to sleep let us ask her to bless us and to prepare our heart for a worthy communion on the following day. Again let us turn to her for her blessing before we start our work or when we pass her image or statue; when meeting difficulties in our studies let us invoke her as "*Sedes sapientiae*." Her name or initials should adorn our books. Her picture should adorn our desk. Above all let us frequently find our way to her altar and there with the confidence of true children pour forth our heart to her, acquainting her with the successes and failures of our little day, our resolutions, our efforts and our difficulties. She is our mother: let us tell her all."

Perhaps this interminable string of little acts of devotion will not be everybody's taste: we are not asked to imitate literally all the Saints do. However before dismissing such acts as of no value one should look for the spirit that prompts them. One will easily find a living spirit and "of the right sort" the spirit of children, and "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." When the heart of a child overflows with love one cannot tell the strange unconventional ways in which he will express his love. All this also applies to grown up children. Only recently we have heard of a distinguished man of a letters, the late Maurice

Baring, who for days on end would light candles to Our Lady. It was his simple prayer for the conversion of his friend Chesterton.

Actually Andrew and his friends filched their pet devotion "A Day with Our Lady from Saint Stanislaus Kostka, a boy saint whom we all love for his joyous, spontaneous piety.

That Stanislaus Kostka, Aloysius Gonzaga and John Berchmans should have been able to impress their ideals on the novices of Foglizzo, in spite of the marked differences between the spirit of the Salesians and of the Jesuits, is to the great credit of both societies.

Religious Profession

DEVOTION to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Mother of God would mean very little to Saint John Bosco unless they issued into apostolate. Devotion means fullness of love, exertion to make Our Lord and his Blessed Mother more widely known and loved. And it was the Sodalties that in the Saint's mind were to keep alive the apostolic flame.

One of these Sodalties, that of the Immaculate Conception, was particularly dear to the Saint. If you read its rules as explained in his life of Dominic Savio you will notice that they embody exactly the ideals of the modern "Legion of Mary." Its members were to be the leaven in the mass. They were to integrate the work of the superiors and be their most effective auxiliaries in fostering a high degree of morality and piety in the school.

Even in the novitiate house the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception filled an important need. For it should not be forgotten that Foglizzo, like Valdocco, was a curious little world: a mixture of fervent, good, indifferant, and even a few of the difficult type.

Ardent young men who had fought many a battle in order to leave the world and whose ambition was to dedicate themselves to the missionary apostolate in some unknown land of America sat side by side with young men who had embraced

religion under the impulse of even mixed or even merely human motives. Mary had but a superficial idea of the nature of religious state. For some the geniality of the Salesian life, the spirit of carefree joy which endeared their schooldays, the attraction of a musical or a literary career for which the Congregation found scope, even the prospect of continuing a friendship that had been formed at school; these and others had been some of the human incentives inducing them to give their name to the Congregation.

An amusing story

There is an amusing story of a Salesian priest who thankfully ascribes his vocation to a practical joke played upon him by some lively school fellows. He had been a pupil at the Oratory and at the end of the year had asked to join the Aspirants' Retreat not because he had the faintest intention of becoming a Salesian but simply because the retreat would be a welcome novelty and would give him the opportunity of spending a few more days with some of his friends. On the last day of the retreat the aspirants were lining up in front of the Rector's room with a view to registering their formed application for the novitiate. This boy, too, was in the line but, again, merely to while away the time and perhaps have a last chat with one of his chums. Now it so happened that the door suddenly opened, and, as the line fell back, some confusion followed. Two fellows, seeing at once the chance of having a little fun, caught their friend and flung him into the room, shutting the door behind him. What exactly happened during the interview we do not know but it appears that before the boy could speak and explain the situation the Rector was so warm and enchanting in his welcome that the boy there and then decided to become a novice. He went to Foglizzo and persevered. The story might not be true in every detail but even if it is largely a 'ben trovato' it has, like so many legends, a core of solid truth. It typifies the spirit of those days, the spirit of '*compelle intrare*' ('Compel them to come in'), the zeal

and largeness of mind which opened the novitiate's door to as many as possible, even to those of whom it might be doubted whether they had the wedding garment. "*Omnes probate, quod bonum est, tenete*" (Test them all, hold on to what is good) was the principle laid down by the Saint and carried out literally by his disciples. That not all these young men persevered and some soon found themselves out of place will therefore cause no surprise. Even some of the best, after the first fervour was spent, began to find life harder than they expected. As a consequence, several left. But the majority, after overcoming their hesitation, finally settled down. They began to see things in a new light, to set about their things more seriously, they rectified their motives and eventually made first class Salesians. This moral miracle, for such it must be regarded, was largely due to the zeal of Father Barberis and Father Bianchi whose sympathetic understanding and forbearance could reach incredible lengths. This the Saint had asked of them and this they did.

A very human story

A very human story in this connection is remembered of Fr. Barberis. There was a novice who after a few weeks of novitiate was still subject to slight periodical bouts of homesickness. Significantly enough these came round during spells of work when, broom in hand, he was going the length and breadth of one of the largest corridors of the house. One day Father Barberis happened to surprise him leaning on the broom and in one of his moods. Divining his state of mind he approached him and with a cheery smile: "Well, Brother," said he, "is there anything I can do to make you happy?" "Yes, Father," was the immediate reply, "I would much enjoy a good glass of wine." The priest laughed. Then taking the novice by the arm he led him to the cellar and told the laybrother to give him a glass of the best wine, and that any other time he should feel like having another one, he should give it to him. "That act of kindness," comments the Salesian, "was the beginning of a new life for me."

But the credit for all these spiritual conversions must not be given to the Superiors only. More than once the final stroke of grace, the impulse to take the plunge and bid an irrevocable good-bye to the world was due to the compelling example, the sympathetic interest, and persistent prayer of a fellow-novice, generally a sodalist of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception.

The animating spirit

We have already said that Andrew Beltrami was the animating spirit of this apostolate; an apostolate, let us repeat, which was only prompted by the purest motives of charity and of love for the Congregation. "He was deeply concerned," "says a witness," "about those whom he knew in danger of losing their vocation and were about to take a false step: for them he prayed and begged prayers." "He had been made sub-assistant of the novices in one of the dormitories," says another. "He made use of this superiority in order to help us with kindly advice and brotherly correction. This he did always with such humility and delicacy that no one could feel in any way hurt."

Father Bianchi says: "He hardly let any recreation pass without being in some way helpful to one or another of his companions. He had to accomodate himself to various temperaments and this cost him much effort."

"His company," says another witness: "Was always a source of pleasure and an incentive to improve ourselves."

But the time when he became particularly expansive and gave vent to his zeal was in the sodality meetings or in his talks with intimate friends. He would then pour out the ideals of the Sodality and of the Society as he saw them and point out the heights to which every Salesian should aspire with all the ardour which he himself felt. That such idealism was not of the sterile kind that soon evaporates with the passing of the emo-

tional mood is clear from the way in which he prepared himself for his religious profession. Writing in June to Father Bianchi, then recuperating at Penango, he says: "I am endeavouring to prepare myself for my profession by the exact fulfilment of my duties, as Don Bosco has recommended us." This ideal of testing his love of the Sacred Heart by 'harder and harder work for God and his neighbour,' as St. Theresa would put it, dominates his mind at that time.

Many hours he spent with D. Bosco

At the end of July after the examinations (in those days still the normal feature of the novitiate) Andrew was visibly tired: and his superiors decided to send him with a companion to Lanzo for a change of air. There he met some of his former school-fellows and their impressions are worth recalling.

"There was about Andrew an air of sweet gentleness and thoughtful gravity," remembers Father Costa, "and my old familiarity with him soon gave place to sense of respect and reverence." Fr. Cane also received the same impression: "How changed you are!"—his friend said—"You were not always as quiet as that" And the young cleric with a smile, "But I am happy, I tell you. I am very happy."

The few days which he was to spend at Lanzo grew into weeks through the generous impulse of his former superior, Father Guidazio, who, noticing the young novice's weakness, went straightway to Don Bosco and obtained for him permission to spend a full holiday.

The Saint was in those days at Lanzo recuperating after a fatiguing journey to Rome where he had been for the consecration of the new church of the Sacred Heart. Of the many hours spent with Don Bosco, Bro. Andrew retained a vivid impression. He even had the privilege of having his meals with him. "How much we can learn from his holy example," he wrote to a friend.

A touching scene

We cannot doubt that he was the witness of a touching scene which took place on August 10th when a group of past pupils came to Lanzo to offer the Saint their greetings on the occasion of his approaching birthday.

One of these past pupils, Fr. Griva, has left us a graphic account of the meeting. "We arrived at the College early in the afternoon. Don Bosco was much moved when he saw us: he could hardly utter a word. He kept looking at us with the kindly and penetrating eye of his which we knew so well. His appearance betrayed how much he was suffering. He did not receive us in the reception room but he came out on the lawn supporting himself on our arms, all the while speaking of the early days of the Oratory when he was wont to entertain his boys on the fields of Valdocco. As he got into an invalid's chair, he said jestingly: 'I used to beat the swiftness of my boys at running and jumping, and now I have to make use of others' legs to move about.' We wheeled him down to the far end of the lawn. Here we all gathered round him and a thousand things were said in a few minutes. He wished to see each and every member of the deputation. We spoke of his Golden Jubilee which was to be held in 1891 and on hearing that the Choir Master was thinking of preparing a choir one thousand strong to sing the jubilee mass he interjected: 'Oh no, that is not enough: there must be at least two thousand, and there must be a good number of Patagonians as well in the choir.' Then turning to the Parish Priest of Cunico. 'On that day,' he said, 'to thank our Lady Help of Christians we shall drink the wine from Cunico, and the Patagonians will sample it, too.' And he insisted on having a formal promise on this point. Before taking leave he blessed a few pious objects and when we asked him to bless all present and absent he was deeply moved, tears coming into his eyes and into ours as well."

On August 16th, Don Bosco's birthday, most cordial greetings were sent to him from all parts of the world and another

deputation from the community and boys of the Oratory arrived for that purpose at Lanzo. All these family events and above all the pathetic sight of the wearied Saint whose strength was visibly failing left a deep impression on the novice's mind.

Father Del Favero remembers that on one of those days he and Brother Andrew went for a walk with two or three of the senior students. One of them noticing how frail and tired the young brother looked ventured to remark that it was unwise to work too hard, that one should spare oneself and prolong one's life. Andrew would not agree. "The Lord," he said, "might call us at any minute; would you have us to run the risk of appearing before him empty-handed? No; we must work and keep on working. Look at Don Bosco, how much he has done and still does, notwithstanding his advanced age and weakness. And shall we, young and full of life, take things easy?" We must not forget these words. They provide the key to the rest of the narrative.

Unreserved and final offering

On September 23rd, Andrew started his retreat in preparation for his profession. This was to be not the usual temporary one for three years, but final and perpetual. Don Bosco had promised to go to Foglizzo for the ceremony but increasing weakness made the journey impossible. He arranged that the novices should come to Valsalice for their profession and there Andrew made his vows into the hands of his Father.

That his offering of himself to God was unreserved and final may be surmised from a confidence which he made at that time to his Superior.

One Sunday, in July, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, there had been a solemn procession in the village and the novices had been asked to take part in it. Andrew was given the office of

cross-bearer. As he, carrying his Cross, was walking at the head of the procession, an interior voice seemed to speak to him: "Andrew, can you bear the Cross with Me?" It was only a vague intimation, yet sufficiently clear as to prompt the immediate reply: "Yes, if You give me grace."

IX

The ideal student

VALSALICE is a pleasant little village lying, half hidden amongst sycamores and poplars, on the gentle slope of one of the many hills overlooking the city of Turin. The Salesians had for some years conducted a College there for the education of the sons of noblemen. This had been undertaken at an urgent request of the Archbishop of Turin. But it had only been a temporary arrangement and in 1887 it was decided that the College should be turned into a studentate for the growing Congregation. There had been difficulties with regard to this change, as a new seminary on the city borders was bound to rouse hostility in anticlerical circles, but the Saint had brushed aside every objection saying: "Do not fear, I am going to be the guardian of the place myself." The meaning of these mysterious words was made clear the following year when, after the death of Don Bosco, Valsalice was unexpectedly chosen as his burial-place. The new studentate was to be also a Training College for Salesian teachers. The need of properly certificated teachers was most urgent and the Saint had asked his young Salesians in addition to their philosophical studies to equip themselves for a teaching diploma as this was the only way to satisfy Government requirements. The Government authorities however, let it be said in passing, were not particularly gratified by the zeal of the Saint. Just previously a Cabinet Minister in a conversation with Don Bosco had said jestingly but pointedly: "We do indeed appreciate your work, Don Bosco, but we have

one serious complaint against you. You are turning out too many priests and too many professors." The Saint laughed and retorted in his own characteristic way. "Too many priests? But this is a flattering compliment. What general, glorying in his spurs, would not attract as many recruits as possible to march and fight under his banner? And with regard to the too many professors it is the Government that deserves the blame for compelling poor Don Bosco to send his young men to the University.

Other heroes

The staff of the new College could not have been better chosen. They were all very young, extremely able and enthusiastic. Most of them were destined later on to leave their mark in the Congregation. The teacher of philosophy, Fr. Varvello, was to attain renown as the author of a well-known text-book of philosophy and the writer of various philosophical publications. In charge of the scientific and mathematical department was Marco Nasso, in whom one could hardly tell whether frailty of body or tenacity of will was the greater. He also was to distinguish himself as a compiler of a Manual of Algebra and Higher mathematics. It was he that as prefect of studies with his broad vision and dogged perseverance, brought the studies to such high level of excellence that in later years the Government Inspectors (in those days under the control of freemasonry) were compelled by public opinion to recommend the College for state recognition. (1)

(1) Fr. Nasso belongs to the gallant band of heroic Salesians who delicate in body but strong in soul died comparatively young, victim of a disease that in those days was always fatal.

As a boy he was very dear to St. John Bosco. Fr. Boyton in "*The Blessed Friend of youth*" writes: "One day a serious looking lad dogged Don Bosco's steps in the Valdocco Oratory yard. Finally Don Bosco noticed him. "You wish to speak with me, my son?" "Yes Father. I should like to give you a present, which I hope will please you." "What is the gift?"

The Classical studies too were in good hands. Fr. Garino was a scholar and his greek grammar and various commentaries were to run into several editions. Finally Fr. Ottonello should also be mentioned. He was professor of Italian literature and he is well known for a popular commentary on Dante's *Commedia*. The admirable devotion of these young Salesians, their wholehearted co-operation with their Superior in a common effort to make the venture a success, makes one of the finest chapters of the early history of the Congregation.

Admirable example!...

There is a story of Fr. Garino, the Greek professor, being asked by Fr. Barberis to replace ad tempus the teacher of mathematics who was on the sick list. "Would you mind" Fr. Barberis said one day, "trying your hand at teaching mathematics? It will only be for a few weeks." It was rather a terrifying request for the Greek scholar, but eventually not without a sigh he said: "Well, Father, I will do my best." One day, so the story goes on to say, the extempore mathematician was trying to elucidate on the blackboard a rather intricate problem. After a lengthy and laborious explanation he turned to his audience and asked them: "Well, my young men, did you understand?" "Not a bit of it" they replied in chorus. "Neither

"Here," said the boy, standing on the tiptoe with outstretched arms and upturned face: "Here, Don Bosco, is the gift. I want to give myself to you from now on that you will keep me good always."

"My son (said the priest) you could not have made a more acceptable gift. Gladly I accept you, but not for myself, but to offer and consecrate you to our dear Lord."

The lad was Marco Masso. He never withdrew the gift. Having joined the Salesians when still very young he spent all his life at Valsalice as teacher and prefect of studies. After some time his health broke down and he had to be confined to his room. But though no longer able to teach (he could only speak in whispers) he continued from his invalid's chair to guide and control the seminary studies bringing them to a very high excellence. He died as he lived (1920) with great simplicity and serenity of mind. We shall meet other heroes of the same stamp in this biography which incidentally is intended to give an idea of the heroic spirit not only of a man but of a whole generation

did I" was the quick retort of the teacher as he threw up his hands in despair. But that admirable example of self forgetfulness is still remembered and still inspires the young generation. In such environment it was easy to realise with what ardour Andrew threw himself into his studies. The teachers however were rather exacting in their demands. Being all young and specialists it was only human that they should expect the students to have a preference for their special subject. Consequently, it was difficult to satisfy them. All admit that Andrew Beltrami succeeded in the task. Andrew's natural bent was in the direction of literature; yet he applied himself with the same intensity to all the subjects indiscriminately. One of his companions remembers him playing excitedly at one of the usual games and during a pause taking out of his pocket a slip of paper; he was revising some geometrical formulae.

To satisfy his tutors he had often to sacrifice his personal views. There were keen discussions in those days between purist and romanticists. The professor of literature was a stickler for purism and the older methods, and was most exacting as to the way of writing essays. Not everybody shared his views but Andrew never swerved an inch from his teacher's principles and directions.

Singleness of purpose

His spiritual notes of this time reveal what was his guiding motive in his studies: "I will imitate our father Don Bosco in the scrupulous use of time. Scholastic duties will always come first. I will indulge in no reading, even of spiritual books, before my daily lessons are thoroughly prepared. I will also avoid waste of energy by excessive eagerness." Fr. Piscetta comments on his singleness of purpose. "He attended to his studies out of obedience. I can truly say that even in those years he had no other motive but God's glory and the desire to fit himself to do good to souls."

Fr. Ottonello always saw in Andrew Beltrami the ideal student. "I did not know what more to admire in him whether his brilliant intelligence or his great humility. He was passionately fond of Dante. But it was not merely splendour of form that he saw in this masterpiece: he tried to interpret it in the light of ascetical and theological principles, which, incidentally, is the only way to study that great mind with profit. At my suggestion Andrew during that year read the Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales. How well he took in his teaching. It was remarkable how at his age (he was only 18) he could assimilate so well the ideas of the Saint."

He showed no less zeal in the study of the natural sciences. To an intimate friend he later wrote: "I always found great delight in the study of physical sciences. They certainly helped me to meditate with profit on the power and wisdom of God." It stands to the credit of the Valsalice professors that as faithful disciples of St. John Bosco they sought in their teaching to blend the natural with the supernatural and took every opportunity to lift the mind of their pupils to God, the *Scientiarum Dominus*. For the same reason, and as an antidote against the fascination of humanistic studies, the students were advised not to neglect the private study of christian literature. It is on record that Bro. Beltrami during his time at Valsalice learnt by heart large portions of St. Luke's Gospel and of the letters of St. Paul, and this by taking advantage of the short intervals which divide one duty from another, an excellent habit that he had formed at Lanzo. We are not surprised then if we are told, that by the middle of the year he was ready to sit for the elementary school teacher's diploma, in which he succeeded brilliantly.

Like plastic clay

More marvellous still was the fact that, in spite of such intense and distracting activity, his spiritual life instead of suffering loss, as usually happens, was moving towards a higher level. Fr. Barberis tells the secret: "He had mastered the art

of making a good meditation. *Ignitum eloquium tuum et servus tuus dilexit illud vehementer...* He loved exceedingly the word of God. It so inflamed his soul that during the whole day his intention was always directed to God."

This desire for greater generosity in God's service became noticeably more intense after the death of Don Bosco in January of that year. With many of his companions he had been privileged to see for a few moments the dying Saint and kiss his fatherly hand for the last time. The sight of his heroic father, of that body broken with labours and now struggling for breath, of his face drawn with suffering and yet beautifully calm and serene, had moved him deeply and his soul had been roused to a new determination to dedicate his life to a great purpose, to model it after the heroic life of his spiritual father. These aspirations find their outlet in a letter to his mother and to a greater extent in one to his Spiritual Director. To his mother immediately after the Saint's death he writes: "I have now only one desire: to become a less unworthy son of such a Father." To his Spiritual Director, in a letter which he wrote after protracted prayer, he reasserts his unshaken resolution to surrender himself to his guidance without reserve. He wants to be in his hands like plastic clay in the hands of a modeller. Let him handle the clay as he thinks best. "It is our Lady"—he says— "who has implanted in my heart such a desire for my sanctification. I have repeatedly besought her to enlighten me as to the way of becoming a Saint—and to enlighten you also that you might help me in my undertaking."

A permission which was never granted

These were no empty aspirations, no mere expressions of a youthful and unpractical idealism. Fr. Barberis, had he noticed such danger, would immediately have warned him. It has been wisely said that there is nothing so dangerous as to foster an emotion and then allow it to evaporate and spend itself before it issues into action. Such squandering of valuable

energy always weakens the soul. Bro. Andrew was always fearful that such might be the case with him. His searching examinations of conscience led him to think that he was slow in utilizing the many graces he was continually receiving. "A sermon which he once heard on this subject, says Fr. Barberis, left a marked impression upon his mind. The text was '*agonizare pro anima tua*': namely that we must be prepared to 'wrestle for the good of the soul' and if need be, '*usque ad sanguinem*' (unto shedding of blood). He thought he had not acquired sufficient mastery over himself and asked for permission to make extraordinary mortifications. A permission which, of course, was never granted him." Fr. Barberis would now and then point a warning finger to the little book of the Salesian Rule or to the picture of Don Bosco in front of him; he would then say with quiet emphasis: "This is what is to help you to become a saint: and that is your model. *Fac hoc et vives*. (Do this and you shall live.) And as to external penances and crosses, obedience and community life will supply them in plenty."

Bro. Andrew's spiritual notes of this time reflect how he completely entered into the views of his Spiritual Father. He has now only one desire, to become a saint by the exact observance of the religious Rule. "Oh, that my ways were well guided to the keeping of Thy laws!" we read in his note book. And other beautiful aspirations from Ps. 118 follow: "Blessed are they who keep His decrees. On Thy decrees I will ponder, Thy paths I will regard. I run the way of Thy commandments: for Thou widenest my heart." Indeed God's Holy Will is the only thing lovable and the only true source of joy. Bro. Andrew had reached the stage when loyalty was turning into love, the goal of religious perfection. His superiors and companions agree that by this time Bro. Andrew's obedience and poverty were already those of a perfect religious. One of them writes: "I once thought that the stories of obedience which one reads in Rodriguez, as, for instance, the story of the monk who cuts short" a "syllable at the sound of the bell, were to be relegated to the realm of the fairy tales, the reflection of a sanctity no longer

practicable. I was disabused when I watched the perfection of Bro. Andrew's obedience." His spirit of poverty was not less admirable; he evidently loved it as an infallible way of being conformable to our Blessed Lord. In those years if one was in need of a cassock for ordinary daily wear he was asked to pick out one in the wardrobe where all disused cassocks found their way. Fr. Fascie remembers Bro. Andrew wearing a cassock so ungainly, of such strange cut and so shabby, as to bring to mind the picture of one of those wretched beggars who feed on the table crumbs. He evidently had chosen a cassock which everybody had discarded as past wearing.

"And left me marvelling"

How he carried out the maxim 'think well of all, speak well of all' is shown by this conversation which one of his companions, Alessandro Aureli, left on record.

A.—"Have you heard the latest? So and So (a well-known Salesian) has left the Congregation."

B.—was silent.

A.—"Well what do you think about the whole affair? Don't you think it really a scandal?"

B.—"I am afraid I have no opinion to offer. This is the business of the Superiors who alone are acquainted with the facts."

A.—(sarcastically) "I see you don't like to commit yourself; you talk like the Fathers of the desert. Come, let me have a more human reply."

B.—"What do you mean by human reply? Do you mean an unfair judgement?"

A.—"Well, what's a tongue for?"

B.—"Yes, and what does St. James say about the sins of the tongue? You know that there are cases in which silence is golden."

A.—"Come, Brother, let us have silver just for once. What do you really think of this man?"

B.— "Well, if you wish to know my mind about the whole business here it is. A religious vocation is a signal grace which one should treasure up with great care. And at times God permits a fall even in a man who is not really unworthy in order that we ourselves may realise the delicacy necessary in our service in religion."

A.— "In other words you justify a desertion."

B.— "I did not say that. There is a difference between *deserting* the Congregation and *leaving* it."

A.— "A clever distinction indeed. I see you are a philosopher. But are you not quibbling?"

B.— "I beg your pardon. My distinction is quite obvious. By deserting the Congregation one does something dishonourable and worthy of reproof before God. But leaving the Congregation does not always imply guilt. Don Bosco, as you know, advised more than one to *leave* the Congregation."

A.— But now stop beating about the bush and frankly tell me : did So and So leave or desert the Congregation ?

B.— "Ah, that is just what I don't know : and it is not a fair question to ask"

"The sound of the bell interrupted the conversation"— comments Aureli—"and left me marvelling at the spirit of charity and prudence of this virtuous Salesian."

Any one who has followed carefully this little dialogue and has been able to read between the lines must have come to the conclusion that the uprightness of this young cleric, his unquestioning loyalty, his zeal, could not always escape criticism in certain circles.

Of the heroic mould

This in fact happened and it was a sore trial to him. He was aware of such criticism : in his humility he put the blame on himself (though there was no reason for it), suffered in silence and prayed for those who had misunderstood his intentions. But the critics were negligible in number and when

the last word was said this was invariably one of wistful admiration for the exemplary religious. Once when in a group an unfavourable remark had been passed on what was considered an excessive delicacy of conscience one present finally voiced the general feeling by concluding: "All the same, would that the Congregation had many Salesians like Andrew Beltrami." Was not this a spontaneous though unconscious admission that the young Salesian was of the heroic mould? and that a religious Society cannot be without such men?

Fr. Ceria, his fellow student at Valsalice, remarks: "There is a snare in which even the most fervent are apt to fall. It is that subtle sort of vanity which betrays the unconscious feeling that you are better than others. Bro. Andrew, I can say with all sincerity, was free from such misery. Every Friday evening I used to join him in the customary spiritual talk and I was always edified by the unassuming way in which he contributed his share in the conversation. Far from making show of his piety he rather played the role of one who prefers to listen because he wants to learn."

But there was in the eyes of all one unmistakable proof that his virtue was of no showy metal. It was well known that whenever it was a question of offering oneself for work and of giving one's best, energy, time or talent, for the benefit of the community, Andrew Beltrami always took the lead. This became particularly evident during his last year at Valsalice when still a student he was asked to teach philosophy to a section of his companions. The devotedness with which he fulfilled his task and the unstinted help which he gave to his pupils, especially the backward ones, are the comment of all in words which are warm and enthusiastic.

This extra work did not prevent him from sitting at the end of the year for another public examination, the "licenza liceale"—which corresponds more or less to the English Intermediate, and American B. A., leading to the University. As in previous examinations he came off brilliantly.

A Holy friendship

A striking characteristic of the life of Fr. Beltrami was his richness in friendships. Of ardent temperament and of affectionate disposition he longed for the intimate familiarity of kindred souls who would share his loyalties and ideals. As a boy at Omegna he had made close friends: at Lanzo and at Foglizzo he formed new friendships and it is chiefly to those friends that we are indebted for much of our information about him. One of these friends is Prince Augustus Czartoryski, who had just by that time joined the Salesian Congregation. As he too died in the odour of sanctity and his name is on the list of the Salesian Causes of Beatification it will not be out of place to give a short sketch of his edifying life.

"Thy sons will come from afar"

Augustus Czartoryski was born in Paris on August 2, 1858 the son of Prince Ladislaus and Princess Amparo, daughter of the Queen of Spain, Maria Cristina. The child gave soon great promise of virtue, thanks chiefly to the deep influence of his saintly mother who, alas, died when he was only six years old. Augustus received a complete classical and scientific education at the Charlemagne Liceo in Paris where he carried off several prizes. Fr. Grill S. J. prepared him carefully for his first Communion which his father desired he should receive with some solemnity in the crypt of the Parish Church of Sieniavah, the family

burial place. Indeed it would seem that after his first meeting with our Lord, the boy's heart began to feel increasingly drawn to heavenly things; all the diversions which society had in store for a young man of his rank had no attraction for him. He loved travelling but chiefly for the sake of visiting the most celebrated sanctuaries of Poland, France, Spain and Italy. Some time spent in the brilliant court of Madrid as guest of his cousin Alfonso XII did not seem to change his religious inclinations. The decision of his tutor to leave the world and to don the coarse habit of a Carmelite made a profound impression upon him and turned his mind in the same direction. Torn between the desire for a higher life and the solicitations of his family who intended him for a brilliant career in the world, his soul went through a long period of doubt and uncertainty. One day, as he himself related, during Holy Communion he heard an interior voice saying: "Don't be anxious. In due time I will send you one who will be the guide of your soul."

In 1883 Don Bosco was in Paris and the whole city was stirred by his presence and his words. One day he was invited to say Mass in the private chapel of the Czartoryski family and Augustus secured the privilege of serving the Mass. On that occasion the interior voice spoke again: "This is the guide I have provided for you." The mysterious intimation was made clearer when at the ensuing reception the Saint fastened his eyes on the young Prince and said: "I have desired to meet you for a long time." From that moment an irresistible attraction, one might say a fascination, drew the Prince towards the Founder of the Salesians. Whenever in his travels he passed through Turin he stopped to pay Don Bosco a visit: he performed no important action without his advice. Every year he spent a full week in Turin and it was touching to see the noble Prince in the church of Mary Help of Christians joining the boys and the community at prayer. The piety and joyous spirit of the Oratory cast a spell on him. It was on one of these long visits that he acquainted the Saint with his long felt désiré of embracing the priesthood. Don Bosco advised him to drop the idea and

to fall in with the views of his father who was anxious that he should settle down to married life and take charge of the management of the family estate. Twice did the Prince try to comply with the Saint's suggestions, but without success. Society life did not interest him and the interior call was as insistent as ever. The long trial came finally to an end in 1887 when during a retreat at Turin the Saint told him that he could now safely follow the divine inspiration. But when the Prince asked to be admitted to the Salesian Society he was told that owing to his feeble health and refined upbringing the Salesian Congregation was not meant for him. The Prince insisted and the Saint finally concluded that only a command of the Pope would make him change his mind. The Prince went straight to Rome where Leo XIII, after some reflection, gave his consent. "You can tell Don Bosco that I approve of your decision. He will raise no more obstacles. Don Bosco never acts contrary to the Pope's desires."

And so the Prince after having also obtained, though not without difficulty, his father's consent, at the age of 27, crossed the threshold of the Salesian Oratory to try his religious vocation. Six months later he received the religious habit from Don Bosco himself in the Church of Mary Help of Christians. It was an unforgettable ceremony. Another Pole, a Frenchman and an Englishman received the habit together with him. Don Rua preached the sermon and took as his text the words of Isaias: "*Filii tui de longe venient*" (Thy sons will come from afar.) The Saint was visibly moved and the ceremony so fatigued him that he had to be helped to his room. The new novice started his novitiate at Valsalice. His spirit of mortification in adapting himself without any exceptions to the demands of the common life, particularly hard in those days, is still remembered as well-nigh heroic.

With kindred soul

Bro. Andrew had already met the Prince at Foglizzo some months previously but it was at Valsalice that they formed that

friendship which was to last until death parted them. In truth the superiors not only approved the friendship but encouraged it. Don Augusto (as now henceforth the Prince will be called) was naturally shy and reserved and, on account also of his age and social rank, the clerics at Valsalice were not inclined to associate with him easily. Andrew saw at once the opportunity of doing an act of charity and whenever he saw him alone he offered to keep him company. The desire of learning foreign tongues, which Don Augustus spoke with a certain fluency, provided a further incentive.

One can easily imagine what was the subject of their conversations. Don Augusto was then in the first fervour of his new life and though at times he did not disdain to speak of his travels and of his experiences he preferred topics on religious life or on anything connected with the Congregation.

Don Boco's way of holiness

Yet, we must not think for a moment that the two young religious sought to penetrate into the secrets of the various schools of ascetical and mystical theology.

The way of holiness which Don Bosco had left as a heritage to his sons was direct and simple. He asked his Salesians to live in God's presence, to work for His glory and to draw strength in their work from the love of the Eucharist and of our Lady. In later years he used to urge with particular insistence love of the Sacred Heart as revealed in the Blessed Sacrament. It has been well remarked that in the development of the Salesian apostolate such as we see it in the life of Don Bosco, the Immaculate Conception was the morning star, Our Lady Help of Christians the noon day sun, while the Sacred Heart illumined its twilight. Indeed the ardour with which St. John Bosco propagated this devotion in his last years is not sufficiently known. After having built at the cost of much sacrifice a

magnificent church in Rome in honour of the Sacred Heart, old as he was, he was still consumed by the desire of doing something more to spread His devotion. We read that one day in 1887 as he was travelling in Spain his mind could not dismiss the subject. "Now that the church in Rome is completed" -- he kept on saying to himself-- "what more shall I do for the Sacred Heart?" And an interior voice replied: "*Tibi dabo! Tibi Dabo!*" What could these words mean?

Their meaning became clear a few days afterwards when in Barcelona at a big Catholic gathering a deputation of Salesian Co-operators asked the Saint to accept a property named *Tibi Dabo* on the hill overlooking the city for the purpose of building a Shrine there in honour of the Sacred Heart. The holy man, remembering the voice, could not restrain his tears.

The memory of this and of other marvellous facts of the life of the Saint, of his prophetic missionary dreams, of his dying recommendations, was enough to keep burning at Valsalice, the place where now he rested, the flame of a fervent spirituality and ardent missionary zeal. That we are not exaggerating is proved by many heroic pioneers and missionaries which Valsalice gave to the Congregation.

Down the shady lanes

Don Augusto could confirm what Andrew was saying by a personal reminiscence. He had once asked the Saint to advise him about the special devotions which as a Salesian should seek to adopt. "Concentrate on one devotion" the Saint said. "Seek loving union with the Sacred Heart who lives a life of love for us in the blessed Sacrament." Don Augusto thought this a wonderful and simple way of living the unitive life, about which so much is said in ascetical books. On other occasions their subject of conversation would be our Lady and the best means of honouring and imitating Her. One of these means

was living in trustful dependance upon Her, according to the methods of St. Grignon, a practice often explained and recommended by Fr. Barberis.

It is refreshing to think of these two fervent young Salesians talking passionately about God and His Blessed Mother as they walked quietly up and down the shady lanes of Valsalice whilst the rest of the clerics, a few yards away, gave free rein to their exuberant spirits in the most lively and strenuous of games. The scene was highly symbolic. It symbolised the Saint's ideal of a salesian house: a house in which intensity of active life is beautifully blended with intensity of piety.

Companion and guardian angel

At the end of the year Don Augusto, already in indifferent health was sent to Penango for a change of air. It was arranged that Andrew should share his company and it was his business to look after the novice, to encourage him to take walks and exercise. He did his task well and early in the morning both would be seen on their way to the vineyard where they had been told to eat grapes to their heart's content.

But it was on the following year that their intimacy became closest. Don Augusto had been ill again and had been sent to Lanzo to recuperate. Bro. Andrew was again deputed to be his companion and guardian angel. For two months he was always at his side: he accompanied him in his walks and drives, shared his meals, read to him and even rendered the ordinary and special services which only a devoted infirmarian could give. Above all he helped him to make the best of his malady and to turn it into a means of spiritual elevation. We are told that Fr. Faber's "*Alt for Jesus*" was their favourite book of spiritual reading. Had the English Oratorian still been living how glad he would have been to know that his enlightening pages on the 'spirit of oblation' served to sanctify two young sons of St. John Bosco. Bro. Andrew wrote in those days: "We agreed to offer

our food, rest, recreation, walks, medicines, everything in union with our Lord's actions, sure that they would share His infinite merit." Once they were talking about Don Bosco and of how, although often seriously indisposed, he never thought of asking God for relief. Don Augusto resolved there and then to imitate him. He was sleeping in the same room used once by the Saint and that gave him much consolation. The Prince was inclined to be scrupulous and Andrew was admirable in suggesting to him acts of confidence in God. In a letter to Don Rua, he writes: "Don Augusto is now more calm and serene. We have often made the offering of our life to our Lord and the renewal of our vows. His favourite aspiration is: *Fiat voluntas Tua*." In a subsequent letter he says: "The day after to-morrow we shall keep Don Augusto's feast. Would it not be nice if you could come and take part in a little 'festa' which we are arranging for him?" This last suggestion is a welcome human note on which it is pleasant to linger. Indeed would these two young Salesians have been true sons of their Father had they failed to value these little joys of family life?

Some time afterwards Don Augusto was ordered by the doctors to the Riviera and Bro. Andrew was free to join his companions again at Valsalice. Fr. Piscetta, speaking of Bro. Andrew at this time, says: "The devotion and self abnegation of this cleric only 18 years old, at an age when a young man feels so keenly the attraction for study, recreation and genial companionship, has always struck me as worthy of greatest admiration."

Salesian Educator

HIS course of philosophy ended, Bro. Beltrami was detailed to join the staff at Foglizzo as teacher of classics. The appointment made him not a little anxious as he considered the task far beyond his capacity but a word from his superior that he should banish hesitations and undertake the work 'in Domino' soon put him at ease.

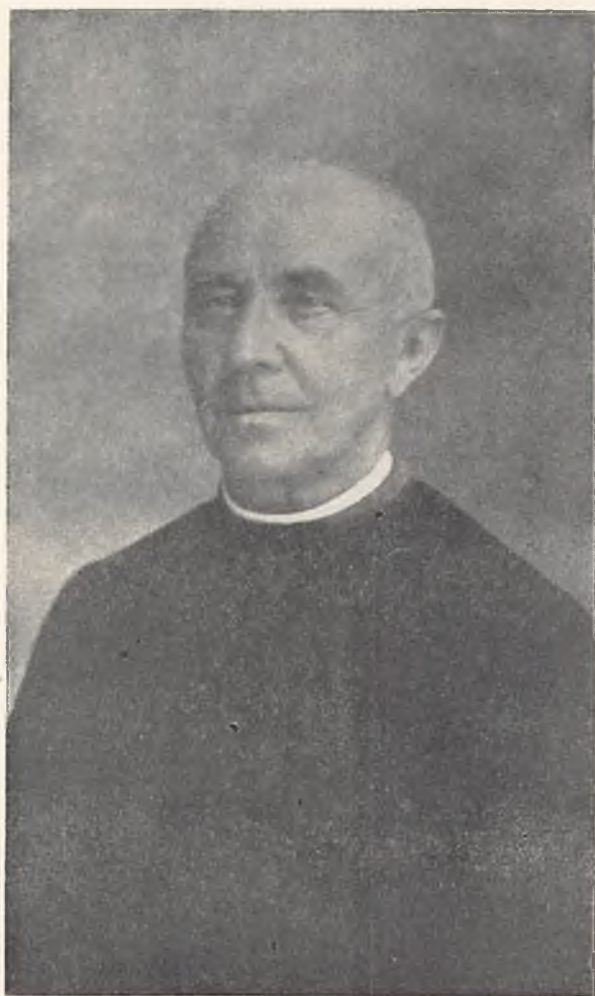
Actually his duties were not as simple as those of an ordinary teacher. He was to share the supervision, attend to his theological studies and on top of that he was to study for a University degree. How a young man just 19, far from robust, could be expected to put his heart into such variety of activities is one of the marvels of those days. As the phrase went, "one had to multiply himself;" but the example of Don Bosco and of Don Rua was infecting and nobody saw anything extraordinary in so doing. Our admiration increases when we see the principles which governed all such manifold activities. Bro. Andrew determined above all to be a teacher according to the ideals of Don Bosco. His pupils' progress, both literary and moral, would be the interest which was to be uppermost in his mind. His personal aspirations, his individual tastes, his attraction for literary studies, which we know, amounted to a passion, were to be wholly subservient to the higher good, that of his pupils and of the Congregation.

His teaching before all else

"Bro. Beltrami" says Fr. Valle—"had three duties, each of which would have sufficed to engage the activity of one man. Accustomed to work in a spirit of faith and obedience, he placed his teaching before all else, then his theological studies, and lastly his duties as University student."

All his pupils are of one accord in praising the thoroughness with which he fulfilled his teacher's task. One of them writes: "I saw myself with my own eyes the painstaking preparation he made for his class, the number of books he consulted, the copious notes he prepared, the pile of exercises he daily corrected. . . ." an enormous task when one is told that his class never numbered less than 80 pupils. "His punctuality," writes another, "was proverbial. After the first bell had sounded Bro. Beltrami betook himself to the classroom and there with a book in his hand waited at the entrance for the last bell when he would go in and start the lecture immediately. He was equally exact in concluding the lesson even going to the extent of cutting a sentence short."

One day a pupil received one of his remarks with bad grace and showed resentment. The Brother took no notice of the disrespectful attitude, asked him to sit down and proceeded in his exposition as though nothing had happened. The pupil soon realized his mistake and made public apology. He is now a good and zealous Salesian Missionary. Fr. Fascie, then one of his companions on the staff, comments on the ardour and enthusiasm which he brought to his teaching. "He had the gift of pouring his passionate love for knowledge into the minds of his pupils." But his chief ambition was to supernaturalize his teaching, to vitalize it by permeating it with true christian spirit. On this subject he kept up a correspondence with one of his intimate friends who had asked for his advice and the benefit of his experience. "Of course," he writes, "one must not overdo it. One must not turn the class into a church, the lesson into a sermon. Knowledge must be imparted conscientiously. Yet



FATHER GIULIO BARBERIS
Novice Master of Fr. Andrew Beltrami.

on the other hand one must not forget that the teacher's task is also and chiefly to mould christian characters." The apostolate of good example in recreation he considered just as important as the apostolate in the class. "Our pupils should receive the impression that we fear God and His commandments and that His love is the mainspring of all our actions." His friend was teaching physical science and Bro. Beltrami envied his lot. He thought that teaching such branch of knowledge provided a splendid opportunity of lifting the minds of his pupils to the mysterious Unseen. "Even mathematics, he once wrote, should give us such an opportunity." Then perhaps thinking he had overstepped the mark he concluded: "Impossible? Our Lady will teach you the way how to do it." One may smile at the naive enthusiasm of this young Salesian who relies on Our Lady to solve the difficult problem of spiritualizing mathematics: yet would not Don Bosco have spoken in the same terms? When difficult tasks confronted him and people mentioned the word impossible, it was then that the Saint with a gleam in his eyes would invariably retort: "Do not fear. We will do it. Our Lady will see to it." And what seemed impossible became a reality.

More than one sneered . . .

It has already been said that Bro. Beltrami during his teaching period was also a University Student. How, it will be asked, could he find time to attend the University lectures? Foglizzo was 30 miles away from Turin and travelling in those days, done partly by coach and partly by train, entailed much time and discomfort. Actually he went to Turin only once a week, usually on Thursday, his only day free from teaching. His object was to put in a weekly appearance so as to be able to secure the right of sitting for examinations at the end of the year. He followed as best as he could the Professor's explanations by means of notes which he borrowed from other students.

One of his fellow students writes: "Very often during winter he was unable to return on the same day: he returned by

an early train on the following morning. He would arrive in the house at about eight or half past eight without having broken his fast. He went to Holy Communion and then if there was time he took a little breakfast : for the bell for class went at nine and he always wanted to be punctual. Those who know of the discomfort of travelling in Piedmont in winter when the roads are full of mud and often covered with snow will have a proof of Bro. Beltrami's fervour and self sacrifice." Another writes : "One cold morning in December 1890, I happened to come across Bro. Beltrami at Valsalice as he was returning from the University lecture. He struck me as being rather worried. Evidently something had happened which had distressed him. Upon my questioning him he told me the secret. The Lecturer in classical philology had called upon him to explain a certain passage set down for study and he had to confess, not without a blush, that he was unprepared. It was the first time in his life that he had cut such a sorry figure in the class room. He had felt the humiliation all the more as he had noticed more than one sneer in the audience. 'It was not the sneering in itself that grieved me,' he said, 'but the thought that I had brought disgrace upon the cloth which I wear. On the other hand what could I do? As you well know I am in charge of nearly a hundred pupils and unless every day I supply them with their corrected homework there will not be much progress.' He was in fact carrying a bundle of papers which he intended to correct in the train or at odd intervals anywhere."

The "white bear,"

The experience which he gained by mixing in University circles was in later years to rouse his interest in the spiritual welfare of the Catholic students whose faith was in serious danger. He strongly advocated the idea of a Catholic University Club. He urged that the Salesians could not be indifferent to such a pressing need. He was then already an invalid and could only pray and plead. But he was not idle. He sent for an influential

Salesian and prevailed upon him to make himself promoter of the project and not to rest until it materialised. He thought that Salesian old boys attending the University could form the nucleus of the future Club. It is freely admitted to-day that it was chiefly owing to his interest and prayers that the University Catholic Club became eventually a happy reality. The Club prospered and for years kept aloft the banner of Catholic action in Turin : it produced amongst others that fine type of Catholic youngman, the saintly Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Other impressions have been recorded by his colleagues on the teaching staff at Foglizzo. They are worth quoting as showing that the idea of sanctity and all the abnegation it involves were constantly dominating his mind.

"He never lost a minute of time" says Fr. Conelli, then professor of philosophy. "He knew how to work well and quickly though unhurriedly. Owing to his need of abundant fresh air the windows of his room were always wide open even in the cold months of December and January. His ears and hands were livid with chilblains. These he endured with a smile. We often chaffed him about his preference for cold and used to call him the white bear and other similar nicknames. The joke did not put him out and he would join us in laughing. He used to sign himself 'White bear' in his notes and ask us to pray that his soul might really grow in grace and have the whiteness of snow." Fr. Costa comments on his love of poverty. "It was a passionate love," he says, "such as one sees only in great saints. During his last year at Foglizzo Bro. Beltrami wore a clumsy cassock of coarse material and much patched. It had belonged to a Polish cleric who had discarded it as quite beyond wear. We used to tease him about this strange garment but he seemed to be fondly attached to it." How much would his bantering companions have marvelled had they been able to see what was going on in Andrew's soul at that time. They would have understood that the strange attachment to an old coarse patched up cassock was only his way of showing his passionate love for Our Lord who became

poor for our sake. Saints are indeed extravagant. But it is love of Our Lord that drives them to such lengths : they simply cannot help it.

The great turning point

But he was never so absorbed in himself as not to have an eye for the needs of others. His pupils remark that he sought every opportunity of helping them at all times of the day; the backward and slow could always claim his special attentions.

By this time he lost the youngest of his sisters. He felt the loss very much. Every parting of this sort was always a wrench. We are reminded of Theresa of Lisieux's tender affection for her sisters and of her painful partings.

By the end of the summer term his health gave way again. One day in June he became aware that he had lost some blood. His superiors immediately arranged that he should go to Turin to consult a specialist. The latter did not diagnose the case as serious and advised rest. This he had for three months at Penango on the breezy hills of Monferrato. Upon arrival there characteristically he asked the Superior whether he could be of any use to the community by taking up some light occupation. He was told to supervise a few boys at recreation and then later to help a boy by occasional coaching. This boy retains unforgettable memory of the kindness and virtue of his tutor.

In October he felt so well that he offered to resume his teaching. For four months all went on smoothly. But one day in February (it was a bitterly cold day) unwisely, most unwisely, he travelled to Turin for his weekly University lecture. The strain proved too great and on his return he had a severe hemorrhage and collapsed. He was never to be well again. There was much sadness on that day at Foglizzo. Everybody sensed that a great calamity had fallen on the community. It was February 20th, 1891, the great turning point of Andrew Beltrami's life.

The offer had been accepted

Someone will probably ask : could not the catastrophe have been averted ? Could not abundant nourishment, a more protracted rest, have made the young cleric proof against the fatal attack ? This sounds common sense. But the fact is that in those days, the days of hard beginnings, human prudence was not always the deciding criterion. The Society was growing rapidly ; and this growth, like the advance of front line troops, could not proceed unless risks were taken. Not one but several of those generous pioneers took such risks and went down. But there was never any regret, never any repining. It was taken as a matter of course, even regarded as a privilege. Had not the Founder assured that whenever one of his sons should fall through overwork the Society would record a triumph ?

Still in the case of Andrew Beltrami even the above would not be an adequate explanation. There are circumstances attending the beginning of his illness which seem to point to the presence of a factor as mysterious as it was decisive. Fr. Beltrami himself gives us the clue in a letter, written some years later, to his spiritual director. "The months that preceded my illness" — he wrote — "were marked by intense fervour, by generous resolution, by an unbroken union with God which nothing but sleep could interrupt. This union with God in the months before my final breakdown had reached such an intensity that I thought I should die . . . It is likely that it was the cause of my illness. After meditation I was in a state of exhaustion, and this was further increased by Holy Communion . . . In truth my soul had ceased to have any taste for earthly things, even for learning, which had always been my passion . . . It was clear that the Lord was preparing me for this illness. . . ." To his former superior of Lanzo who showed concern about his state of health he wrote in the same strain : "Do not be grieved, Father, at my illness. . . . I asked for it that I might have an opportunity of doing penance for my sins in this world where one can suffer with merit. To

be candid I have not asked for this particular malady as I never thought of it. But I have asked for much suffering and the Lord granted my desire in this way."

These words are really necessary to understand that happened on the 20th of February, 1891. So the explanation of the origin of his malady is deeper than the one which a doctor's diagnosis could give. Perhaps we are not far wrong if we conclude that the generous young man under the influence of a strong grace had offered his soul to the Divine Purifier and the offer had been accepted.

The Priesthood

BUT his superiors were most anxious that Andrew should give all his attention to a complete recovery in health and, accordingly, no sooner was he well enough to travel, than he was ordered to go to Alassio on the Riviera. There the great-hearted Fr. Rocca gave him the warmest welcome. Bro. Andrew spent only a month at Alassio. Don Augusto Czarioriski then convalescing at San Remo, obtained permission for him first to join him at the place where he was staying. This was a model Salesian house, provided with every comfort spiritual and material, including the attention of a resident doctor.

Three months afterwards Bro. Andrew followed the Prince to Aix le Bains in the invigorating climate of Savoy. From that resort he wrote to Fr. Bianchi giving a report on his health which was slowly improving. His pupils at Foglizzo were evincing much concern about his illness and some had even offered their life for his recovery. This news touched him deeply and he felt prompted to do likewise for them. "I often pray for them and always will: I have often offered my life for them, but always in accordance with the intention of my superiors."

He was happy at Aix le Bains; only one thing he keenly missed — the Holy Tabernacle "This is indeed a heavy sacrifice," he wrote to a friend. Of the natural beauties of the mountains of Savoy, the magnificent panoramas, virginal forests and bleak rocks, their torrential cascades, their majestic dawns

and purple sunsets, he preserved a vivid remembrance : this he put on record later in a brilliant page of one of his books. On the mountains Andrew Beltrami always felt lifted anew to God.

Only a temporary improvement

At the end of August he left Savoy for Turin en route to Omegna, his native town, where it was thought the native air would greatly benefit his health. "I am better," he wrote in September to Fr. Barberis, "the doctors are quite hopeful. Spiritually too, I feel quite happy. The Parish Priest is a true Salesian Superior, who in confession speaks to me as a religious."

A visit from Fr. Bianchi brought him and his family immense joy : in fact it helped considerably towards his improvement.

With the winter approaching Bro. Andrew left Omegna for the milder climate of Alassio but in the following spring he was back again, and now the improvement was so marked that he was able to give some time to his Theology. But there were moments when in his innermost soul he knew that this was only a temporary improvement. "The doctors hold out much hope, but I am not excessively optimistic. I am preparing for death while taking all the remedies prescribed. Our Lord gives me a sensible experience of His grace and I feel supremely happy."

At Foglizzo and at Valsalice the students, most of them his pupils, were storming Heaven for the recovery of this precious Salesian. He was urged to join them in their prayers for that purpose. "I will continue to pray" he wrote at the time to Fr. Barberis "whilst placing myself completely in God's hands. When well enough, I give some time to my moral Theology. I will do as you suggest and join in spirit the clerics at Foglizzo in a special Novena to our Lady, asking for an improvement in my health such, at least, as will enable me to receive Holy Orders." Actually his superiors were anxious that as soon as

possible he should be given the consolation of the sacred priesthood, and to this end, as 18 months were still wanting before he reached the canonical age, they were arranging to secure the required dispensation. Our Lord heard their prayers. Andrew improved so much that he was able to travel alone to Turin where in September he received the Subdiaconate and soon after the Diaconate. Even the hard winter months of Turin did not hinder his improvement and he continued the study of Theology giving also some time to the preparation of the ceremonies of the Mass.

The intensity of his interior preparation is evident from his correspondence and especially from an intimate note which was found amongst his papers after death. "Sweet Jesus, prepare me for the Holy Altar. Prepare me for the Holy Priesthood. I am in fear and trembling. I am a great sinner. *Ego non sum innocens, non habeo virtutes.* Grant me innocence." And he chose some saints, one for each Order, as his special protectors.

The long desired day

The long desired day arrived at last. On the 8th of January 1893, he received the sacred priesthood in the little chapel of Don Bosco at the Oratory from Mgr. Cagliero who happened to be then in Italy. The ceremony was strictly private, only a few confreres and his two brothers from Lanzo being present. His only regret on that day was that his entire family was not able to attend. But at his second Mass in the chapel of the Addolorata at Valsalice his mother also was present. An eyewitness recalls how mother and son were radiant with joy.

The Ordination card which he chose to mark the occasion is characteristic of him. It bears an image of Our Lord amongst lilies and lambs and underneath the following words: *Sacerdotes Domini sancti erunt Deo suo. Mecum benedicite Domino quia suscitavit a terra inopem ut collocet eum cum principibus populi sui.* Fr. Barberis in his biography notes with a sense of wistful regret

that on account of his weakness it was not possible to mark the day with music and an academy as it is usually done on such occasions. But was it not the better thing after all? From a private note which was found later we gather that the new priest approached the Altar in the spirit of Victim, an expiatory victim for the sins of the world. Would not the external expression of joy have marred the sacred intimacy of that sublime self immolation?

For the poor

To the following months belongs a short poem, only a few stanzas, which Fr. Beltrami wrote for the comfort of his dear mother, at that time passing through a severe affliction. The eight unpolished stanzas are decidedly a poor literary effort but their genuine inspiration reminds us, if not of the lyrics of St. John of the Cross at least of the popular rhymes of St. Alphonsus. The theme of the poem is suggested by St. Ignatius well known words. "*Quam sordescit terra dum Coelum aspicio*" (how ugly looks the earth as I gaze on Heaven). Earthly desires no longer attract him: only a share in our Lord's chalice can satisfy his soul's desires.

By the end of May, upon the doctor's advice and also to please his parents he betook himself to Omegna. He now felt well enough to walk every morning to the nearby Convent of the Ursuline Nuns where he said Mass to the great consolation and edification of those religious. They still speak of him as of a second St. Aloysius for the fervour of his devotion.

And now that he felt stronger and was no longer confined to his room his priestly zeal soon found ways of expressing itself. It was only natural that he should take an interest in the children of the town. He was often seen surrounded by little boys to whom he gave sweets, pictures, and spoke simple words of exhortation. His sister remembers his frequent visits to a poor invalid woman forgotten by everybody, living alone in a dark

and musty room. Canon Voli testifies to his solicitude for the poor of the parish : "He used to stop and talk to them and often helped them by generous alms or got his family to help them." This love for Christ's poor was always a marked characteristic of the Servant of God. There was in his love for the poor something of the tenderness of the Poverello of whom we read that at the sight of a distant beggar would instantly get off his horse, run to him, place money in his hands and then embrace him as the dearest of brothers. His great devotion to St. Francis from his youngest days may account for his marked love of the poor as it accounts for his writing later his life. In his letters to his mother there is nothing so touching as his recommendations to be generous in almsgiving.

In the poem we have just mentioned Fr. Andrew draws a delicate picture of a beggar as he is knocking on the door to ask for an alms. "Mother," urges the poet, "do not turn a deaf ear to the door-man : he is our Lord disguised as a poor."

Ascolta il poverello
Che batte al tuo ostello
Cristo sotto sue spoglie
S'affaccia alle tue soglie
L'aiuto ad implorar.

After a few days he rallied

Though very slowly he seemed to be improving. His family was overjoyed at having a priest in the house. But, alas, their happiness was to be shortlived.

One day in August, Fr. Andrew thought of paying a visit to a mountain shrine, a favourite spot which he had often visited as a boy. The climbing was too much for him and the strain caused a hemorrhage. It was so severe that for five days following he was between life and death. Sorrow and gloom settled down on the family and on the town. "The only one to remain calm

and unmoved" says an eye witness "was the priest himself. His eyes fixed all the time on the Crucifix, he seemed to live more in Heaven than on earth." He was given the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction. After a few days he rallied. He always attributed this return to life to the prayer of his grandmother, a devoted woman, who together with his mother nursed him with the tenderest care.

Years later he recalled in moving words that unforgettable scene and paid a loving tribute to the memory of his beloved grandmother. He could not forget "her troubled look, her bated breath as she approached his bed on tip toe, anxiously peering into his eyes for any sign of hope..." "The deep tolling of the belfry bell summoning the faithful to escort in devout procession the Holy Viaticum; the well known footsteps of his Parish Priest upon the stairs: and how in that moment, when human hope was gone, she, the greathearted woman put all the strength of her soul into a mighty act of faith and pleaded amidst tears for her dying grandson. Jesus was moved by those tears and yielded: and he stayed the hand of the Angel of death already hovering over my bed and I rallied and I got up, and once more, in that very room in the presence of my delighted relatives I offered the sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb..."

That he may die near Don Bosco

So strength returned, very little, yet enough to give the impression that recovery was still possible.

But he soon began to feel acutely the loneliness caused by the forced separation from his religious family. Having heard that in the neighbouring town of Borgomanero there was a Salesian Missionary, Fr. Solari, just back from Brazil, he sent him word that a visit from him would be considered a great favour, a distinct act of charity. Fr. Solari hastened to his bed to satisfy his desire. "I found him" wrote Fr. Solari "in bed in a state

of utter prostration. His face was pallid but lit up with a sweet smile that reflected the serenity of his soul. As soon as I entered his room he tried to rise to welcome me : he took my hand and kissed it reverently and placed it upon his head. He asked me at once for news of Don Rua and the other Superiors, and urged me to pray that he might not die at home but near Don Bosco's tomb. I said Mass in his room and gave him Holy Communion. The rest of the day I spent with him, he could speak very little but he listened with great interest to all the news I could give him of our Missions in Brazil."

On that occasion Fr. Beltrami sent for the Parish Priest, and with him arranged for a lecture to be given in the Parish Church at a suitable date. This lecture was a great success. That Omegna should take an interest in the activities of the Congregation and should eventually benefit the work of the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was always one of his most cherished desires. Later on a festive Oratory was opened and the Sisters began the work there. It was also at this period that several boys of Omegna, through his interest in them, gained admission to the Oratory and to San Benigno.

He began to feel better and was able to leave his bed. The Superiors extended to him the privilege of the portable altar and so he was able to say Mass in his room. That was for him a great consolation : he insisted that the altar should be adorned in the best possible way and that there should be flowers in abundance — "those flowers which God gives to man to symbolize His perfections," as he once wrote. A memorial tablet was later on placed at his suggestion in that room by his parents : and he dictated the following inscription : "*Ad perpetuam rei memoriam. Hoc in loco Sacerdotes Joseph Solari et Andreas Beltrami pluries Missam celebrarunt. Beata domus quae Dei praesentia sanctificata fuisti. 1893.*" (The tablet has been placed here in remembrance of the Holy Mass often offered in this room by the priests Joseph Solari and Andrew Beltrami. Blessed is this house which has been sanctified by the presence of God.)

For the sake of Thy words . . .

But the improvement was more apparent than real. One day Fr. Beltrami received a surprise visit from one of his most intimate friends, a boyhood friend whom he had not seen for years. The meeting could not be but touching. "Fr. Beltrami" — so his friend — "believing or pretending he was strong enough rose from his couch to greet me : but as he tried to embrace me his strength failed him and he fell helpless into my arms. The futility of the effort filled him with confusion, and tears came into his eyes. He afterwards apologized for what he called an act of weakness."

This incident is very human. Actually the meeting of his friend in those very surroundings had vividly brought back to his mind the happy days of his youth, when, full of dreams and ambitions, he was looking forward, to an active and energetic life. But now how different was the reality!.. In a flash he now saw that all those dreams were shattered forever. And it was under the strain of that sudden realization that he broke down. This is the only time that we see him giving way to depression of spirit. The fact was that Andrew Beltrami with his superior intelligence and keen sensitiveness, with all his gifts and accomplishments, could and did appreciate the joy of life, the joy of work, and felt keenly the loss of both. Indeed Andrew Beltrami was far from being an apathetic sufferer.

Since that day the invalid saw with increasing clearness that the malady had come to stay, and that all human devices would be powerless to bring back his health. His growing conviction that his illness was the fulfillment of a divine purpose is reflected in one of those vivid scriptural phrases of which his intimate pages are literally full. "For the sake of the words of Thy lips I have kept to the hard paths. *Propter verba labiorum tuorum custodivi vias duras.* Ps 16.4." These words will now become the lodestar of his life. Autumn was drawing near and Fr. Beltrami expressed his desire to rejoin

for good his religious family. He begged his superiors to dispense him from the use of exceptional remedies and from any special treatment such as change of air, specialist and costly medicines. The request was granted and on a melancholy day in October, as the leaves began to fall, he said good-bye to Omegna and set out for Turin.

XIII

Apostolate of Prayer

THERE was nothing attractive about the room in which our invalid found himself on his arrival at Valsalice. It had no sunny or otherwise pleasant view; it was not even blessed with the ordinary amount of light which the clear Italian sky so generously provides. But in its seclusion it had one advantage: it was close to the community chapel, so close in fact that from the room one could (through a small loggia) have a view of the sanctuary. It was no doubt this consideration that prompted the superior to assign the invalid that room, a choice which pleased him immensely. Here the holy religious was to spend the last four years of his life; a life which can well be summed up in three words:—prayer, suffering, work. This is the apostolate of Fr. Beltrami.

"Every one has his duty to fulfill," he once said to an intimate friend. "You have been given health that you may work. God has taken away my health that I might suffer. Our Congregation is in need of sufferers. Pray that I may never desert my post."

On active service to the end

Yet his vocation was to be one hundred per cent Salesian. His room was not to be the cell of an anchorite at all times so absorbed in mystical contemplation as to be utterly oblivious of what was happening in the world outside. Rather it was to

be an advanced battle post where the holy Salesian, on active service to the end, would, not only by prayer but also by work, share his brethren's apostolate in all its extent. For it should never be forgotten that Fr. Beltrami in realizing his ideal has constantly a model in his mind. This model is no other than Don Bosco, the hero of his life. At all times, like Don Rua and other disciples of the Saint, Fr. Andrew would put to himself the question : How can I be like Don Bosco ? What would he wish me to do here and now?

Let us first have a glance at the tenor of his life at Valsalice. He generally rose at five and after attending to the customary toilet and to the cleanliness of his room, about which he was very particular, he devoted himself to prayer until nine: the first two hours being his preparation for Mass and the last two his thanksgiving. His breakfast at nine consisted of a cup of coffee and bread. Then he read or wrote at his desk until 11:30, A.M.—the hour of his frugal lunch. The afternoon was usually spent in prayer. From 5 to 7:30, P.M.—reading again or writing : then supper, which consisted of a cup of coffee and a few slices of bread. After supper, prayer once more, which he often prolonged till midnight. In winter he spent those hours in the little loggia overlooking the choir, but in summer, on account of the stifling heat, he preferred to descend into the church below. He had his chair carried on to the predella before the Altar and there spent long hours in prayer. The laybrother in charge of the nightly round often surprised him at two, three o'clock in the morning and even later. These hours spent before the Blessed Sacrament were no doubt a time of intense spiritual delight for the fervent religious. Unconsciously he reveals himself in a passage of his Life of St. Mary Margaret Alacoque where he refers to the supreme happiness of a soul privileged to keep our Lord company before the Tabernacle. "It is in those moments, when all around is silent and the only companion is the flickering lamp, that our Lord reveals himself to us and allows us to hear the beating of His Heart." What

was the subject of those intimate colloquies, and what sort of petitions went up in those moments from the soul of Fr. Beltrami to God's throne will be disclosed further on.

Close to the tomb of D. Bosco

During the first two years he ordinarily said Mass in the chapel of Maria Addolorata, close to the tomb of Don Bosco on the storey below. Because it was tiring for him to climb stairs two young men (salesian aspirants) volunteered every day to carry the invalid priest from and to his room in his chair. The brother who served his Mass still remembers his beautiful bow to the Cross as he entered the chapel. "He had very little strength and it was pathetic to see the effort which vesting for Mass cost him. Even moving the arms in raising the amice and fitting it round his neck caused him pain. He said Mass with great devotion pronouncing distinctly every word. Often he had to be kept waiting when visiting priests were saying Mass at the same hour. He never showed the least sign of impatience or annoyance. Seated on a chair he would spend that time absorbed in prayer. The chapel could never be heated and those who have experienced the bitter coldness of the Turin winter will realise how intense must have been his suffering. His ears, nose, and hands were literally livid and purple with cold."

The young brother confesses that being aware of the nature of his illness and hearing him constantly cough he felt at first a great disinclination to meet him. But he at once adds: "One noticing his sweet charity, the heavenly expression of his countenance, and the warmth of his gratitude for the little I did for him, I began to look forward to the privilege of serving his Mass: I knew I was serving the Mass of a Saint."

The young cleric remembers also the delicate attentions which Fr. Beltrami had for him. "Once he heard me coughing, and with some persistence he asked me: 'does the superior know

about your indisposition?' I said no. You must tell him, he rejoined. A few days later he asked me again whether I had informed the superior and on my admitting that I had not done so, he reprimanded me gently. I really believe that he himself went to see the superior about my trouble because I was sent for and ordered to submit to treatment."

Another young cleric has a vivid recollection of Fr. Beltrami's daily visit to him when he was lying ill in the infirmary. "His visit was to me like an angelic apparition and the few words of comfort which he spoke to me on those occasions were a soothing and refreshing balm in hours of physical pain and moral depression." We shall hear more about this brotherly tenderness and love later.

During the last two years of his life, owing to his increasing debility, he had to say Mass in his room. He sorely missed that opportunity of visiting daily the tomb of Don Bosco. Every day he would now be seen standing for a long time at the window overlooking the tomb, and as his eyes were fixed on that sacred spot, his lips were murmuring prayers. It was the daily outpouring of his soul to his Father.

His fervour during Mass

As time went on the absorption of his fervour during Mass became so remarkable as to seem humanly inexplicable. The server noted that the holy priest went through the first part of the Mass employing ordinary time; but after the Consecration he proceeded very slowly, so slowly as to spend ordinarily one hour and more. "What struck me was the fact that whereas, at other times he was always coughing and could hardly stand and his arms always needed a support, now, after the Consecration he never coughed, stood motionless and erect for more than one hour and found no difficulty in keeping his arms outspread. His eyes were all the time fixed on the Sacred Host and his

countenance, often, not always, took on a remarkable bright colour."

"Fr. Beltrami," continues the witness, "was concerned about my getting tired and asked me to kneel on the prie-dieu and to lean my arms on it. He also prevailed upon the Prefect to provide me with a long and heavy overcoat, for the windows were always open and it was very cold. If at times I made any mistake he would point it out on a slip of paper: he asked me to correct him when I notice anything amiss in him. He always greeted me with the words: May Jesus be praised."

Another laybrother, Bro. Frank, who served his Mass during his last months bears out what has been said above. "Fr. Beltrami's Mass during his last year lasted at times two hours, never less than an hour and a half. He was so weak that he could hardly make the movement of fitting the cincture round the alb. I had to do it myself. But no sooner had he reached the moment of Consecration than he was a different man. He genuflected with ease, he raised the Host without any difficulty, and with his eyes fixed on the Sacred Host, he went through the rest of the Mass quite oblivious of what was going on round him. His faith could be seen in his eyes. He seemed to be talking face to face with an invisible person; I was always happy to serve his Mass despite the time it lasted. I had time to say all my prayers, the fifteen mysteries, and then to make my preparation for Holy Communion which I used to receive from his hands."

The secret of his prayer

Is it now possible, one will ask, to draw aside, even a little, the veil from the inner sanctuary of Fr. Beltrami's soul that we may catch a glimpse of the secret of his prayer?

Fragments of notes and passage in his books, obviously autobiographical, will help us in our enquiry.

First of all let it be said at once that Fr. Beltrami's prayer, was never attended by any extraordinary mystical phenomenon such as raptures, visions, or levitations as we read of in the lives of saints, including our own St. John Bosco. Though even a tentative explanation is always a presumption we may perhaps suggest the reason. His choice of life of expiation, his intense desire for humiliation, would have hardly been in keeping with such showy gifts. He certainly would have found them disconcerting if not distressing. We find the same absence of mystical phenomena in St. Theresa of Lisieux. She also offered herself as victim for the conversion of sinners. In any case it should be borne in mind that these extraordinary gifts are not of the essence of mysticism. This consists essentially in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. "At no time," says a modern theologian, Abbot Oscar Vonier O. S. B., "do the christian mystics rise to anything higher than the full development of the three divine virtues." And it is the development of faith, hope and charity that is wonderful in Fr. Beltrami—so strikingly wonderful as to draw from an eminent religious the remark:—"Fr. Beltrami a saint? Certainly, and not an ordinary one. He is one of the giants!"

Faith and hope were at the root of his prayer; and both were so vivid in their expression as to remind us of the faith and hope of the great Patriarchs and other saints of the Old Testament. No wonder if the holy man could not pray but in the words of Job, David, Jeremias. All his favorite ejaculations and aspirations are in fact drawn from the Bible. Of them he had made a long litany which, written on a sheet of paper, he carried close to his heart until death.

But it is the intensity of love that is particularly evident in his prayer. It was very early, so it seems, that the Servant of God reached that degree of mystical union in which God becomes the sole and undisputed possessor of the soul. "God" he often confessed to his spiritual father, "has given me an unbroken union with Him which only sleep can interrupt." "I

think that the need of being in a cold place in winter, of eating ice and snow, of breathing fresh air is due to the ardour of such a union which seems to burn my body as well as my soul." He added that twenty degrees of cold could not cool this interior flame. In very truth he could make his own the inspired words of the Canticle: "*The Love that Thou hast given me, O Lord, is stronger than death: and all the waters of tribulation cannot quench it.*" (1) "These words which were part of his prayer are not the expression of empty emotionalism or a poetical fancy: they are indicative of a strong reality.

Fr. Piscetta, his spiritual director, testifies that such intensity of love was particularly noticeable when a great feast came around. He was then left considerably weaker in body afterwards. That such union was a genuine embrace of the Beloved is clear from the abundance of peace and joy which left him perfectly happy in his pains. This was clearly the "*superabundo gaudio in tribulatione mea*" of St. Paul.

Such vehemence of love could not be but intermittent: it would have been too much for a frail human body. As we gather from another of his intimate notes, his union with God in the ordinary way took the form of a 'loving attention to God' — what St. Francis de Sales calls prayer of quiet — the sweet repose of the soul in the arms of her Beloved.

Deeper and deeper submission to God

What is surprising is that the young religious reached such high degree of union in a very short time: in fact we had a glimpse of it during his novitiate. We think the explanation is to be found in the generosity of his renunciations and the ardour with which he pursued the path of humility. As he himself wrote: "The more a soul detaches itself from all

(1) Canticle VIII, 7.

creatures the closer becomes its union with God." Similarly St. Theresa of Lisieux wrote: "The only way to advance rapidly in the path of love is to remain always very little. This is what I did." Again it was the great St. Theresa who said: "With regard to union with God it is humility that does everything." And abbot Marmion taught: "The ascension of the soul towards God is characterised by a deeper and deeper submission to God."

There is no doubt that an increasing desire for humility and for deeper and deeper submission to God was the core of Fr. Beltrami's prayer. It had always been so, from the first day of his religious life, as his spiritual letters testify: "Our Lord has granted me a big grace — a great desire for humility, a real famine for this virtue." "My union with God generally consists in a simple petition: 'O Lord make me humble, truly humble.' For six months I have been asking for this virtue. I do hope that the Lord will grant me the grace to persevere in this exercise and that He will increase the thirst for it."

A kiss of the Crucifix.

It was to be expected that Fr. Beltrami's love should find its expression in a tender devotion to the Passion of Our Lord. A witness writes: "He kept on his desk a Crucifix of the ordinary make such as is given to departing missionaries, and it was common knowledge at Valsalice that he cherished it as one cherishes a most precious treasure. With the childlike faith which he had learned from his mother he often kissed the Crucifix or pressed it lovingly to his bosom. In one of his books he urges devotion to the Crucifix. "What a world of meaning is to be found in such a simple act as a kiss of the Crucifix. Kissing the Crucifix like the kissing of the Altar at Mass betokens love, union of hearts: it spells friendship, pardon." And he goes on to speak tenderly of the holy affection with which saints never tired of kissing the sacred wounds of the Crucified Christ. We may imagine with what tenderness of

devotion the holy religious practised what he urged others to do. In truth Fr. Beltrami was a wonderful lover, and his manner of loving was that of simple souls.

Another witness comments: "In his room there was a carved statue of the *Ecce Homo*. Though artistically crude and of poor workmanship Fr. Beltrami held it very dear. He used to spend hours before that statue." Writing of St. Margaret Mary he says that "the Saint's contemplation of her Divine Spouse, crowned with thorns, His body lashed and bleeding. His feet bound like a malefactor's made her oblivious of all earthly sufferings." These were no doubt the holy priest's feelings as he prayed before his Agonizing Lord.

For the prevention of sin

We can hardly doubt that it was in the light of these divine sufferings that the holy Salesian, like his Father, was given the grace of realising to the full the tremendous reality of sin. We are told that St. John Bosco, that herald of joy to nineteenth century youth, turned inexpressibly sad at the mere thought that one of his children was in danger of falling a victim of sin. And when this took the form of scandal, he literally wept. Fr. Beltrami shared with his father this charisma of tears.

One day Fr. Beltrami was lying prostrate on his bed suffering from a great oppression, one of those crises which were to him a real torture. A Salesian, Fr. Grandis, happened to be present and began to sympathize with him. By way of reply the invalid raised his hand slowly and pointed to a card which was over his head. It bore the following inscription: "no pain however severe, not even death, is as great as a venial sin."

It was no doubt this realization of the terrible evil of sin that prompted the holy priest to make the heroic offering of himself as victim of expiation for the sins of the world. Over

the ruin of souls brought about by sin, Fr. Beltrami, it can be said without exaggeration, wept with the grief of an Old Testament Prophet. "Who will give water to my head and a fountain to my eyes that I weep day and night" for the loss of souls? These words of Jeremias (Ch. 9, 1) he made his own and they became part of a prayer which he kept constantly close to his heart. But even that would not satisfy him. With the same deliberation of will he would vow himself as victim of intercession for the prevention of sin. This was in keeping with his Salesian ideals. Had not his father St. John Bosco urged so insistently that if you really have God's interests at heart it is the prevention of sin that matters? Of this truth, the fundamental principle of the Salesian system, Fr. Beltrami was so convinced that he would have given his life for it.

And it was only to be expected that as he entreated with tears our Lord to protect souls from the misery of sin he should have primarily in his mind the thousands of young men and boys who filled the Salesian Oratories and schools all the world over. Unable to play his part in active labours for the salvation of that youth, he would, like the High Priest of old, raise day and night his hands in supplication pleading that his brethren, whatever was their sphere of work, might be untiring in their vigilance, ever alert in forestalling the enemy snares. It was one of his cherished petitions, comments Fr. Barberis, that the preventive methods of St. John Bosco should be always held in high esteem in all the Houses and Schools of the two Congregations.

He would go over each name

The activities of this twofold religious family, needless to say, Fr. Andrew followed with the keenness and affection of the most loyal of sons. He had constantly at hand an up-to-date catalogue of the Congregation, and would often peruse it from beginning to end. He would pray at length for the Superior General and for each member of the Superior Chapter. Then he would go on asking graces for the novitiates and studentates.

for their superiors and each of the young novices and students. Similarly he would commend to God the needs of all the Convents of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, especially their novitiates.

For the increase of vocations and their perseverance he pleaded with special vehemence. If it came to his knowledge that the vocation of one of his brethren was in danger he would give himself no rest: he would wrestle, like Jacob, with his Master until he had won the favour.

There is no need to add that the Salesian Foreign Missions had a special claim on his prayers. He would go over the name of each missionary and beseech the Divine Mercy to grant them untiring zeal, power to endure, safety from danger, and a rich harvest of souls. Any letter that came from the missions as well as the missionary news in the Salesian Bulletin he always read with eagerness and delight.

Nor did he forget to pray for the members of his family: their needs both spiritual and material were constantly in his mind. We can now understand how the holy priest filled his time when by day and especially by night for hours on end he stood watch before the Holy Tabernacle.

"I offer myself Victim"

But as time went on praying and suffering merely for those who were related to him by blood or religion could hardly be expected to satisfy his soul. "*Dilatentur spatia caritatis!*" he cried one day with St. Augustine. Let us make more room for love. Surely, charity could not be held in such narrow limits. And so he began to feel more and more that his heart could, by God's grace, expand and make room for a wider intercession. So it was that one day in December 1895, the holy sufferer, no doubt under a special impulse of the Spirit of Love, by a formal document vowed himself a victim for the needs of the whole

Church at large : for the Pope, bishops, priests, religious of both sexes, for the agonising, the suffering souls of Purgatory, the salvation of men in heathen lands. "I offer myself victim" he added, "also for the inhabitants of the stars if there are any and if they are in need of redemption" (1). The gist of the whole document is to be found in the concluding moving supplication : "*Salva omnes homines, Domine, et percutite Andream peccatorem*" (Save all men, O Lord, and strike only Andrew Beltrami, a sinner).

This heroic prayer, signed with his own blood, he attached to a map of the four continents and placed it upon his breast that it might be offered at every beat of his heart. Fr. Beltrami had already made this offer of himself in a general way on the eve of his ordination. It was now to be more comprehensive, final and irrevocable.

Six months previously in the same year young St. Theresa had made at Lisieux the same heroic offer and for the same purpose. What can explain this identity of aspiration in two souls completely unknown to each other but the action of the Holy Spirit who, as St. Paul tells us, "prays within us with groans beyond all utterances?" (Rom. 8.26) But let us read the document itself : any comment would spoil its compelling beauty.

Prayer

Dear Jesus,

I intend this prayer to rise continually from your suppliant at every instant, at every moment. Convert all sinners. Comfort all with Thy grace — all the agonizing, all the world over. Set free the Holy Souls in Purgatory. I willingly offer myself to endure all the pains of the souls in Purgatory in all their duration and intensity, and those of each one in particular. To suffer all

(1) He evidently had in mind the words of the liturgical hymn "*astra lavantur flumine*—even the stars are washed by the flood of Christ's blood."

the agonies of the dying: all the chastisements and pains of sinners (except their sins). I offer myself to suffer until the day of Judgment, the afflictions which Thou didst suffer on earth, in Thy life and death: the spiritual desolations of all the saints, the torments of all martyrs and even of the damned if such be Thy Will: all this with Thy grace. Jesus, let me be a victim constantly offered to Thee."

Sweet Heart of Jesus, I include America with all its dying and its suffering souls in Purgatory in the wound of Thy right hand, Africa in the wound of Thy left hand, Europe in the wound of Thy side, Asia in the wound of Thy right foot. Australia in the wound of Thy left foot.

Sweet Heart of Jesus, I offer myself as a victim for the conversion of England, of Germany, Russia, the Eastern Church, Turkey, the United States, Africa, China, India, the people of Australia and the arctic and antartic regions. I offer myself as a victim for the Pope, the Bishops, the heads of Religious Orders, priests of the regular clergy. As a victim for all men in the world and for each one in particular and also for the inhabitants of the stars and the planets in the event of these being inhabited by rational beings in need of succour from others. My prayer, my sacrifice, united to that of Jesus Christ, which is of infinite value, may extend even to these. Are the stars inhabited? Did they have a fallen Adam? Were they visited by fearful chastisement? I do not know: but if such should be the case, if my prayers purified and rendered effectual by Christ can reach even these, I offer myself as victim for all. They are thy brothers, sons of the same Father, works of the same Creator: and in the Divine light I love them, and I am ready to die for them as well. One drop of the Precious Blood of Jesus is sufficient for all the worlds in the universe and this drop is mine: it has been placed at my disposition by Christ: and not only one, but all the drops of His Blood, all His merits. August Trinity, I offer Thee the whole of the Passion, all the actions of Jesus for all,

But, O Lord, accept me as a victim above all for my dear Mother, the Salesian Congregation : for the Superior General, for the Superior Chapter, for the Provincials, for the Rectors, and for each of the confreres : for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians : for the co-operators, for the boys in our Schools and Festive Oratories : for the apprentices in our Trades Schools : for the girls educated by the Sisters. O Lord, accept me as a victim for the Missionaries : as a victim in a special way for the house of Valsalice, for all its Superiors, clerics, laybrothers and Sons of Mary.

I am ready to suffer the agonies of Abel, the blindness of Isaac, the persecution of Jacob, the afflictions of Joseph, the sufferings of the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt, the misfortunes of Job, the blindness of Tobias, the sufferings of David, of Jeremias, of Isaias, the martyrdom of the Machabees and of Eleazar, the Babylonian slavery, the torments of the martyrs, especially of the Apostles : the Gethsemane, the Pretorium, the Calvary of Jesus : the grid-iron of St. Lawrence, the wild beast of the amphitheatre, the cruelty of the Romans, Chinese and Mahometan Emperors.

O Lord, pardon the whole world, and strike me only, who am the greatest sinner, worse than the very devils. Lucifer committed one single sin of pride, while I have committed many of every kind. O Lord let there descend on me the curse, except sin, uttered by Josue and the Levites upon Mount Hebal, and upon my brothers the blessings pronounced upon Garizim.

Most Sweet Heart of Jesus, the love you have given me for souls is stronger than death and hell.

May all this be in accordance with the Divine Will, sin being understood as always excepted.

Witnessed : Aloysius Piscetta, Salesian.

(Sealed with his blood)

Valsalice, 15-12-1895

ANDREW BELTRAMI, Priest.

Apostolate of suffering

WHAT are we to make of these strange yearning for suffering? Of these extraordinary petitions?

Of their sincerity we cannot doubt. Yet it may be asked, what is their worth in the scale of values? What purpose can they fulfil?

Only those who can realize what union of a soul with Christ means and the power which Christ can impart to such a soul will find an answer to these questions.

This power no less than the power to love. And love can take many forms. Love can be expressed in action, desire, suffering. Indeed suffering is the noblest and richest form of love. For at that price only is love redeeming. "Greater love than this no man hath that he lay down his life for his friends" (John XV, 13). The closer then is the soul's union with Christ, the greater is the soul's desire to share Christ's suffering and redeeming love.

Don Bosco was no exception

It is not to be wondered then if all the great servants of God longed to follow their Master along the path of expiatory suffering. St. John Bosco was no exception. He was still a young priest when such aspiration was already dominant in his soul. It was at that time part of his ministry to visit the city

prisons and the sight of many young men, early victims of sin, affected him deeply. With infinite patience he bent over them to hear their confessions but as he absolved them he would prescribe but a light penance. He would instead plead with Divine Justice that he might be allowed himself to expiate, at least in part, his penitents' sins. This accounts for the mysterious headaches and other severe physical pains which immediately followed his request.

The same divine lesson he sought soon to impress upon his sons when these first began to gather around him. All know of the Saint's predictions of vast apostolic activities to two of his missionary bishops but few know of the martyrdom of pain which he foretold to several of his sons, for instance to Fr. Piccollo and Fr. Provera, to mention only two names. We are told that on one occasion a young cleric asked the Saint playfully for a present on his approaching feast day. "A present?" answered the priest, looking tenderly on the young man. "Yes, you will have the present—but it will be Our Lord's crown of thorns." Indeed, the brother was soon visited by a severe and mysterious headache which he bore the whole day with fortitude. Nobody could ever know what was the purpose of mercy that lay behind that pain. To add another instance we read that one night in 1875, the Saint saw in vision a procession of young men and Salesians long since dead. They looked radiantly happy and were singing a melodious song. But their shining white robe, he noticed, had been made red by the martyrdom of penance.

We need not therefore be surprised if the Saint prayed that the spirit of expiatory suffering should never be lacking in his Congregation. Only at that cost would it expand.

"Just a little to imitate Don Bosco"

Andrew Beltrami was in the front line of these heroic sufferers, who, by vowing themselves to a life of expiation,

were to fill up what was wanting in the Salesian apostolate. Let us say at once that the young Salesian put his lips to the chalice only after a struggle. He had his *'agonia'* (*'agonia'* means struggle) and it seems not a short one! Human nature was shirking from the acceptance of the cross. How much this acceptance cost him is revealed in a letter written to Fr. Barberis at a time of particular suffering when in addition to his growing malady another affliction was weighing heavily upon him. It had happened that a certain course of action which he had taken through obedience had, owing to a complex of circumstances, landed him in a very embarrassing situation, involving also his family in much distress. The following lines describe the state of his soul. "This trial has been going on already for four years and at times the suffering is very great. In my anguish my only support is trust in Divine Providence, which, I know will order all things for God's greater glory and the good of my soul. Even now when I think of it my soul aches and I have to resort to meditation and spiritual reading and spend much time in making acts of resignation and confidence. Rodriguez's *'Treatise on the Conformity to the Will of God'* I know nearly by heart. The higher part of the spirit is all right, but the lower part, the natural reason, is easily disturbed and agitated. It then takes a long time to recover its peace...."

This mental conflict was only natural. His penetrating intelligence could not but see the part played by the human element in the circumstances that had shaped his lot and eventually shattered all his human ambitions. But he always refused to see in the human element the decisive factor. He trained himself to see God's hand in everything. He saw His all embracing Providence turning all events, even those due to human will, to a higher purpose. And this mysterious purpose he adored and finally accepted with all the strength of his soul.

One of his intimate friends, Fr. Bertolucci, was one day sympathizing with him about his illness. "What a pity," he

said, "that you are an invalid and you cannot work . . . and to think that this is the result of your excessive obedience . . ." Fr. Beltrami cut short the sentence: "No," he said, "we must not speak like that. God knows what He is doing. He has marked out a path for each one of us: our duty is to follow our path with all confidence. Only thus we can be true Salesians. You have been given health that you may work, my business is to be sick." "But you are working too" rejoined his friend.

"Just a little, and to imitate Don Bosco . . ." (1)

On another occasion he wrote: "The theoretical knowledge of spiritual things is worth very little in itself: Far better that it should be put to the test of experience. Then we learn a good deal indeed. It is a good thing to learn the theory of conformity to Divine Will: better to be in such circumstances that one is bound to practice it."

Fr. Beltrami simply followed the line of St. John of the Cross and of the Cure of Ars. "These things," said St. John, "are not done by men but by God, Who knows what is meet for us and ordains all things for good. Think that God ordains all." Similarly the holy Cure said: "It is no use to try to find out whence crosses come. They all come from God."

Whole-hearted thanksgiving

But it was not merely in the spirit of resignation that he put his shoulders to the Cross. Resignation is not meant to make lovers or heroes. It was not long before his soul reached that state which St. Francis of Sales calls holy indifference, and others, holy abandonment. Though that would not seem enough for him. As days went on and he saw more and more

(1) This is the same Fr. Bertolucci who a few years later was to fall himself victim of a very severe malady which for fourteen years confined him to an invalid's chair.

that a purpose of love lay behind his suffering, his indifference finally made room for a continuous act of joyous, whole-hearted thanksgiving. In his morning prayer after having thanked God "for having created him, redeemed him, made him a priest and religious" he added: "and for having given me this malady as a means of sanctification." In his daily *Benedicite*, the great thanksgiving prayer of the priest after Mass, he added "*Benedicite omnes dolores mei Domino*" thus calling upon his sufferings to give praise to God. Indeed the '*Deo gratias*' began to rise so spontaneously to his lips as to become his favourite ejaculation. Fr. Grandis who was studying next to his room remembers his frequent '*Deo gratias*' after each painful fit of coughing. (1)

"You see," he wrote to his mother, "how well the Lord loves me. He leads me along the path of the Cross, that royal road which He reserves for His loved ones."

The anniversary of the commencement of his illness he began now to keep as a red-letter day. "This last February"

(1) Here is another man of the heroic mould. Many still remember Louis Grandis when he was pupil of the Salesian Oratory (Turin). Tall, red-haired, bright-eyes, athletic, a singer of first rate, at the age of sixteen he surprised all his companions by giving up the long cherished ambition of military career and entering the novitiate at Foglizzo. His Salesian career was remarkably rapid. At the age of twenty seven we find him already Rector and Provincial in Mexico. Here seven years of unbroken activity in exceptionally difficult circumstances were enough to shatter his health completely. Sad indeed was the day when Fr. Grandis still in his prime of life had to leave his beloved Mexico and return to Europe in search of health. But this he was never to recover. At Ivrea, where he was sent by obedience he soon realised that every hope of active work was to be given up forever. A severe form of mental and physical exhaustion proved rebellious to any treatment. Every mental effort including the celebration of the Mass and the saying of the Breviary became impossible. This trial, more painful than his persistent insomnia and physical suffering, was to last for twenty years. Fr. Grandis bore it with admirable fortitude never uttering a word of complaint. Indeed it is literally true that he bore it with a smile. Like Fr. Beltrami he offered himself as victim for the Congregation. His last years saw a mitigation of his trouble. One day in our Lady's chapel at Becchi he received the grace of being able to resume the celebration of the mass. He closed his life serenely on Dec. 8, 1940.

he wrote to a friend, "has been the anniversary of my illness. I remembered it with three days of festivity: I have praised and thanked God with the *Te Deum*, the *Benedicite*, the *Laudate Deum omnes gentes*, the *Agimus tibi gratias* for having deigned to give me a share in the suffering of His Son." A share in the suffering of Christ. Here is the key to his love for suffering. As all Saints, he did not love pain for its sake: but because it made him similar to Our Lord.

What he suffered will never be known

But it would be difficult to realize the intensity and variety of these sufferings. It may be repeated of Fr. Beltrami what we read in the life of St. Theresa of Lisieux. "What he suffered will never be known in this world."

In the first days of his illness, so he himself confessed, he felt as though his right lung had completely hardened, whilst the left one could barely function and that with great pain. The increasing debility of his chest, frequent coughing, made his breathing extremely laborious: often he could only gasp. Movement of any kind was difficult. His legs at times could not support him and at the same time sitting was quite painful. There were days when he could neither lie down or stand up or sit on a chair and he had to lean on some support. The heart's palpitation and feeling of oppression was a torture. "It is terrible what I have to suffer when my heart is in such a state," he once confided "it seems as though it is going to burst." Add to all this the constant nervous tension, the mental suffering caused by a life of isolation, by the inevitable disgust and repulsion which he noticed on the countenance of those, especially the young, who came in contact with him and knew the nature of the disease.

Nor was this all. There was another affliction rather persistent and of a most humiliating nature which often made

the cup of sorrow overflow. We refer to the tribulations of the flesh. These rebellions of the senses in a man whose life was an endless mortification, who was prepared to 'die one thousand deaths than commit the least deliberate venial sin' are rather disconcerting. Yet an explanation is not far to seek. Had not the holy priest asked God to strike him as the worst sinners, as an outcast, that souls might be saved? Had he not offered to suffer pain in all its forms, sin excepted? Had he not cried with St. Paul: "I wish to be anathema from Christ for the sake of my brethren?" It is then conceivable that God took him at his word and permitted this humiliating buffeting of the flesh that others might be mercifully spared. Of a similar case we read in the life of the German mystic Theresa Neumann. A University professor was immediately relieved of a harassing temptation against faith by a prayer of the mystic, but she had to suffer the trial herself.

Speaking of faith there is no record that Fr. Beltrami was ever tempted against this virtue. But he had severe temptations against the virtue of hope. This was perhaps the most searching of his interior purifications. This trial also he bore with fortitude. We are told that when the deep waters of this mental affliction threatened to overwhelm him, he would look on the Crucifix, clasp it to his bosom and keep on saying that, true, he was great sinner, nevertheless our Lord had died for him and would never suffer him to perish. Or again he would repeat with holy Job. (XIII 15) 'Even if God should kill me, I would still trust in Him,' or he would draw strength from that marvellous act of confidence. "*In Te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum.*" Finally he would cast himself into the fostering arms of our Lady, his Mother, his help, his hope. Eventually peace, complete peace would come back to his soul.

Suffering love

Our Lord must have been pleased with His victim. The sweet flavour of this sacrifice must have been rising increasingly

fragrant in His sight. It is a divine saying that 'he that hath, to him shall be given.' This must be the reason why, as time went on, his desire for suffering kept on daily increasing, to such an extent as to become an unquenchable thirst. In 1897 he wrote to Don Rua : (I have no wish to recover : neither do I want to die. *'Non morire, ma vivere per soffrire.'* I wish to live that I may suffer more.) On another occasion he protested that with God's grace "he would gladly endure all his sufferings until the day of judgment."

Again we ask ourselves : what does all that mean ? what is the value of such desires, to suffer and not to die, to suffer until the last day ? Are they not but morbid fancies, foolish dreams ?

Exactly the same question, and by that very time, another sufferer young St. Theresa, did put to herself in a far off corner of Normandy as, confined to a bed of pain, she felt an overwhelming desire of being a missionary and a martyr. What did desires mean ? She soon found the answer. Reading one day St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians her eyes lighted on the famous passage where the Apostle expands on the nature of love. She was then giving to understand that her longings for martyrdom and missionary apostolate were very valuable indeed though they could never be realised. She understood that such desires are 'love' in the highest degree: and love, we repeat, is never barren. Love alone produces evangelists, missionaries, martyrs, apostles. Love embraces every vocation.

The recent Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ with its renewed emphasis on the primacy of the interior life has come once more to remind us that the Church and all its great institutions cannot do without these 'Spirits of Flame,' without these suffering contemplatives. They are necessary in the Church to keep love burning at white heat. Without them the work of saving souls would proceed languidly — the building of God's temple on earth would be slow and halting.

We are thankful to God for having added this young Salesian to the noble line of Theresa of Lisieux, Gemma Galgani, Gabriele Possenti, Theresa Valsé, and others, who in the last century advanced His Kingdom by the sheer intensity of suffering love.

Apostolate of the pen

THE portrait of Fr. Beltrami would not be complete were we to circumscribe his apostolate by the limits of prayer and suffering. He would not be true to his prototype, the saint of action, 'one of the greatest labourers of the Church of God,' as two Popes called St. John Bosco. Indeed many are the furrows of activity which the Saint traced out to his Salesians, and one of them and very important too is the writing of books of popular instruction.

Fr. Beltrami took up writing about the end of 1894 and laid down his open ten days before his death. In the space of four years he wrote a goodly number of books and booklets such as are rarely produced even by a writer who dies at a late age.

A distinguished writer, Dr. Mioni, says : "I cannot describe the impression of gentleness, and supernatural tenderness which Fr. Beltrami's writings convey. When I consider that they were written by an invalid on the brink of the grave : how trying it must have been to him to hold the pen, with fingers often benumbed with cold, whose very motion caused him intense pain : when I consider all the fatigue that all these books entailed I am amazed at the writer's zeal and capacity for work." Indeed it would seem that these lovers of the Cross can draw from the depths of their sufferings not only a negative gain of submission but a positive good in the shape of added power for life work.

His literary career

Fr. Beltrami began his literary career with a collection of Essays on modern foreign literature which he wrote in collaboration with Professor Ferri. The Essays gained much praise.

But his real first work was to be the popular life of *St. Mary Margaret Alacoque*, which he completed in 1894. Lives of this great servant of God were not lacking: but they were bulky and chiefly concerned with visions and revelations. Fr. Beltrami preferred to dwell on the inward beauty of her soul, to lay stress on her virtues and on how she attained them. He dedicated the book to the novices of the two Congregations, the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. "I wrote," he says in the preface, "this little book near the resting place of our Father Don Bosco whose life was an unbroken canticle of love for the Sacred Heart. Our Founder willed that the shield of our Societies should bear the image of the Divine Heart so that his children might often gaze on it and be reminded that they were to love it and make it loved by many. If they will do so the two Societies will grow, and notwithstanding persecution, extend in such a manner as to share the prodigious vitality of the Church." He concludes by expressing a wish that the two Congregations should be solemnly dedicated to the Sacred Heart. This wish was carried out six years later by Don Rua on the first day of the new century.

On the following year he wrote a popular life of *St. Francis of Assisi*. In this small volume which he dedicated to his parents, he gives us a glowing picture of this seraphic lover of Christ. Of Assisi which Dante calls 'Oriens' he writes: "Assisi will ever be an Orient, a 'rising sun,' light unto the path of all who are resolved to scale the heights of heroic Christianity."

In the same year he wrote a full-length life of *St. Joan of Arc*. The book, written in delightful style, betrays an enthusiastic admiration for the heroine. It is one of the best books

on the subject. To the same period belongs the life of *St. Lidwin*, the Dutch virgin who was an invalid for 31 years. No one could have written about this saint better than our saintly priest, himself an invalid. The book is an ideal companion for those who are sick.

The year 1896 was the richest in Fr. Beltrami's literary activity. His "*Perle e Diamanti*," a collection of sixty stories, based in large part on the lives of famous men, is a credit to his vivid imagination and brilliant style. It attained at once a wide circulation especially amongst the young. Of a more serious character is the booklet "*Volere é Potere*" ("Where there is a will there is a way." Its pages, full of inspiration, are an index to the writer's character, which, as we have already seen, was marked by great ambition and tenacity of purpose. All those who believe that character building is the foundation of sanctity will like this book. Another little book of that year, which many consider as one of his best ascetical production, is a little treatise on *Venial Sin*. It is full of unction and has many passages worthy of St. Alphonsus. It soon attained popularity, especially in seminaries and religious communities: 23,000 copies were sold in a short time. Similarly successful was another little treatise on the existence of Hell.

And playwriting

Fr. Beltrami tried his hand also at playwriting. He chose as his theme the heroic figure of Thomas More owing no doubt to his apostolic interest in England. Fr. Tozzi S.D.B., remembers the day when having received his obedience as novicemaster of the Salesian English Province, he went to take his leave of the invalid priest. Fr. Beltrami kindled as he spoke of England and of the prospect of its conversion. "I spend whole days," he said, "praying for England. If God gives me life I have in mind to write a small book on the English schism. I hope it will do some good, it will at least prompt people to pray

for that country." To the last year of his life (1897) belongs the *Life of Napoleon* which he dedicated to his Father Don Bosco a 'conqueror of souls.' "This is no ordinary biography," said a literary critic : "It reveals a master's touch. No important detail escapes the writer who shows a fine critical acumen in the selecting and marshalling of facts. No better book could be put into the hands of the young."

Another book soon followed and of the same size, the "*Aurora degli Astri*," in which the youth of 33 celebrated men is brilliantly described. To the same year belongs the small but golden volume "*Maxims of Don Bosco*," which reveals his deep love for his Father and the diligence with which he perused his writings. Its last page was written ten days before his death.

Other small works which were published after his death were the *Lives of St. John de la Salle*, *St. Stanislaus Kostka* and of *St. Julius and Julianus*, the two patron saints of his native town. Amongst the unfinished manuscripts are three volumes of the works of St. Francis de Sales, translated from the Annecy edition.

The writer's message

Let us ask an outsider to give us an estimate of Fr. Beltrami's writings. Dr. Mioni writes : "These books are thoroughly Salesian in style and intent. The style is smooth and easy, even elegant, though without any literary pretension. Indeed the purpose of the writer is not to win popular praise or to flatter or to amuse a frivolous reader. It is preeminently educative : it aims at spreading goodness and uplifting souls. The writer never loses sight of this object : with the result that not merely in his devotional books but also in his books of history and fiction he is at all times at pains to point out a moral, to deter from error or evil, to spur on towards virtue. One can trace in every page the masterly hand of the educator who goes straight

to the reader's heart and skilfully touches those chords which are sure to give the best response."

Were we asked to point out the writer's favourite message, that which he constantly seeks to convey to his youthful audience, a passage from the *'Aurora degli Astri,'* we think, would supply the answer. It reminds us of the fine idealism of Longfellow's *Excelsior*. Speaking of virtue, he says: "Virtue is a high and steep mountain and its ascent calls for toil and perseverance. But the higher we mount the greater is the magnificence of the panorama that spreads before us, the clearer the sky, the purer is the air and the brighter is the sun. And when we have reached the summit how full is the joy of the soul!... It is an ample reward for all our fatigues."

This great sufferer certainly belongs to the school of those Christian mystics (the true mystics indeed!) whose eyes would never rest on any form of goodness that was not transfigured by beauty and joy. And in this too he was true to his type.

XVI

The end

AT the beginning of 1897 it was clear that Fr. Beltrami's strength was fast ebbing away ; but if the outer frame was dissolving, his spirit was still alert and vigorous and his ardour at work was as steady as ever.

On the 8th of February, the sixth anniversary of his illness, he begged his Superiors for an unusual favour. He had never left Valsalice for the last four years and it was his wish now to pay a last visit to our Lady's church at Valdocco. He was taken there by coach and he greatly enjoyed the visit. For a long time he prayed at the Altar of our Lady Help of Christians, pouring forth his gratitude for his Salesian vocation and for the many graces connected with it, chief amongst them the 'big grace of his illness.' On that very spot in his younger years he had prayed and dreamt of a long life spent in the missionary apostolate. How different had been his career ! Yet, no matter how dark the days, and how rugged the path, never had confidence in his heavenly Mother for a single moment failed him : and this too was a big grace.

Never so happy

In June he had one of his usual crises, a violent hemorrhage, but 'after invoking our Lady (so he wrote to a friend) and without any medicines or help of the doctors he was soon on his feet

again and back at work. Two months later, about the feast of the Assumption of our Lady, his condition became critical again and a serious intestinal trouble added to the ordinary pain. "This has been our Lady's gift," he wrote to Don Rua at that time. "But the Lord is good and helps me very much. When pain is sharpest, greater is the desire our Lord gives me of suffering." He added that he had never been so happy.

Of this spiritual joy which God vouchsafes to every lover of the Cross his letters are now increasingly full. "Dominus lætificat juventutem meam : " "The Lord gladdens my youth." One of his last literary works was the religious drama, "*Thomas More*," the first copy of which he sent to Fr. Bianchi, superior at Ivrea where there was also a small group of Irish students. "I want you," he wrote, "to read the preface in which I suggest that we should constantly pray for the conversion of England. I hope the Irish students will like the play. They should be urged to offer Communions and Visits for the 'Island of saints.' How pleased I was to read in the '*Civiltà Cattolica*' that Leo XIII has given his approval to the Confraternity of our Lady, recently established at St. Sulpice, for the purpose of promoting prayers for the conversion of England."

His letter ends on the usual note. The novices and students, the hope of the Congregation, are always in his mind. For them he constantly prays and suffers. "*Opto ego ipse anathema a Christo pro fratribus meis.*" (I desire to be cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren.)

To fill his lamp

A sign that the end was not far off was a noticeable increase in his charity. "In his last days," writes a witness, "charity shone on his countenance with particular vividness : it looked more like an indefinable tenderness." As he himself wrote (1) "the

(1) Life of St. John de la Salle.

last days of saints are richest in good works. No wonder. They hear the distant sound which announces the approach of the Bridegroom : hence they hasten to fill their lamps with oil."

Fr. Costa writes : "During the last months of his life I and others with me were struck by Fr. Beltrami's exceptional kindness. While previously, in an effort to spare his voice, he had spoken very little, now he stopped to talk and often for a long time. It was obvious that he wanted to go out of his way to be obliging. I had been ill for some time and he had seldom called on me owing to his difficulty in walking : but now he was a frequent caller in spite of the fatigue which it entailed. Once, as he entered my room, he was so exhausted and breathless that I thought he would collapse. In his last visit he stopped for nearly half an hour. He kindled as he spoke of Liguria (where I had lived for many years) and of its natural beauties. Noticing I was relishing my meals he sent me through the servant some delicacies and little extras." The infirmarian too comments on this unusual bounty of Fr. Beltrami. "One day he invited himself to lunch in the infirmary and (with the superior's permission) he treated everybody with marmalade and sweets. He had never done so before. Every body on that day was impressed by his unusual cheerfulness." And yet it was precisely on those days that his crises were more frequent and exhausting, but he would never utter a word of complaint nor insist on any special service or assistance. Fr. Grandis one day, calling on him, and finding him in much pain, expressed regret at not being able to do anything to bring him relief. His reply was a happy smile. And raising his eyes upwards : "I am never alone," he said, "My Guardian Angel is very good and helps me much. I know how you all are : you must not trouble yourselves about me."

One of the brothers, J. Magistris, testifies : "A few days before his death Fr. Beltrami sent for me and asked me to take a couple of his books to every Salesian in the house. He was anxious lest I should forget anybody and two days afterwards

he asked me again to make sure that all the laybrothers had received the little gift."

In spite of his increasing weakness he was faithful to his routine of work and prayer, alternating writing with visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Intercessor between God and man

The following intimate note, saved from destruction, reveals the persistency with which this marvellous contemplative fulfilled to the last his mission of intercessor between God and man.

"For five hours I have now been pleading before the Tabernacle for the conversion of sinners and of all men in pagan lands. I am resolved to do violence to the merciful Heart of Jesus and wrest from Him the salvation of all. I am determined to wrestle, like Jacob, with Divine Justice in order to placate it on behalf of my brethren. I have been in spirit on the blood stained Golgotha and there I have been pleading that out of our Redeemer's wounds there should issue five rivers of mercy to flood the five parts of the globe. I have been traversing in spirit the American continent from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, interceding for all the Missionaries, beseeching the heavenly Husbandman to give increase to their labours. I have been in Africa. Africa, poor unhappy Africa! The curse against Cham is still weighing upon thee: thy land is still the most wretched and derelict in the Christian world. When will the Blood of Christ descend upon thy barren soil and make it germinate flowers of life eternal? But Europe is the object of my tenderest solitudes. I yearn for the death of Protestantism, for the day when England and Germany will cast off their Henry and Luther, when Russia and Greece will put an end to their schism and submit to the rule of the Vicar of Christ, Who is already stretching his arms to welcome them. May the day rise soon when Mahometanism will renounce its

errors and the Crescent will give place to the Cross on the towers of Constantinople."

Barely a week before his death he was still working at his books and correcting proofs. It was on the 18th and 19th of December that in his failing handwriting he wrote the preface of his last books. Many are convinced that he knew the day of his approaching death. He paid a last visit to every priest in the house and repeated the call if anyone was not to be found. He put his room in order and destroyed carefully all private notes and his correspondence, especially all letters (and he had many) containing flattering appreciations of his books. On Christmas night he joined the community in the midnight celebrations. The strain brought about a violent heart attack and the night was sleepless and agitated, but he managed to rise the next day and say his Mass as usual.

Spiritual radiance

Fr. Barberis called on him on December 28th, and received the impression that his strength was near the breaking point. "He told me in faint whispers that he was suffering from a great oppression, that the heart beat so violently that he thought it might break at any moment. But I am not surprised, Fr. Andrew added. It is the usual gift of our Lord on His big feasts. My mind, however, is perfectly clear. My brain, though exceedingly hot on account of the fever, seems to work even better. My imagination works admirably. "His eyes," continues Fr. Barberis, "were yet undimmed. How they glowed, when, to gratify his desire for news of the Congregation, I told him of the new projected foundations, of the increasing number of novices, of the widening of our missionary fields in America, etc. . . ." All such news delighted him immensely. And once again with what little voice he had left he protested his willingness, should it please God, to continue to suffer for the Church, the Pope, the Congregation, the agonizing and souls in Purgatory. "How glad," he said, "I would be to endure these

pains and more until the Day of Judgment if only one more soul could be helped..." "What particularly struck me," concludes Fr. Barberis, "was the inexpressible blending of sorrow, and joy and serenity on his pale emaciated countenance..." Fr. Barberis is not the only one to comment on this joyousness of spirit, which a noted writer calls 'spiritual radiance,' "and in default of which," he adds, "Rome will never canonize a saint." (1)

On December 29th, late in the evening, he sent for Fr. Rector and asked to go to confession. No mention was made of Viaticum as it was thought that he could say Mass on the following day. But it was not to be so. During the night he had another heart attack and Fr. Rector, calling to see him in the morning found him utterly prostrate. "He was so feeble that I could hardly hear the few words he muttered to thank me for my visit. Thinking that the end was not near I went to say Mass but before I had reached the Consecration another crisis followed and that meant the end." The laybrother who was attending him writes: "On the previous night Fr. Beltrami had sent for a change of linen and he himself had changed them when I entered his room in the morning I noticed that he was very restless. He could not lie in any position. He was kissing the Crucifix over and over again. Then he suddenly dropped it. I brought it again to his lips. .but all his strength had gone. I went for a priest but when he arrived the holy man had already breathed his last. It seemed as though he had fallen asleep."

The death of love

He was 20 years, 6 months old. Exactly three months before St. Theresa of Lisieux had completed her earthly pilgrimage. Once again the similarity between the two servants of God springs irresistibly to the mind. In the same year, 1895,

(1) The late Baron Von Hugel.

they had vowed themselves victims for the salvation of souls. And now when the end came, this was to be under similar circumstances. The young Carmelite had said some time before death: "The death of love which I so much desire is the death of Jesus on the Cross." The Salesian had prayed: "*Domine redde me desolatum . . . redde me sicut solitudinem*" which means: "Give me, O Lord, a share in the abandonment of Thy Cross."

Both prayers were granted: and if "darkness enveloped the soul of the Carmelite nun in her last hour," solitude and and pain were the portion of the Salesian priest. (1) He died alone. There was no Viaticum, no priestly blessings, no kneeling brethren round his bed to comfort his last moments: and there was intense physical pain. True, love (and with love trust) was with him right to the end: but it was love stripped of every sensible consolation human and divine, the only love worthy of a victim.

Not suffered in vain

On January 31st, the day of the funeral, the remains of the holy priest were taken to the Seminary Chapel for the last rites of the Church. A procession of well over a hundred surpliced young religious, each carrying a lighted candle and chanting the *Miserere*, led the way. Sorrow trembled in every voice and was visible on every countenance. Yet who could doubt that a feeling deeper than sorrow prevailed in the hearts of all? *Et exultabunt ossa humiliata* — chanted the choir again and again. How true these words of the Psalm did ring at that moment. They sounded prophetic. Indeed, if there was a dominant feeling, this was not of loss but of gain: not of failure but of triumph. A great mercy, all sensed, had it been granted: a new intercessor was now with God; a sign had been set up for those who were left behind.

(1) Autobiography of St. Theresa. To be more exact, the darkness, had one short interruption for the space of a *Credo*.

Is it then fanciful to think that in those solemn moments many of those young men, if not all, became suddenly aware of a new light shining in their soul, of a new readiness to answer the Master's call, however hard the demand and steep the climb?

In truth Andrew Beltrami had not suffered in vain. He had marked out a path and set an example. He could now teach how to 'overcome' no matter how tremendous the odds. He could show how prayer can be turned into power, suffering into praise, inaction into apostolate. And this is in fact Andrew Beltrami's achievement.

Still fulfills his mission

His mortal remains, in compliance with the family's wish, are now at rest at Omegna in the church of his baptism. But his tomb is far from being deserted. Souls without number constantly find their way there to seek light and strength in the battle of life. That their quest is not in vain is already proved by a long list of favours.

But it is especially his brethren in religion all the world over who gratefully testify to the power both of his example and of his intercession with God. It is those in particular, and they are far from few, who stricken down too soon by a deadly disease or broken down by the fatigues of an over strenuous apostolate lie helpless in a solitary room, confined to a bed of pain or to an invalid's chair. These are they who have learned from the heroic Salesian the secret of confidence, the secret of rebuilding their life, and, by turning it to a new purpose, of dedicating it afresh to the greater glory of God. Through them Fr. Andrew Beltrami still fulfills his mission.

In the wake of a giant

The growing fame of sanctity of the Servant of God has already attracted the attention of Rome and on July 1920 the

Holy Father has signed the decree of the introduction of his Cause of Beatification.

Let us hasten with our prayers the day when this worthy son of St. John Bosco will share with his Father the supreme honours which the Church reserves for her Saints.

THE END