

*My dear Confrères,*

It is with deep sorrow that I announce to you the death of the

## **Rev. Father MICHAEL HENRY McCARTHY**

He had attained the great age of eighty-five years, had passed sixty-three years in our Society, and in September, 1956, had celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of his Priesthood.

Michael McCarthy was born in the Diocese of Southwark on 17th April, 1872, his parents being John and Ann McCarthy (née O'Grady). The Salesian work in England was still very much in its infancy when Michael McCarthy entered the Salesian House at Battersea, London, on 8th December, 1891. On 4th May, 1892, in company with Father A. Hawarden, he received the Religious habit, and the period of the Novitiate was commenced. The following year, on 20th October, there was much joy in Battersea as three Novices, among them Brother Michael McCarthy, made their Religious Profession. It was a festive and a noteworthy occasion for all, but more particularly so for the newly-professed, as they made their Vows in the presence of the Servant of God, Father Michael Rua, who had come to Battersea accompanied by Mgr. Cagliero, Don Albera and Don Barberis. The Blessing of God and the Blessing of His Venerable Servant, Don Rua, was with the Cleric, Michael McCarthy, at the commencement of his Religious life, a life that was to stretch out for nearly sixty-four years.

The Salesians in Battersea in those early days had need of special blessings. The demands that those primitive times made upon the first Salesians in England were many, difficult and continual. The life of Brother Michael McCarthy and the early history of Battersea are closely knit in the years that followed. The times in which they lived were difficult, the life was poor, not with the poverty of the modern Social Welfare State, but with the poverty of extreme need. And along with want and poverty there were the incessant demands on the time and skill of those early Salesians. All of them were working from early morn until late night with the feverish urgency of firmly establishing the beginnings of a School, the beginnings of the Salesian work in England. Brother Michael had a capable pair of hands, and if workmen were kept out of the School, it was because of his ability as a carpenter, plumber and engineer. To his practical ability he added his gift as an organiser, who could be depended upon to get arrangements carried through regularly and punctually.

To the strenuous labours of those years he added the study of Philosophy and Sacred Theology. If these studies were carried through in the midst of many other duties, they were, nevertheless, carried through very thoroughly, the truth of which was borne out by the soundness and clarity of his decisions in Theological discussions, even sixty years later.

Don Rua, on a visit to London, discovered that Brother Michael McCarthy laid claim to relationship with the Blessed Thaddeus McCarthy, Bishop of the combined Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, who had died at Ivrea on his journey from Rome in the 15th century. Beatification Celebrations were to take place in Ivrea in September, 1896, and Don Rua arranged for Brother Michael to journey to Italy, in order to receive the Diaconate at Ivrea during the celebrations. And so on 13th September, during the Solemn Triduum in honour of Blessed Thaddeus McCarthy, the Cleric, Michael McCarthy, received the Diaconate from Mgr. Bourne, the Coadjutor Bishop of Southwark, and the future Cardinal Bourne. On 19th September, in his private chapel, the Archbishop of Turin, Mgr. Riccardi, raised Michael McCarthy to the Priesthood. Father McCarthy soon returned to Battersea to celebrate one of his first Masses in the Parish Church of the Sacred Heart, a church that had been built due very largely to the encouragement and practical help that came to the Salesians in Battersea through the hands of the Venerable Don Rua.

The following year Father McCarthy was sent as Rector to open the house at Burwash, Sussex. In the year 1898, working directly under the Superiors in Turin, Father McCarthy went to Egypt, and there he negotiated for the purchase of the site of the present huge School in Alexandria. Whilst in Egypt he was appointed Chaplain to the Catholic Soldiers in the British Army. Recalled to Turin, he was English Secretary to the Superior General, Don Rua, for nearly a year.

On his return to Battersea, Father McCarthy was appointed Catholic Chaplain to the inmates of Wandsworth Prison. The present devotional Chapel in the Prison grounds is largely due to the successful struggle Father McCarthy carried on for the provision of suitable Religious facilities for Catholic Prisoners. Before the completion of this work, Don Rua called Father McCarthy to Turin once more and entrusted him with Parish work in New York City. The high excellence of the work done in the Parish of the Transfiguration, in New York City, was testified to by Father Diamond, who succeeded Father McCarthy; since Father McCarthy's death an old parishioner has written to sing the praises of the devotion and zeal of the young Salesian Priest of those days. On his return to England, further good work was done in the Parish of Earlsfield, later at Chertsey and then at Neath, in Wales. In 1923 he returned to Turin for a short time, to be appointed Rector of Battersea, London, the following year. This was followed by the Rectorship of Farnborough until 1931. Then came two more years of Salesian work in America. Poor health had been stalking Father McCarthy for several years, and in 1933 he returned to Battersea and to quiet retirement. With the coming of the war and the forced evacuation from the capital, Father McCarthy left for the country and for a time acted as Chaplain to a Convent. Eventually he came to this House of Blaisdon to remain here until his death.

His life had already been a long one, and the memories many of us have of Father McCarthy are memories of those years of retirement. He had laboured whilst vigour and energy were his. He had borne the heats of the day, a long day, and he was passing the evening of his years, a long evening, in a most exemplary manner. Our memories of him are the memories of a man who was essentially a Priest, with all the best of the Priestly characteristics. His love of the Holy Mass and his manner of celebrating were remarkable. Few knew the distress, the sense of loss, he experienced when ill-health prevented him from celebrating his daily Mass. His devotion to the Divine Office, to the Holy Rosary and all the Community Exercises was intimately connected with his love of the Mass. As the years passed, without any hope of a return of energy and vigour, he acquired none of the pitiful, failing qualities of old age. His mind remained clear, his spirit light and cheerful; he was ever grateful for any consideration shown him, unassertive, unobtrusive. He had affection, genuine affection, for his confrères and for the pupils of the School. The benefit of his counsel and his experience he would give with diffidence and only when requested. The burden of his years and his infirmity was his burden; he had no desire to unload it on others.

Only a month before his death the good Lord gave Father McCarthy timely warning that the end was nigh, and Father recognised that warning. Convinced that his time of departure had come, he prepared quietly to put a happy ending to the blessing of a long life. When medical opinion proposed that he should go to hospital he quietly acquiesced. Whilst in hospital he asked for and received the benefits of the Last Sacraments. Another Priest, Father J. Davies, also a patient at the hospital, was accustomed to visit Father McCarthy: on the evening of 25th July, at Father McCarthy's request, they spent a long time in prayer together. In the small hours of the following morning Father McCarthy again asked for Father Davies, this time to recite with him the Prayers for the Dying. And answering those prayers he quietly and peacefully ended a long life given to God, and entered another life for which he had made such careful preparation. The peace, quiet and tranquillity of his latter days as a Priest were mirrored in the peace, quiet and tranquillity of his beautiful death. May the Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady, Help of Christians, of Saint John Bosco and all the Salesian Saints, quickly grant him a rich reward for all he has done and suffered. May he rest in peace eternal.

As you remember this, our departed confrère, please also remember to pray for this Salesian House, for its confrères and pupils and for

Yours devotedly in Jesus Christ,

HENRY MULLANEY, S.D.B., Rector.

**Data for Necrology :** Father MICHAEL HENRY McCARTHY, born at Southwark, London, on 17th April, 1872, died at Cardiff on 26th July, 1957, in the eighty-sixth year of his age, the sixty-fourth of his Religious Profession and the sixty-first of his Priesthood.