

# Italy Proud of Soldier-Poet Killed in Action

Giosue Borsi's "Letters from the Front" and "Spiritual Colloquies" Are Considered Remarkable Products of Days of War

HERE have just arrived in this country copies of The Bulletin of the Salesian Fathers of Turin, in which appears an article on the life and writings of the young Italian poet and journalist, Giosue Borsi, who fell on the Isonzo battlefield. Borsi had achieved an enviable literary fame and been accepted as a successor to his father among anti-church editors. But he was converted just before the European war broke out and soon attracted attention as one of the foremost among the apologists of the Roman Catholic Church. The Bulletin also announces the forthcoming publication in Italian by the Salesian Fathers of his "Letters from the Front" and his "Spiritual Colloquies," works on which his latest fame rests. Purely spiritual in thought and viewpoint, they are considered an amazing product of days dedicated to the materialism of war.

Cardinal Maffi has expressed the opinion that the "Spiritual Colloquies" will stand with the Confessions of St. Augustine as among the greatest apologetic literature produced by the Church, and Cardinal Mercier has written of "Letters from the Front," and particularly of the last one, addressed to his mother, that "when some day, as is my intention, I shall speak to the [Belgian] soldiers, I shall bring before them this letter to show them how one lives and how one dies."

Giosue Borsi was born in 1888, the son of Averardo Borsi, who owned a chain of Italian newspapers, a celebrated man, to whose memory a statue now stands in Florence, his home city. The elder Borsi was a famous anti-clerical, and the son grew up as an opponent to the Church, although his mother was strongly religious. When the father died in 1910 the younger Borsi became editor of the Nuovo Giornale of Florence at the age of 22.

He had already won fame as a literary man. At the age of 20 he was recognized as the foremost commentator on Dante in Italy. He was a poet and had published two volumes of verse, besides a great volume of prose writings, both critical and original. His first work, a classical poem to his mother, was a product of his thirteenth year.

It is said that the first outward steps of his conversion to Catholicism came in connection with his work as an editor. In the interests of his newspaper he had consulted frequently with Father Guido Alfani, Director of the Florence Observatory and a famous seismologist, who took a leading part in 1914 in discrediting Giulio Ulivi, the man who had all the military authorities in Europe greatly interested in his manipulation of ultra-red rays, whereby, he said, bombs might be exploded at a distance without the use of wires or contact apparatus. Ulivi was a nine days' wonder.

Borsi's friendship with the priest continued after the Ulivi matter had been settled. His commentator says that his sensitive nature had been deeply touched by the sudden death of his father and by the death of a beloved sister, which followed shortly, and that, seeing his family thus suddenly destroyed, he found solace in religion. Father Alfani became his spiritual adviser, and he was received into the Church in 1914.

The outbreak of the war came shortly after his conversion and this period saw the beginning of his "Spiritual Colloquies." When Italy entered the war Borsi decided to enlist. Apparently from the first he had a presentiment that he was to die—the product of his highly sensitive imagination and the artist's instinct for filling out a picture to its ultimate possibilities. This feeling, judging from his writing, was very real to him and colored everything he did.

One of his first steps of preparation was to destroy everything he had ever written before the period of his conversion. One morning he made a fire in the garden of his home and confided to the flames all his manuscripts and printed

pages, "stirring them and putting them back with a stick so that all should be consumed."

The following "Morning Meditation and Prayer" from the "Spiritual Colloquies" will show the spirit with which he had resolved to take his place in the Italian Army. It is called "The Christian Idea of War." The translation is by the Rev. Father Pasquale Maltese of St. Anthony's Church, Van Nest, this city, as are the others used here. Father Maltese has studied Borsi's career and made his work known here since the day

Giosue  
Borsi



he first saw his name attached to the "Letter to his Mother," which affected him profoundly:

I firmly believe that the victory of the Italian Army will be a great step toward the triumph of justice, toward the coming of Thy holy kingdom among men. I shall fight with pride and with glory, without hatred, without grievance. Should death come I hope I will not be surprised without Thy grace, and I hope I may die tranquil while loving Thee and invoking Thee. May Mary pray for me in the hour of my death, as I ardently besought her so many times, and may Thou grant the grace to make me die with the name of Thy Holy Mother upon my lips.

God of Hosts, watch, I beseech Thee, over the Italian Army and over the soul of every one of its brave little soldiers, so gay, so lively, so intelligent, so resourceful, so frugal. Inspire its leaders, guide them to victory, and grant that they will never abuse Thy protection by being harsh and cruel.

I pray also with all my heart for our enemies and brothers, whose dear and precious blood perhaps I will have to shed. Take away from their hearts every sentiment of hatred and rancor. Among so many fighters there are so many that love Thee, who are good, intelligent, affectionate to their homes, to their parents, to their wives, to their little children! Grant me to remember this always, so that I will not rush upon them in cruelty, in barbarity, in ferocity.

On the contrary, show me the way to exercise on the battlefield toward my enemies as toward my friends some Christian virtue of pity, succor, and love. Grant that I should feel the gratitude due the Church for being so provident and beneficent as to allow me to partake of her sacraments even on the battlefield, so that I may be ever prepared for Thy call.

War is a terrible scourge, a fearful chastisement that Thou inflictest on the people.

Although I know well that often it is the bloody sign by which Thou recallst them to Thee when they have strayed from Thee; although I understand that the evils of war, terrible as they may be, are often amply compensated by the good that war carries with it; although I am persuaded that war is the great test of the endurance of the races, the bona occasio of the people's inner concord, the inspirer of obedience, of discipline, of sacrifice, of self-forgetfulness, a purifying tempest that scatters a thousand evil vapors, heals thousands of corruptions, cements the love of citizens, inspires a thousand forms of charity; yet I am not so inhuman or sanguinary as to desire it, much less to wish it long and cruel.

Therefore I believe it my principal duty as

do not come to any agreement or compromise with it. It is the privilege of truth to be gay and innocent like a child, fearless and inexorable like an archangel; but love men tenderly, love them with humility, with trust, without diffidence; love them as you love yourself, excuse them with stubbornness, endeavor to understand them and to find in their behalf the most ingenious justifications.

Love the wicked with fervor, but in a special manner adore the poor, the weak and deformed. Consecrate to them the palpitations of your heart and the most persevering and tender solicitude. The first are the poor of fortune which is capricious and unjust; the second are the poor of intelligence which is erring and blind; the third are the poor of beauty that pass away and are no more. Remember that they are your beloved brethren of the Father; that they can do the greatest good to you before Him; bow before them and you shall be exalted, whereas to bow before the powerful of the earth is most degrading.

This was the strange constitution of the infantry Lieutenant who went to the front to fight beside rude peasants and ignorant men of the city slums, men who had no thoughts about life in the trenches except that they had been told to fight and did so.

The Lieutenant was a fine soldier, they all testify. He led his men valiantly in action, and in the pauses of the fighting no one could inspire the men with more steadfastness and courage than he. Sometimes he took the functions of the chaplain, when a priest was needed and none was to be had. Always in the breast pocket of his tunic he carried a small volume of his beloved Dante, whom he had not felt it necessary to renounce.

He was killed by a bullet while leading his platoon in the fighting on the Isonzo front on Nov. 10, 1915. When his men got to him they saw him press to his heart, in the spirit of performing a rite, the pages of his Dante. Before he died he handed them the blood-stained book and told them: "Give that to my mother. May my sacrifice and her sacrifice be acceptable to God."

After he was dead his last letter was found. It was to be delivered to his mother in the event of his death. Thus the thought that had impelled him to write his first poem at the age of thirteen to his mother, that had persisted during the moment of his death when he asked that the volume of Dante be sent to her, still was in force after his death. This last "Letter to his Mother" has gone around the world, and been translated into many languages as a monument to filial love. Some of its passages follow:

Mother: This letter, which you will receive only in case that I should fall in battle, I am writing in an advanced trench, where I have been since last night, with my soldiers, in expectation of the order to cross the river and move to the attack.

I am calm, perfectly serene, and firmly resolved to do my duty in full to the last, like a brave and good soldier, confident to the utmost of our final unfailing victory; although I am not equally sure that I will live to see it. But this uncertainty does not trouble me in the least, nor has it any terror for me. I am happy in offering my life to my country; I am proud to spend it for so noble a purpose, and I know not how to thank Divine Providence for the opportunity—which I deem an honor—afforded me on this sulgent autumnal day, in the midst of this enchanting valley of our Venetia Giulia, while I am in the prime of life, in the fullness of my physical and mental powers, to fight in this holy war for liberty and justice.

In the world there are so many battles to fight, for love, for justice, for liberty, for the faith, and for a time, I must confess, I presumptuously believed myself predestined and assigned to the arduous and terrible task of winning one or another of these battles.

All this was, I admit, beautiful, flattering, desirable, but it cannot compare with my present lot. This is the very truth, and indeed I cannot say whether I would really be satisfied if the writing of this letter would have been in vain. Life is sad; it is a painful and annoying duty, a long exile in the uncertainty of our own lot. In order that life may go quickly in accordance with my wishes, and without leaving me in a thousand disappointments, there would be need of many very rare and difficult occurrences. Besides, I am and I feel weak. I have not the least confidence in myself. The whole world against the ingratitude and wickedness of the world would not have frightened me as much as the battle against myself. It is better, therefore, dear mother, as it has happened. The Lord, in His wise and infinite wisdom has reserved me for just the destiny that was fit for me; a destiny that is easy,

sweet, honorable, rapid; to ~~be~~ in battle for one's country.

With this beautiful and praiseworthy past, fulfilling the most desired of all duties as a good citizen toward the land that gave him birth, I depart, in the midst of the tears of all those that love me, from a life toward which I felt weary and disgusted. I leave the fallings of life, I leave sin, I leave the sad and afflicted spectacle of the small and momentary triumphs of evil over good. I leave to my humble body the weight of all my chains and I fly away, free, free in the end, to the heavens above, where resides our Father, to the heavens above where His holy will is always done. Just imagine, dear mother, with what joy I will receive from His hands even the chastisements that His justice will impose on account of my sins. He Himself has paid all these chastisements by His superabundant merits, a God of mercy and of love, redeeming me with His precious blood, living and dying here below for my sake. Only through His grace, only through Jesus Christ, could I have succeeded that my sins be not my eternal death. He has seen the tears of my sorrow, He has pardoned me

through the mouth of His spotless spouse, the Church. I do, sincerely hope that the Madonna, so loving and kind toward us, will assist me with her powerful help in the instant when my eternity will be decided.

And as I am about to speak of forgiveness, dear mother, I have only one thing to say with all simplicity: Forgive me! Forgive me all the sorrows that I have caused you; all the agonies that you have suffered on my account every time I have been ungrateful, stubborn, forgetful, disobedient toward you. Forgive me if, by neglect and inexperience, I have failed to render your life more comfortable and tranquil since the day when my father, by his premature death, intrusted you to my care. Now I understand well the many wrongs I have been guilty of toward you, and I feel all the remorse and cruel anguish now that, dying, I have to intrust you to the providence of the Lord. Forgive me, lastly, this final sorrow that I have inflicted upon you, perhaps not without stubborn and cruel inconsideration on my part, in giving up my life voluntarily for my country, fascinated by the attractions of this beautiful lot. Forgive me also if I have not

sufficiently recognized and tried to compensate the incomparable nobility of your soul, of your heart, so immense and sublime. Mother, truly perfect and exemplary, to whom I owe all that I am and the least good I have done in this world.

Love and freedom for all, this is the ideal for which it is a pleasure to offer one's life. May God cause our sacrifice to be fruitful; may He take pity upon mankind, forgive and forget their offenses, and give them peace. Then, oh! dear mother, we shall not have died in vain. Just one more tender kiss.

GIOSUE BORSI.

When Father Maltese wrote to Cardinal Maffi of the feelings Borsi's last letter had roused in him, and of his endeavor to raise money here for the mother of the writer, he received the following letter, testifying to the interest of the Cardinal:

Archbishop's House, Pisa, Aug. 25, 1916.  
Very Reverend Sir: Many thanks, and I am happy to know that the good fruit of

poor Giosue Borsi finds an echo even beyond the sea.

If you can do something for his poor mother, the Lord will reward you for it. I am sending a little biography of his life, but very soon there will be published by the Salesian Fathers of Turin the "Spiritual Colloquies," and later many other things, where you can best see the soul of my dearest boy.

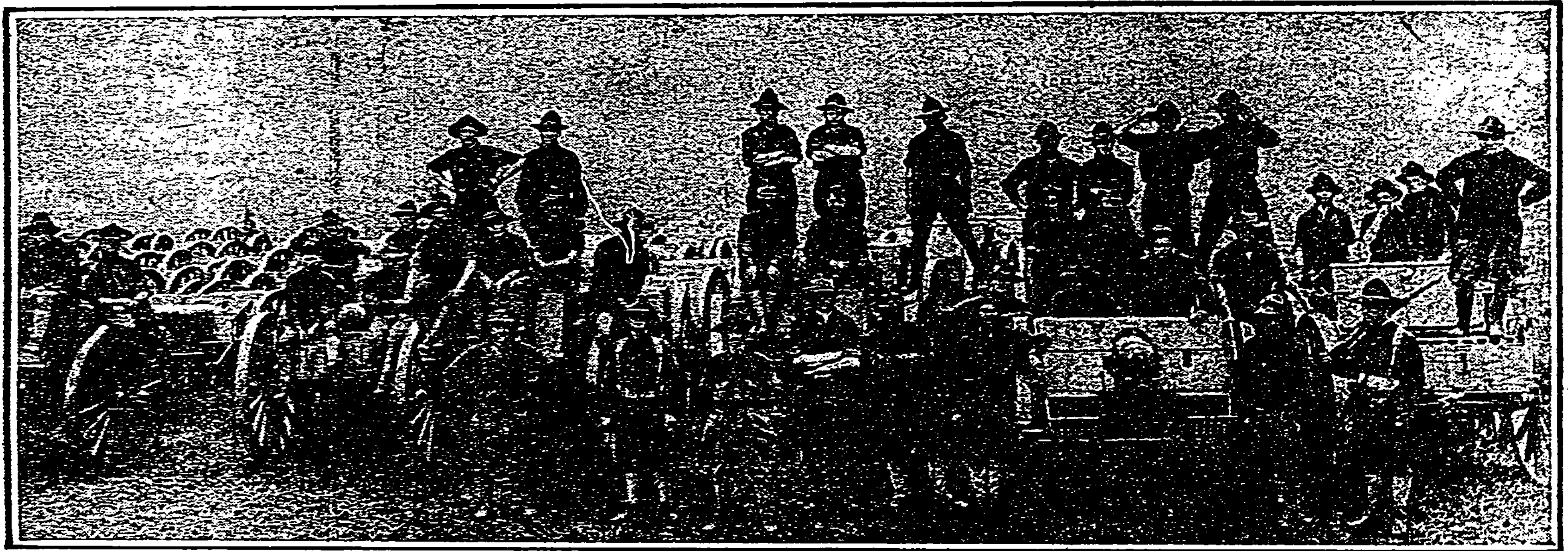
Write to me if I can do anything else.

With best wishes, believe me,

Yours truly,

PIETRO CARDINAL MAFFI.

When the Minister of Public Instruction sent a communication to the young writer's mother relative to his death, he called him a "new Christian miracle." Among others outside of the Catholic clergy who have also testified to the power that was in his work is Senator Isidoro Del Lungo, one of the best critics in Italy, who has collected and published the last writings of Borsi.



New York's First Field Artillery to be Equipped Exclusively with Howitzers.

The New York Times

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