

FATHER FRANCIS SCALONI. S. D. B.

The sad tidings which reached us by cablegram on Good Friday to the effect that Fr. Provincial was lying dangerously ill in the Belgian Congo came as a thunderbolt and completely overclouded our Easter rejoicings. The news was sudden and unexpected, for he had left us on January 8th in the spirit of cheerfulness and optimism which was habitual to him. No news arrived for a few days after this, and this fact buoyed up our spirits, for we felt that no news meant good news; but on April 6th 1926 the bad news reached us that Fr. Provincial had died on the previous day.

Fr. Scaloni was born on April 30th 1861 in the little town of Monte Rubbiano, in the diocese of Fermo and the Province of Marche, Italy. He entered the Salesian Oratory at Turin in March 1876, and thus at an early age he came under the direct influence of Don Bosco – an influence which showed itself so clearly throughout his life. In August 1881, he entered the Salesian Novitiate at Sab Benigno, where he became the fellow-novice of two priests of this province – Fr. C. Macey and Fr. J. Bonavia. On November 3rd of the same year (1881) he had the privilege of receiving the religious habit from the hands of Don Bosco himself and on October 7th of the following year took his perpetual vows. The following few years of his life were spent at the Salesian houses in the busy towns of Nice and Marseilles, where he endeared himself to all. He was gifted with a very fine voice and he taught and composed music. His bright and happy disposition made him very welcome wherever he went, though personally he was of a retiring disposition.

In 1885 he received the Tonsure and Minor Orders, and in the following year he was raised to the Subdiaconate. In 1887 he was ordained Deacon by Mgr. Robert at Marseilles and later in the same year – on December 17th 1887 – he was raised to the dignity of the Priesthood by the same Prelate. Three years later, in spite of the very busy life he had, he managed to find time to take a degree in Divinity at the University of Paris. In the year 1891 he was sent by his superiors to commence the Salesian work in Belgium. He took up his abode in Liege, and from this centre he built up the extensive and successful work which the Salesians now carry on in that country. He himself was the first Rector of the large institute in Liege, and this school he directed with great success, while year by year the Salesian work spread rapidly throughout Belgium. In 1895. the Orphanage of St. Charles, at Tournai, was opened, and this institute, as well as the Provincial House at Liege has been productive of immense good. In the following year (1896) the Novitiate House was opened at Hechtel and the work continued to grow with even greater rapidity. In 1900 a Professional School was inaugurated at Verviers, and two years later the Orphanage of St. Joseph, near Ghent, was confided to the Salesians. All these institutes continued to develop and progress in every respect, and the work grew to such an extent that the opening of a large House of Studies for the philosophical and theological course of the Salesian clerics in the Province became a matter of necessity. And so it was that, in 1904 the fine Scholasticate at Grand Bigard saw its first beginnings. Under the zealous and able administration of Fr. Scaloni progress and success were inevitable. He himself was untiring in all his labours and completely unselfish in all his motives. He had but one aim and objective in view – the furtherance of the wonderful work of our saintly founder and the salvation of the boys who were confided by Divine Providence to his care. He certainly embodied in himself all those fine qualities and virtues which are, to a certain extent, a necessity in anyone who is called by God to carry out a work of such importance in His Church.

The great work continued to extend and in 1907 the Institute of St. Raphael at Sougne-Remouchamps saw its beginnings, and in 1909 the school at Antoing was confided to the Sons of Don Bosco. In 1910 the fine municipal schools at Ixelles (Brussels) were handed over to the Salesian Fathers, and finally, in 1911, a body of missionaries departed from Liege to inaugurate the Salesian Missions in the Belgian Congo. These missions have developed wonderfully, and technical schools and other forms of missionary work have been established out there with great success.

Fr. Scaloni's connection with Battersea began in November 1909, when the Salesian provinces of England and Belgium were jointly placed under his care. With that tact and delicacy, which were so habitual to him he soon won a place in the hearts of the English confreres, although the greater part of his time had to be spent in the Belgian Province. He continued to carry out his work with success until the outbreak of the great European War in 1914. As soon as he heard of the violation of Belgium and the terrible accounts of the treatment meted out to the inhabitants by the invading forces, he hastened over from London to Liege and succeeded in reaching the town before its siege began. He remained there throughout the war, and endured great privations and hardships, to say nothing of the sorrow which must have filled his heart at the sight of the sufferings of his spiritual children. The knowledge too, of the havoc that was wrought to so many institutions that he had built up at the cost of so much labour and sacrifice must have caused him deep affliction. The House and School at Liege, where he lived and, to the best of his ability, provided for and solaced the community and boys who yet remained there, were in the possession of the German invaders all through the war, and a very large portion of the buildings were occupied by them. The keynote of his whole life was devotion to duty, however onerous it may be; and with that calm and unflinching courage which he possessed he steered the barque confided to his care safely through those troubled waters. Though his life was intensely active, still he found time to write several philosophical and educational works; and he was, moreover, an eloquent preacher in both French and Italian. It was due mainly to his zeal and skilful administration that the Salesian work in Belgium spread so rapidly and efficiently in every direction. At the close of the War he was re-elected Provincial of the English Province, and had to sever himself away from the great work which he had built up and directed for so long in Belgium. His whole energies were to be centred henceforth on the further development and spread of that splendid work which had been inaugurated and carried on for so many years by Fr. C. Macey. In the period of Fr. Scaloni's administration, several new houses were opened. Two fine Agricultural Colleges were started in Ireland and one at Claremont near Cape Town. The House of Studies and Novitiate at Oxford was opened in 1920 and a new Secondary School was started at Bolton in 1925.

On January 8th 1926 Fr. Scaloni left England to make his visitation of the Salesian Houses in South Africa. At the request, too, of the Salesian Missionaries in the Belgian Congo, who all loved him and regarded him as a father, he was asked by Don Rinaldi to visit the Congo as his representative. Father Scaloni, therefore, had very many important matters to attend to during his visitation of the Schools in South Africa and of the Missions in the Congo. His task was nearly finished when he was brought to death's door and went to receive the well-earned rest he had merited by his long life of earnest toil and labour. His one aim in life was the realisation in himself and in others of those ideals which he had learnt so thoroughly from Don Bosco himself. He certainly embodied in himself those priestly virtues and that spirit of sweetness and kindness which he loved and admired in this great Master, who had been his spiritual father and director at the Oratory. In fact the beautiful words in which St. Paul describes charity may fittingly and without any exaggeration be applied to this saintly priest. . "He was patient, he was kind. He was not envious, was not puffed up, was not ambitious. He sought not his own, would not be provoked to anger, thought no evil, rejoiced not in iniquity, but rejoiced with the truth; was constant in trials, strong in faith, firm in hope and patient in suffering."

While we lament his death and his departure from our midst, there is one thought that buoys us up, and it is this: he has already gone to enjoy the reward of his toils, labours and sufferings here below, and one more saint, we feel quite confident, is added to the realms of bliss. But still it is the duty of us all to remember him; our holy faith and our spirit of charity impose this obligation on us, for we can never be absolutely sure that in the inscrutable judgements of God there may not be some faults and shortcomings yet to be expiated. The suddenness of his departure from our midst has indeed added to our sorrow; it has taken from us a father and a friend, it has bereft the Salesian Congregation of one who has proved himself to be a wise ruler and an able administrator, and who has been recognised by all who had the privilege of knowing him as a very saintly priest.