

My dear Confrères,

I have the sad duty of announcing to you the death in the Esperance Nursing Home, Eastbourne, of the

Very Rev. Fr. RICHARD MILLEN, S.D.B.

He was 60 years of age and had been a Salesian priest for twenty-nine years.

Richard Francis Millen was born in the Diocese of Southwark on February 11th, 1895, of Richard and Mary Ann Millen. He grew up as a child of a good Catholic home, showing those dispositions of character which were to mark him out all his life. On leaving school in 1909 at fourteen, he began earning his living apprenticed as a compositor to a London printer. He remained at his trade until 1914 and was awarded a First Class Pass in the Final examination of the City and Guilds of London.

About this same time he came in contact with the sons of St. John Bosco at Battersea, and although faced with many years of hard study he commenced working to prepare himself for the priesthood. But England was at war, and the situation developed so seriously that by 1916 every man was needed to serve his country. Richard Millen in company with others joined the Forces, as a Signaller. His steady qualities and discipline soon picked him out; he was made assistant instructor and was highly recommended. Later he went to France and saw heavy fighting, gaining the Military Medal for bravery and devotion to duty. He and another companion, also a Salesian, were isolated in a shell-hole, but without thought of personal danger they continued to signal their messages to headquarters. The war ended, and Richard Millen returned to the Salesians and was admitted to the novitiate in 1919, was professed and studied philosophy at Cowley and Battersea, where he continued for his first years of theology. In 1924 he was sent to Turin to complete his studies in the International Studentate and was ordained priest in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians, July 11th, 1926.

Once ordained, he became successively Prefect in Cowley and Catechist and Prefect in Malta: then in 1931 he was appointed Rector by the Superiors to Lansdowne, South Africa. From that time onwards he continued as a Rector in South Africa and in England until the day of his death. These years saw the slow, steady growth of his spiritual life; his unremitting struggle against himself and his courageous acceptance of the special crosses his office of superior placed upon him. His was a sensitive character, quick to feel hurt, but he brought himself under control by his ready obedience; he had the heart of a soldier and he did not shrink from the most unpleasant of duties when fidelity to rule or tradition demanded it. The years he spent during the Second World War in South Africa were particularly difficult. The Salesian Communities cut off from contacts with Superiors and the grave difficulties of personnel called for uncommon fortitude and steadfastness in the Rector. Father Millen shunned the spectacular; he was at his best holding his team steadily to the beaten track of observance to Rule, fidelity in ordinary things and the simple Christian virtues of ordinary people.

The last two years of his life reveal the stature of this holy priest. As he had lived, so he was to die. Early in 1953 his health deteriorated, though the true cause was then unknown. In the November it became certain that an operation would be necessary and in December it was known he suffered from an incurable cancer. His will to live and to work made him ignore this sentence of death. He offered the pain he suffered for Catholics behind the Iron Curtain, and he manfully turned his will to the business of doing his work as Rector whatever the cost. In and out of hospital, given up by doctors and nurses alike, with only weeks to live, he surprised everybody on his return to Burwash, after receiving the Last Sacraments in a nursing home, by saying Mass daily—a thing he was never expected to do again. A shadow of his former self, he lived the common-life for another four months; only he knew the price he paid in suffering. Never a complaint. Nothing but gratitude for what was done for him. Finally, he had to make his last journey to hospital—he knew this must be the end, as indeed it was. All his prayers were for the Congregation he loved so dearly; all his sufferings for those in need of spiritual help . . . and above all gratitude to God for all His blessings and mercy: so he passed slowly away and died as quietly as he had lived, fortified by the rites of the Church and by the prayers of his confrères. His end was made peaceful by the supreme grace of a Happy Death. He leaves behind a fragrant memory of priestly goodness and the inspiring example of fidelity, courage and perseverance in the daily duties of the religious life.

Pray for the repose of this valiant soul and for all the needs of this Province.

T. W. HALL, S.D.B.,

Provincial.

Data for the Necrology:

Father Richard Francis Millen, born at New Cross, London, on February 11th, 1895, died at a nursing home at Eastbourne on April 17th, 1955, in the 61st year of his age, the 35th year of his Religious Profession and the 29th year of his Priesthood.