

Dear Confreres,

It is my sad duty to announce to you the news of the death, in a Dublin Nursing Home, on October 1st, 1953, of :

Fr. Timothy Patrick O'Connor

He was 81 years of age, had been professed for more than fifty years, and was in the 45th year of his sacred priesthood.

Father Timothy O'Connor was a man who, by his special gifts of character, his tenacity and his altogether brilliant business flair, had contributed much to Salesian work. Whilst his death is a heavy loss to us all and he is mourned by a host of friends who admired and revered him, it is an encouragement to us who are left to realise that we can take heart from his good example in the practice of the priestly and religious virtues, and we thank God who used him as an instrument in the building up of works on foundations so sure and solid that they augur well for the Missions and for Agriculture in Ireland.

Timothy O'Connor was the son of James and Margaret O'Connor and was born at Rossadrihid, County Tipperary, Ireland, on the 17th December, 1872. He was, therefore, about fifteen years of age at the time of the death of Saint John Bosco. He came to the Salesian Congregation in 1901, after having spent four years earlier, from 1894-1898, with the De La Salle Brothers as a member of their Society. He commenced his novitiate at Burwash, England, in that same year, 1901, and made his perpetual vows in 1906.

His was a long and active life, yet, though many who did not know him intimately may not have realised it, he had, almost from the first, suffered from ill-health and there were times when his condition was a cause of much anxiety. In the days of his novitiate, the state of his health was a cause of concern to his Superiors and another serious illness struck him down soon after his religious profession. Never, however, did he allow these physical difficulties to stand in the way of the faithful fulfilment of his duties and, from the first to last, he was always a model to all. In his lifetime he has achieved much and has, at his death gone to his Creator full of good works.

Life at Battersea in those early days of the Province at the beginning of the century was extremely hard. They were the days of the pioneers, days of unending toil, days of poverty, yet days which produced Salesians of outstanding quality, men after Don Bosco's own heart. Clerics who, like Timothy O'Connor, had to combine study with constant assisting and manual work, were men who knew the meaning of sacrifice and whose lives were lives of selfless dedication. He, like the rest of them, was well-known as a cleric for his devotion to the boys in his care, and he was loved and respected by them in return.

After his ordination to the priesthood, some forty-five years ago, he was given a marked sign of the confidence his Superiors had in him by being appointed to the important office of Catechist at Battersea. A few years later, he was made parish priest of an important London parish, St. Mary Magdalen's, East Hill, Wandsworth, which was then in Salesian hands. For thirteen years he carried out his apostolate there with astonishing success. He was loved by all, both by the old and the young. Perhaps one of the greatest tributes to the work he accomplished at East Hill was that paid, long afterwards, by his successor as parish priest who asked if it would be possible for Father O'Connor to return to the scene of his former ministry to give a Mission to the people. No-one else, his successor maintained, would ever have the same influence for good over the people of that parish. As Confessor, spiritual guide and preacher, he was in constant demand. By his own initiative and his tireless labours he paid off the entire debt on the beautiful church of St. Mary Magdalen and had the joy of witnessing its consecration during his term as its parish priest.

Meantime, a preparatory school had been established at Burwash and Father O'Connor's next appointment was as its Rector; indeed one of the first. Once more the story was one of rapid development and complete success.

In 1930, Father O'Connor began his long connection with the Salesian work in Ireland, and here, in the tremendous expansion of the work of St. John Bosco at the colleges at Pallaskenry and Warrenstown, is to be seen his lasting memorial. The great work begun, under most difficult circumstances by Father Sutherland at Pallaskenry, work handicapped and made so terribly difficult and nerveracking by the agonies of civil war, had been nobly continued, but, when Father O'Connor arrived in 1930, though times were easier, the days of struggle were still there. Future prospects were none too bright. The transformation effected, and which may be seen at Pallaskenry and Warrenstown to-day, makes it almost impossible to visualise what conditions were like in those days. Old boys coming back frankly gasp with astonishment when they see, for the first time, the changes that have been taking place since their days. In all this we are able to assess and evaluate to at least some little extent the character of the herculean labours, the zeal, faith, enterprise and outstanding ability of Father O'Connor and of that other great Salesian, still happily with us, Father McElligott, and of those other Salesians who worked under them.

Many are the services which a person may offer to God, but there is, perhaps, none so acceptable and none which so intimately unites a soul with Christ as the service given in the apostolate of suffering. For the last two years of his life, in particular, the deceased priest bore his long and painful ailments with courage, cheerfulness and geniality bordering upon the heroic. Because of the reward which the Cross brings to him who bears it patiently and well, this final apostolate may well be regarded as the finest of all and the grand fore-runner of the crown. Surely, at the end of his long and faithful life, this most zealous Son of St. John Bosco could, like St. Paul, raise his eyes to heaven above and declare: "I have fought a good fight: I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day." (II Tim. IV. 7-8).

He, surely, has glorified God upon this earth and has accomplished the work he was given to do, but let us remember to give him also the reward of the charity — nay the debt of justice — of our prayers that his soul may speedily enjoy the eternal peace of God.

Our Lady, Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio, pray for him.

Asking, too, the favour of your good prayers for myself and for this Province,

I remain,

Yours sincerely in Dno.,

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

(Provincial.)

Data for the Necrology:

Father Timothy Patrick O'Connor, born Rossahrihid, Co. Tipperary, Ireland, 17th December, 1872; died, Dublin (Eire), 1st October, 1953. Aged 81 years, in the forty-fifth year of his priesthood and the 52nd year of his religious profession.