



Salesian College,
Battersea,
London, SW11 3PB

4th December 1978

Dear Confrères,

It is with a sense of very particular sorrow and loss that the Salesian Community here at Battersea places on record the death, on Friday, November 24th 1978, of

REV. BROTHER NOEL WESTON, S.D.B.

at the grand, patriarchal age of ninety. Had he survived, he would have reached his ninety-first birthday on Christmas Day. Truly, both from the point of view of age, and also from that of a unique religious personality, "a great light has gone out in Israel!"

There are people who pass, in the course of the years, through the ways of this world, and who thereby form part of history. There are others who do much more; they make history. Brother Noel was outstandingly one of these. From every angle, he was a character in his own right. In a sense, one might think of him as a special gift of Don Bosco to the Salesian Society, and to the English Province in particular. And why? The answer is that, by one of those providential circumstances which so much defy explanation, he came into this world on 25th December 1887; just a month after the arrival of the first Salesian in England, and just a month also before the death of the saint. And it was to Battersea that our holy founder sent those Salesians as his last 'missionary expedition.' All very coincidental maybe, but, none the less, very interesting!

It was many years later before Noel, a great Protestant and a magnificent Victorian, embraced the Catholic Faith. Knowing him, as for so long we have been privileged to do, none of us will have any doubt that the decision to enter the Catholic Church must, for Noel, have been scarcely less painful and difficult than that experienced by another great citizen of Oxford, Cardinal Newman. Men of such calibre and of such quality of conscience do not easily break faith with all that, for so many years, they have revered and loved. They do so solely because they recognise, in the very depth of their beings, that God is calling them to 'cross the road! And when they make the crossing, it is a genuine case of 'no return.'

With Brother Noel, the beginnings of the faith were planted in a simple enough way when he came into contact with the Salesians soon after they opened their novitiate and studentate at Cowley, Oxford, in 1921. We are told that it all happened in a most unexpected way; through, in fact, our friend calling at the house in response to an advertisement placed in the local paper by the then novice-master for a bicycle. That reverend gentleman certainly never for a moment imagined that he was sowing the seed, by that advertisement, for a conversion. Wonderful are the ways of God! Thereafter, Noel became a regular visitor to the house, and he was received into the Church at Cowley on 30th March 1922. Included in the new Salesian parish was the then village of Littlemore, where Blessed Dominic Barberi had received Newman into the faith. There can, too, be little doubt that Fr Angelo Franco, who was the first Superior at Cowley, and who had an extraordinary love for, and devotion to Cardinal Newman, helped Noel mightily on his way. Providence at work again? I think so.

Though Noel was, to all intents and purposes, part and parcel of the Salesian house for the next few years, he did not, in fact, enter the Society as a novice until 10th December 1928. He was professed at Cowley in 1930, and made his final vows there on 9th September 1933.

In the novitiate and studentate, he was a man among boys, being already in his forties. Behind him, he had already a wealth of experience, both in the business world and in the army. He had enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps early in 1915, just a few months after the outbreak of the First World War, and had, until his demobilisation in 1919, seen active service in France, Italy and the Middle East. In later life, his brethren often teased him to wear his medals: he was not made that way.

What a benefit to the community at Oxford, and later at Battersea, his knowledge of matters medical was to prove to be! He was quickly installed as infirmarian; an office in fulfilment of which he combined both skill and kindness, but never softness. He undertook duties also as stage manager and as manager of the now unfortunately defunct "Help of Christians" magazine. He moved to Battersea in 1941 and stayed there throughout the years of the Second World War, and to the end of his days. In offices such as those already mentioned, and as Guest Master and rectorian, he gave, at all times, an example, a sense of duty and a display of gentlemanliness and courtesy which it would be impossible to exaggerate or to excel.

A Victorian to his finger-tips, he was a model of propriety and he set standards that were an education to everyone, and not least to the young. One can easily appreciate how great a help that must have been to young students in their

training days. Noel was loved by everyone: his advice was keenly sought and equally respected. He loved a joke, and had his own dignified sense of fun. On his ninetieth birthday last year, Salesians, pupils, past and present, co-operators and parents of the boys rose to the occasion and made it a triumph of warmth and affection for him. He himself revelled in the fun.

Back now for a moment to his earlier life. He had, as we have seen, been brought up in strict non-Catholic surroundings. Eventually, he had the joy of seeing his mother received into the Church on her death-bed; a sister, who still survives, and to whom we extend deep sympathy in her loss, also became an ardent Catholic. She has devoted many years to her work as a priest's housekeeper. For her dedicated service, she was awarded the 'Bene Merenti' medal. It is a strange fact, that Noel, who became so strong a Catholic, was born in Lewes in Sussex, where also his father died. Lewes has always been a stronghold of diehard Protestantism, and certainly until quite recently an effigy of the Pope was publicly burnt there on Guy Fawkes Day every year. It probably still is. Our good Brother, in his old age, found some of the newer aspects of the liturgy, following upon Vatican II, rather a severe trial to him. "This isn't the church I joined," he would sometimes say; but, with a faith and a humility which revealed true greatness, he did his best to give an example of unfailing obedience to the Vicar of Christ. His reaction to changes in our Society was similar, but he was faithful to the end.

There seems little need to go into the story of his long years in the business world. We know full well that one such as he, who, in everything was as straight as a prop, must have been a model of the highest integrity, giving a sterling example in all he did.

His religious life was always worthy of the man; simple, quiet, unaffected, dedicated, and, above all, a service of the warmest love. His Salesian vocation was his pride. He died as he had lived; quietly and without fuss, giving his soul up to the Father in heaven for whose company he had yearned for so long. We commend his great soul to Our Lady's motherly care as we approach her feast of the Immaculate Conception. We ask your prayers for his eternal rest and for new recruits to the Congregation, and to the community which is so much the poorer without him. His loss is the third which this Battersea community has sustained in the course of a few months. May we see the harvest ripen soon!

Please keep us, too, in your prayers.

Yours very sincerely in our Lord,

Austin Malloy, S.D.B.
(Rector)

Data for the Necrology:— WESTON . . . Rev. Bro. NOEL WESTON, S.D.B . . . born Lewes: 25.12.1887. Died Battersea (London) 24 November 1978, aged 90 years, and in the 41st year of his religious profession.

R.I.P.