



Brother Luigi SERIOLI, S.D.B.

onary who worked 49 long years in a single place with years of gap and that gap was when he was interned second World War.

was born at Marone, Brescia in Italy on 27th January 1898. Some insight into his personal life from a couple of personal diaries that he has maintained. Born of Lorenzo and Antonietta, Luigi was the only son of the family (his brother died while he was young). Young Luigi spent his childhood days looking after the sheep that his family had. While out in the open he often lifted his heart and prayed, "Lord Jesus and Mother Mary, help me to become a saint like St. Aloysius and come to heaven". He lived contemplating the presence of God and asked for the grace to be kept simple and innocent.

From his childhood days onwards he had an earnest desire to become a saint. He cultivated special devotion to St. Aloysius Gonzaga, his patron saint. His desire to excel in sanctity was soon coupled with his desire to be a missionary. Whenever a missionary from his parish returned from far away mission areas, and having heard from them, his desire to be a missionary was intensified. He once wrote in his diary, "I love the great faith and sacrifice of the missionaries."

As a youngster at home on Mission Sundays, he generously contributed to the missions from his own pocket money. He also persuaded his two sisters to spend less for themselves and more for the mission. We know him as a man of deep sense of economy. In 1918 during the First World War, his family welcomed refugees whom everyone turned away and offered them whatever they could afford. They never sent anyone away without at least a bowl of hot soup.

Salvation of souls was upper most in the mind of young Luigi and when he grew older, his desire to be a missionary grew with it. This was probably what prompted him to join the Salesian mission novitiate at Ivrea in 1935. The same year he came to Shillong to continue his novitiate and to fulfill his dream of becoming a missionary.



All through his life an idea that was uppermost in his mind was that priests and religious must be men of God and must show good example for the simple Christians to follow. This was probably his motto which he kept faithfully till the end of his life. Those who lived with him during the last years of his life can testify to the courageous way in which he faced his last illness which took him to the Lord on 31st August 1993.

#### As a Salesian

Brother Luigi came as a novice to Shillong in the first week of December 1935 and did his novitiate under the guidance of Fr. Joseph Foglia of happy memory. He made his first religious profession in a Jesuit holiday house called "WOODCOT" at Tung in Darjeeling district of West Bengal as 'Our Lady's House' in Shillong which served as their novitiate was burnt down in 1936.

#### As an Educator

Brother Luigi's first appointment was to Bishop's House, Shillong. He came here in 1936. Although he had not done advanced studies in secular subjects, his role as an educator cannot be left out. There was a boarding attached to the Cathedral parish. He always spent the time that he could spare with these poor youngsters. He took great care to see that his boys were well behaved. He brought them, food, he assisted them at study, in the dormitory, in the chapel; for these poor boys he was all in all. Many of his pupils, now occupying important offices, still remember him with a fond memory.

In the Bishop's house he was in-charge of the administration. On Sundays he would go with the Parish Priest for the regular prayer services conducted in the Catholic homes of the Parish. He would invariably give a talk in fluent Khasi during all such prayer meetings.

#### As a Visionary

Brother Luigi was able to see the needs of the future and suggested to his superiors to act in a certain direction. I would like to quote from his own letter dated 24th July 1973 to the then Provincial, "... boys from these villages come to the town and become a little learned then they do not want to go back any more to their villages where there are no possibilities but try to settle down in the town where they hope to find better living



and more comforts. For this reason, I would suggest that Fathers should train boys in their own centres without bringing them to the towns." This is surely a departure from the established traditions of those days but he is more daring when he says that "I have an impression that we have been all out to make priests and nothing to make political leaders and thus we will find that there will be none to defend the rights of the Church in political matters. I would rather put up a Catholic university for diplomats (political leaders) than a seminary".

We find that he is very much like Don Bosco who saw the needs of times ahead of his own.

#### **His Cheerfulness and simplicity of life:**

Bro Luigi was noted for his simplicity of life and cheerfulness. He was simple person whom anyone could approach. He was always willing to listen. He did all that was told by the superiors in humble obedience. He never showed his displeasure at anything. Even in his last years of life, the novices at Sunnyside would gather round him just to ask him a few questions and he always had a humorous reply to every question. As he had a very short memory the novices had a lot of fun with him which he too seemed to enjoy.

He led an exemplary life of simplicity. He was not appointed in very prestigious posts, but wherever he worked, he has left an indelible mark of hard work and selfless dedication. He was by nature very cheerful and he spread his cheerfulness wherever he was. Even in his last eight years of life at Sunnyside, he always loved to join the recreation of the community and he always insisted that he was very young in spirit. Whenever asked: "Brother, where are you going?" The prompt reply was always 'a paradiso!'



