

FR. RICHARD BIEBUYCK. S. D. B.

On December 5th, the death occurred at the Salesian Mother House in Turin, of Fr. Richard. He was born at Sulsique near Ghent in Belgium on October the 26th 1860 and was sent to England as a boy to be educated at Ratcliffe College by the Rosminian Fathers. When his schooldays were over he returned to Belgium for his period of military service and eventually decided on a military career. For several years he served as an officer in the Belgium army but, about his thirtieth year, he left the army to follow the vocation which he felt God had given him to the priesthood. It was natural that he should want to return to those who had educated him and he was clothed at the Rosminian novitiate at Wadhurst in 1891. On being told however that his entry into the Institute of Charity did not necessarily mean that he would be able to be a priest, he decided to leave and he was directed by the Rosminians to the Salesians in London.

He was accepted by Fr. Macey and he entered the Salesian House at Battersea in 1895. After a short period as an aspirant he began his novitiate and made his vows on March 19th 1897. Having completed his theological studies he was ordained at Womersley in December 1900 by Mgr. Bourne, the bishop of Southwark. After spending a year as headmaster at Battersea, Fr. Biebuyck was sent to Jamaica where for three years he worked as a missionary among the planters and their native employees. In 1905 the mission was handed over to another society and Fr. Biebuyck went to Tanjore in South India. There his perfect knowledge of English and of English ways helped to render his apostolate very fruitful. Two years later illness obliged him to return to Italy. After spending some time in hospital he was appointed chaplain to some Trinitarian nuns at Oulx, an Alpine village on the Franco-Italian frontier.

In 1909 Fr. Biebuyck again left Italy for Smyrna where he taught in the Salesian School for six years. In 1915 however, owing to the war, he was obliged to leave Turkish territory and was sent by his superiors to Egypt. Throughout the war period he taught in the Salesian School of Arts and Trades at Alexandria and did splendid work among Catholic soldiers serving in the British army. At Alexandria he was much appreciated by ecclesiastical and military authorities alike. Shortly after the allied occupation of the Holy Land, Fr. Biebuyck, in an interview with Lord Allenby, received permission for himself and his confreres at Alexandria to visit Palestine which was at the time closed to all save the military authorities.

When the war was over Father Biebuyck went back to Smyrna where he remained until 1922 when he returned to Italy to the Salesian Mother House in Turin. There he worked for fifteen years as administrator of the English Salesian Bulletin. He was for many years ordinary confessor to the boys and, until the end of his life, extraordinary confessor to several religious communities in Turin. On December 1st he had a bad heart attack and the doctor, who was called at once, made no attempt to conceal its probable outcome. Fr. Biebuyck, though robust, was 77 years of age. On December 4th he grew worse and asked for and received Holy Viaticum. He was much consoled by a visit of the Very Rev. Fr. Ricaldone, who gave him the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and remained for some time at his bedside. In the afternoon of the same day he seemed much better but, about 3. a. m. on Sunday the pain returned and, after joining in prayers which were being said at his bedside, he passed away.

On Monday, December 6th, the Very Rev. Fr. Serie of the Salesian Superior Chapter sang a solemn Requiem Mass in the basilica of Mary, Help of Christians for the repose of his soul. The Very Rev. Frs. Giraudi, Economer General, Ziggotti, Prefect General of Studies, and Puddu, Secretary to the Superior Chapter, as well as Salesians and boys of the Oratory were present. In the afternoon the body was laid to rest in the Salesian vault in the cemetery of Turin.

By nature, Fr. Biebuyck was reserved, possessing all the calm dignity of the Belgian race. Yet there was nothing cold or stiff about him that made him difficult to approach and, despite the reserve which was so natural to him, he had a pleasant way of joking, of making some humorous remark that set one at ease. Those who have lived with him assert that his kindliness and readiness to sacrifice his own convenience in order to place himself at the disposal of others, made him one of the easiest men to deal with. As a priest and religious he was exact in all his duties and anyone who assisted at his Mass could not help noticing the fervour and care with which he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice. The members of the community to which he belonged, feel that they have lost a dearly beloved confrere but more especially is his death felt by those working in connection with the English Salesian Bulletin to whom he was a constant source of help and encouragement. We recommend him to the generous prayers of all who read the Bulletin.

May he rest in peace.