

FATHER WILLIAM ALOYSIUS WALSH. S. D. B.

By the death, after a painful illness, heroically borne, of Father William Aloysius Walsh, the province has lost an indefatigable worker and a very great priest.

Fr. Walsh was born in Accrington, Lancs, in 1889, and after leaving school he was employed in a textile machinery works from 1902-11 during which time he also attended evening classes. He attracted the attention of the late Fr. Lester, S. J., who thought that he, together with Fr. Reedy and another companion had vocations to the priesthood. But, on account of their age, he could not get his own Congregation or other religious congregations or seminaries to take them. He was finally inspired to approach Fr. C. Macey, then Rector of the Salesian College, Battersea, who told him to send the young men along and Our Lady would do the rest. This typical Salesian kindness of Fr. Macey not only gave William Walsh and others the chance of testing their vocations but was the turning point in Father Lester's dream of helping "Late Vocations" The result was the founding of Campion House, Osterley, generously and publicly acknowledged by Fr. Lester in his history of Osterley.

So, at the age of 22, William Walsh entered Battersea with David Reedy as an aspirant. He made his novitiate at Burwash from 1912-13, and was admitted to first profession there on August 6th 1913. His perpetual profession was made at Battersea on the 4th November 1917. He did his practical training at East Hill and Farnborough; his theology course at Farnborough, Burwash and finally at the newly opened studentate at Cowley, Oxford. He got his Minor Orders at Battersea, his Sub-diaconate at St. George's Cathedral, Southwark, his diaconate at Ore Place, Hastings and finally his ordination to the priesthood by Bishop Amigo on the 24th August 1921 at Ore Place, Hastings.

Shortly before his ordination, Fr. Walsh was appointed Catechist at Battersea and it was while teaching there, in the early years of his priesthood, that he also contrived to find time and energy to attend King's College London and there gain his B. A. with honours in Psychology and with Logic as his subsidiary subject. It was a great achievement – the result of that dogged refusal to be beaten that marked his whole life. He was always a tremendous worker and one could not help but admire the way in which, in spite of all obstacles, he plodded forward to the goal. How else could he have succeeded as he did in making the hard road from the life of the young textile worker in his native town to the priesthood and the headship of great schools.

It is with Bolton and "Thornleigh College" that his name will for ever be most closely associated. Sent there as Catechist when the school first opened there in 1915, he teamed up with Fr. McCourt its first Rector, and Fr. Parker, the first headmaster, to lay the foundations of the first Salesian school in the north and he lived to see many of its triumphs. In 1927, he succeeded Fr. Parker as headmaster, worked in close contact with Fr. McCourt and his successor, Fr. Austen, and, finally, in 1940 followed the latter as Rector. He remained in that office there until 1946. Those years from 1925-46 were indeed 21 years of hard work and great accomplishment and, through them all, whatever his other duties, he remained a teacher as, in fact, he did, everywhere until the day of his death. Somehow he always fitted in a couple of periods at least in the classroom. Teaching was his life.

The years that followed when he was successively Rector at Farnborough (1946-52) Cowley (1952-58) and Chertsey (1958-62) were really a continuation of what had gone before; years of fidelity to the life he had embraced, years of constant devotion to duty and of desire to advance in every way possible the work of Don Bosco. He was always planning some new advance, some building project or some effort for higher recognition of the colleges under his control. Perhaps Chertsey especially bears the mark of his success. The inspection for its official recognition was actually in progress at the time of his funeral.

He regularly attended each year the Conference of Catholic Colleges and he was appointed by the Conference as one of its representatives on the Catholic Education Council. He was, too, during the latter years of his life, a member of the Provincial Council. He had very definite ideas on the subject of Salesian assistance and was regularly to be found among the boys in recreation. He loved a chat and a good joke; he did many a good deed in helping those who were in danger of stumbling on the road of their vocation and there are not a few Salesians, who would gladly tell of the warm-hearted kindness that he could dispense.

A serious operation about a year ago, gave him some relief in an illness that had already taken considerable toll on his health, but he suffered a relapse again towards the end of 1961. In the full knowledge of his illness he was able to prepare for death and meet it cheerfully and courageously with all the strength and consolations of the Last Sacraments. On January 20th 1962, God called him to his rich reward.

The Solemn Dirge was held at St. Anne's Church, Chertsey, on Tuesday, the 23rd January 1962, and the Requiem Mass next morning was sung there by Fr. Reedy, assisted by Frs McCabe and O'Donnell as deacon and sub-deacon respectively. The ministers had been chosen by Fr. Walsh himself as was his grave in the adjoining cemetery with his predecessor, Fr. Payne and other Salesians. Fr. Provincial preached the panegyric and officiated at the interment. Over 80 Salesians and secular priests attended, as did many of the Salesian Sisters and other nuns, parishioners, boys. His brother, Michael, represented the family.

May he rest in peace.