

FATHER EDWARD MCKIERNAN. SDB.

Fr. Edward McKiernan died on the 30th December 1888. He was the companion of Fr. C. Macey and came over from the Mother House to take charge of the West Battersea mission. Like the majority of the Salesian works this foundation was commenced in a very humble way, but its poverty was blessed; it blossomed forth and prospered, though Fr. McKiernan was not destined to live to see the result of those heroic days, so full of sacrifice. Father McKiernan had not been well for some time and the last occasion on which he offered Mass was on his feast day, St. Edward's day – October 13th. The sick priest had the consolation of seeing the late Cardinal Cagliero and Fr. Roussin a few weeks before the end came. The dying priest breathed his soul into the hands of his Maker in the late afternoon of December 30th. The small community were gathered around his bed, with the exception of his old companion Fr. Macey, who at that sad moment was absent on an errand of mercy, administering the last consolations of our faith to a poor man who was dying in the parish.

Edward had come to the Oratory from Ireland as a boy of about fifteen. He was sent to Don Bosco by his bishop, a certain Mons Conroy, to be educated for the bishop's diocese. Bishop Conroy however died about 1876, a year or so after Edward arrived at the Oratory. The boy was an orphan and the death of the bishop left him without anyone to look after him. It is clear, though we have no documentary evidence, that Don Bosco invited the boy to stay on at the Oratory and that eventually Edward asked to be allowed to enter the Salesian Novitiate.

Fr. Vespignani who, as a young priest, entered the Salesians in 1876 recounts one of his early conversations with Don Bosco. He writes. . "I, perhaps imprudently, asked Don Bosco if there were in the Oratory at that time pupils or clerics who imitated the sanctity of Dominic Savio. Don Bosco first mentioned several of the former companions of Dom Savio. Coming then to the boys who had recently been clothed with the clerical dress he named McKiernan, an Irish lad, assuring me that this boy had nothing to envy in S. Aloysius Gonzaga. When later I heard that the same McKiernan had been sent as the first Rector to London, that is to the scene of the dream of our angelic little boy, I could not help connecting the fact with the words of Don Bosco."

Unfortunately, Fr. McKiernan died in Battersea in December 1888, thirteen months after his arrival in England. The mortal remains of this first Salesian Superior in England rest in the Catholic cemetery at Mortlake, and since the dead are so easily forgotten and we never know how much the Divine Justice may need in expiation of sins committed here below, we commend his soul to the pious prayers of all.