

FR. FREDERICK J. STUBBINGS. S. D. B.

From Daleside, Transvaal, comes the news of the death of Father Stubbings, on November 24th; he was buried on the same day as Fr. E. Jackson in London; they had worked together for many years in the Cape area of South Africa.

Fr. Stubbings was born in London in 1907. He went to Battersea as an aspirant at the same time as Fr. Tait. It is interesting to note that his mother, who was of German origin, was working in or near Burwash when she married. Fr. Stubbings would often speak of her as a "great manager". Fr. Stubbings made his novitiate at Cowley, Oxford and he made his first profession in 1925. With Fr. Doyle he went to South Africa, where they worked and studied together, most of their studies being supervised by Fr. J. Dunne. Fr. Stubbings was ordained in 1931 at the age of 24.

Fr. Stubbings then spent some time at Cape Town before returning to England and for a while worked at the Boys Hostel in London. After a spell in the novitiate at Beckford and a short time as the headmaster at Farnborough, he returned to South Africa after World War 2.

In South Africa he became the Rector of the Salesian Institute and with Fr. Fairclough he helped to start the first real missionary work in the province by pioneering the apostolate at Bremersdorp in Swaziland. The two Salesians, helped by a lorryload of Salesians and boys from the Cape began heroic labours under immense difficulties, which were to persist throughout Fr. Stubbins' rectorship from 1953-8. He then took over the hostel in Johannesburg before going to Daleside as headmaster - a post from which he retired in 1972.

Although he had several times complained of ill-health and always seemed to have great difficulty in eating, he was never laid up and declined to see a doctor. But he suddenly collapsed on Monday, November 24th and died on the way to hospital, as Bro. John Preston held him in his arms and tried to help him.

Fr. Stubbings was a man of conservative stamp and found some difficulty in accepting contemporary modes and manners, especially in the liturgy, but he would dutifully carry out all orders emanating from authority, whatever he thought of them privately. At the end he was conscious, seemed quite ready to die, and was praying quietly and calmly until his voice failed.

May he rest in peace. Amen.

TRIBUTE TO FATHER STUBBINGS:

(Our thanks to Fr. Ivo Pisacane, Rector of Daleside, for sending on the text of the following graveside tribute to Fr. Stubbings (R.I.P) by Mr. Wally Weitz, himself a Past President of the Past Pupils in South Africa.)

My heart is very full today at having lost a very good friend. A great loss of someone for whom I had a profound respect and admiration, even affection, and most surely gratitude, extending over more than forty years.

I am grateful for this opportunity to pay tribute to Fr. Stubbings on behalf of the Old Boys and particular the older Old Boys from the Institute days. But words alone don't really mean much at a time like this, with memories flooding in. It's feelings that count more, and thoughts. So instead of words and praises, let me take you back to my schooldays, and perhaps you'll understand a little of my thoughts today. Please, bear with me.

My mind goes back to when I was a kid newly arrived at the Institute in Cape Town, the son of a widowed mother in the depression years. You know, young teenagers are presumed to be tough and independent, without any feelings to speak of, and with a sort of rough and ready acceptance of life, but I confess that I was completely overawed. It was all very bewildering, this arrival at a boys' boarding school, with its strange routine, in a strange town, and among strangers. My mom, who had grown even closer to me after my dad's death, was far, far away in Port Elizabeth, and I felt very, very alone.

A couple of days later, I became desperately unhappy - as only someone who has experienced this form of thing can understand - and after breakfast I slipped back into the dormitory. It was there that Father Stubbings found me, sobbing my heart out. Perhaps some of us have forgotten how impressionable a youngster is and how easily his heart can break. I was terrified and ashamed at being discovered in my secret sorrows by this young priest who, I had been warned by my schoolmates, was a martinet. I discovered instead that he was a man of compassion, very different from what I had been told. He calmed me down, told me to dry my tears and gave me a most kind and fatherly talk, asking about my troubles and finding out a little more about me.

He then took me to the playground and introduced me to a couple of youngsters whom he called over, suggesting that they keep an eye on me and help me to get the routine of things. That was my introduction to Father Stubbings.

One of those youngsters remained a friend of mine until his death; he was the best man at my wedding.

I could write a book about my schooldays at the Institute. In the depression days, things were tough. How the Community managed to provide for us all in those belt-tightening days, only the Good Lord knows! Many's the time the community must have said their prayers extra hard and many's the night they must have lain awake worrying. Of course, it is only in later years that one realises the terrific burden the community shouldered in order to educate us, feed us, clothe us. Only in later years did we realise what a great privilege it was to be in a Salesian House in the first place, because there were many worse off than we were.

However, they were happy days! Some of my happiest memories are of picnics in the Christmas holidays organised by Fr. Stubbings and others of the Community for those boys whose families could not afford to take them home for the holidays, or who had no home to go to. Fr. Stubbings worked tirelessly, never sparing himself, and at the end of the holidays we used to say that we had had a better time than those boys who had gone home.

My schooldays were proud days, too. I remember the time when we wrested the School Cadet trophy from the seemingly invincible Diocesan College platoons. Fr. Stubbings it was who drilled us in the playground until we were a machine, polished to the perfection he always demanded. I was in the band and how proudly we marched back home, through the city, with the triumphant platoon bearing the trophy!... I recall Fr. Stubbings, too, cajoling, bullying, encouraging the band, under the baton of a Mr. Noble, until we were moulded into a creditable version of a school

band — the only one of its kind in Cape Town. In fact, many boys graduated from there to careers in the Defence Force and Police bands. I remember Fr. Stubbings slaving away, tirelessly, at school plays and concerts. He loved Gilbert and Sullivan and many of his quips and wisecracks came from these operations. It was he who supervised the singing in the school chapel — and what singing, as more than one astonished visitor has acknowledged.

And so down Memory Lane. But out of these memories was born a respect and admiration and affection for this man of God that will last me all my life. You might be thinking, "Ah, hero worship! If you are, you are perfectly right for such was my regard for this man and for all he stood for.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Our Lord describes the Last Judgement to His apostles and part of His words are these: "Then the King will say to those gathered at his right hand: "Come ye, blessed of my Father and take possession of the kingdom prepared for you. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in, naked and you clothed me." And the just people on the King's right hand will ask him and say: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you to drink, and when did we see you a stranger and take you in, naked and clothe you? And answering, the King will say to them," Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me."

Father Stubbings did all these things as I and hundreds of boys can personally testify. And, please God forgive me if I sound irreverent, I would like to add a bit of my own in Fr. Stubbings' case, because that's how I remember him: "When you found a lonely kid, crying his heart out in the dormitory, you comforted him."

I thank God for sending men like this into the world to care for kids like me, for they truly are the sons of Don Bosco. I salute you, Father, and thank you from the bottom of my heart. May God rest your soul!