

FATHER ENEAS. M. TOZZI. S. D. B.

With the death of Fr. Eneas Mary Tozzi, the last link in the chain binding the English Province in living memory with our Father John Bosco is broken. It was a precious chain in the order of grace and example, and we can count it as one of the great blessings we, as a Province, have received, for, not only did Fr. Tozzi meet the saint and experience some of his remarkable power to read the workings of the human heart, but he was also among that select group of early Salesians who understood the mind and heart of the founder so well that he was elected from his earliest days, and before many others, as a Salesian to lead them in the religious life. His was a life totally dedicated to an ideal and to our knowledge, attested to by those who shared his life as a student and a priest, he was never known to turn to right or left of the path of his vocation mapped out for him, so that the words of the psalmist can be the plan of his life without distortion. "Thou hast taught me O Lord from my youth until now. I will declare Thy wonderful works. And unto old age and grey hairs, O Lord, forsake me not until I show forth thine arm to all the generations yet to come."

Eneas Mary Tozzi was born into a professional family in Italy: his brother a barrister, his cousins officers in the army of solicitors in Rome. He was born on the 7th April 1875 in Lugo in the province of Verona. His father died when he was eight years old, in 1883, and two years later at the age of ten he was sent as a boarder to the Salesian School at Faenza, opened four years previously. The Salesian life in this school remained vividly imprinted in his mind all his life long, and when he needed to show how things were done in the beginning he would return to his boyhood memories at Faenza and recall as if it were yesterday the way things were in his own time.

It was from this school that young Tozzi went to see Don Bosco at the age of twelve. The saint had been due to visit the college but had not been able to go, so representatives from among the boys were chosen – among them Aneas Maria. He reported this good news on a visit to his mother, who was immediately concerned lest the visit to Don Bosco would rob her of her son and take him away to be a priest. "Don't worry mother" said Eneas; "I know how to look after myself; I'll not be caught." Then comes the well-known incident. The boy meets Don Bosco, who looks at him with penetrating eyes and says kindly enough: "You're not my friend." The sensitive little Tozzi, terribly disturbed, examines and re-examines his conscience but can find nothing wrong. Time passes and the boy has found a growing love for the Salesian way of life, and he sees the saint again, having made up his mind to follow Don Bosco. Another brief meeting, and immediately the saint says; "Ah, now we are friends!" and gives him three medals, one for his mother, one for his sister, and one for himself. This is how he, himself, told the story to the Sisters and Novices at Henley two years ago. He left the school for the novitiate in 1891; in the October of that year he received the habit from Don Rua, and as it was the custom then, he made his perpetual vows at the end of the novitiate, in the Chapel of Don Bosco's Rooms on the 2nd November 1892. 1893/4 saw him doing his philosophy, while he taught the same subject to those who had been late vocations. In 1894/5 he was doing his theology and he also took the public examination we call the Intermediate Arts, in Italian, the Licenza liceale, and he taught those preparing for the novitiate. From 1895 to 97 he taught Latin and Italian to the novices at Folizzo and continued his preparation for the priesthood. 1897 was a memorable year and he received the Tonsure, all the Minor Orders, Subdiaconate, Diaconate, and Priesthood from the September to his ordination on the 7th November.

That same year he came to England, to be the Novice-Master in Burwash, and remained so until 1901, doing duty as Rector, Parish Priest, and later teacher of Latin and Philosophy. In 1902 he was sent to Cape Town where he arrived on Ash Wednesday, February 12th, fifty-six years ago, to find the Salesians in the Courts for bankruptcy. Having struggled from 1896 to establish themselves in the hard and uphill work for the poor and abandoned boys they now found themselves at their wits-end. Here follows one of the glorious pages of Fr. Tozzi's life as a priest. The case was heard bankruptcy is declared, ten shillings in the pound is all that can be paid. Fr. Tozzi, after the passing of judgement, calls the creditors and makes the promise, that no expense

will be incurred and no brick set upon another, until they have all been paid to the last farthing. Then followed the months of extreme economy, begging on all sides, as only he knew how, and the proud day arrives when the daily papers in the Cape carry the headline "Catholic priest keeps his word." Fr. Tozzi had saved all he could, and he then went from creditor to creditor and paid all he owed, to the last farthing, as he had promised. He was to remain in South Africa from 1902 until 1926. Most of this time he was the Superior in Cape Town, with the break of three years when he became Bursar. During the last three years, when he was in South Africa, he was the Founder and Rector of our Salesian House at Lansdowne, where he had hopes of establishing a Salesian novitiate for the South African vocations of the future.

Now follows his long period as Provincial and Major Superior. In 1926 he was appointed Provincial in the Anglo-Irish Province and an illness of nearly a year prevented his coming. This period of illness was as a second novitiate, to prepare this man of God for the special crosses and difficulties he was called to bear in the long years ahead, years of economic crisis, the beginnings of the Second World War. All his attention in this vital time of development was centred on the Houses of Formation, that is, those destined to establish a proper training for the Salesians of the future. In 1928 he opened Shrigley as an act of faith believing that if only he could send men to the missions, God in his own wonderful way would re-double the numbers for our own Province.

In 1935, moved by the sight of so many boys abandoned to themselves without work on the streets of London, he opened the Agricultural School and Technical School at Blaisdon. In 1936 in order to find a more suitable home for the novitiate, he opened the house of Beckford. Those years showed us all, who are his sons the manner of man he was at heart; rigorous with himself, gentle with others, strong when he saw abuse, forthright in his speech; charitable beyond measure in dealing with those in need, and always a priest with his heart set upon the business of the Master. Incidents abound; confessions in trains, appointments to be kept in London with persons he spoke to on journeys all over England. He gave the building of the church at Shrigley to a Mr Tilden in the hope that his wife might return to the Faith. She did indeed return, with Mr Tilden, on his reception into the Catholic Church. He was known to search among his friends in London for employment for parents of Salesians during the time of the great period of unemployment. In Scotland, where he preached several retreats to teachers, he was hailed as something more than a man of God and there are people who, having seen the notice of his death, tell of the good he did them years ago, and in a letter from Devon there were these words: "Please see that soon his cause for canonisation be introduced." Such was the impression received by people who met him and talked with him. He had indeed two great loves; one for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and one for Mary, Help of Christians. From these he expected the miracles of grace which would solve all his problems inside and outside Salesian Houses.

Strong men will always hurt tender feelings when working out their purpose; they will be inclined to sweep aside the problems of others or of the moment, will dictate conditions, impose their own will. In this Fr. Tozzi was no exception, but he was also driven by an inner drive only revealed in later years. He felt he would be held responsible for every calamity if he did not do something to prevent the imperfections in government and observance as he saw things from day to day. This drove him to mention the defects he saw in season and out of season. His motive, supernaturalised, on this special trait of his, was his love of God, and his desire for the best. Not everybody saw beneath the surface and many failed to understand him. In the Province he was generally revered, his personal integrity was beyond reproach. He was a living example of fidelity to the rule, and the natural severity of his character was warmed by his love of God, his love for Don Bosco and for the Congregation.

In 1940 he left England as the war broke over Europe, and he went to America. There he remained as the Provincial of both East and West and representative of the Rector Major until 1946, when his advancing age and weariness made the superiors relieve him a little, and he retired to Newton as Rector of the House of Studies, and devoted his special gifts to the training of late vocations,

then coming in increasing numbers. In 1953 he made his last journey to Italy where a serious fall caused him to remain a year in the Mother House as a patient unable to walk. In 1954 he was given his choice; "Where would you like to go?" and immediately he said. "I would like to return to England." – the country that he had promised to give his life for when he was talking with that other saint of ours, Andrew Beltrami. He came back home to us to be confessor at the house of Melchet Court, and here he spent the last years of his life and finally went to God. It had been his ambition to give his very best to young priests in formation for our Salesian life, and many are now alive who received all he had to give in the confessional.

About a fortnight before his death, Fr. Tozzi contracted a bad bronchial cold through leaving the window of his room open in rather cold weather. He was always a strong advocate of fresh air. This cold combined with digestive troubles led to his being confined to bed. The local doctor was in attendance. Fr. Tozzi improved somewhat but was unable to throw off this deep-seated chest cold. He was too restless to remain in bed for long, so for a few days he was up and about but confined to his room, only leaving it to say Holy Mass. On days when this was not possible he always asked for and received Holy Communion, always preparing for it most carefully and devoutly and following all the prayers of the rite with the greatest attention. He began to find it difficult to breathe inside the house; so he ventured forth a few times in rather severe and windy weather. This soon sent him to bed again with a temperature; however he got well enough to be able to get up again and take walks inside the house, and say Mass a few more times. But eventually he had to admit defeat and was compelled to return to bed, never to rise from it again.

Fr. Tozzi lived with that single purpose before him all his life, to be faithful to the ideals he had grasped as a young man. Indeed, he had seen its living practice, he had lived with those who had been formed by the Saint, he had witnessed with his own eyes the extraordinary work of grace in the hearts of boys wherever Salesians, accepting the challenge their Founder's heroic life and teaching threw down to them, have followed him with simple faith and unquestioning loyalty. To live this way was to choose much loneliness, sometimes isolation, often opposition and misunderstanding: yet because it was so like the prophetic words of the Master Who foretold the suffering and persecution reserved for those who would follow Him, he too, was given the grace in his later years of understanding that only charity, that strong love of God in a man, could solve the problems and remove the obstacles in the way. This was his last thought and the last sigh before he died.

He felt to the end that much of his life had been a failure, that somehow or other, in spite of goodwill and constant striving he had not been able to help his own fathers and brothers enough. Now that he has gone, as so often happens, his life will shine with a new light, his example have a new power to move men's wills. His last words an abiding heritage to us who were his sons to strive to reach the heights he pointed to and saw so clearly and towards which he led the way.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.