

## BROTHER GEORGE WHEELER. S. D. B.

Bro. George died on Wednesday, 26th February 1969, at the Monastery Nursing Home, Sea Point, Cape Town. He was born in Battersea on the 13th March 1884, some three years before St. John Bosco sent his sons to London to establish the Parish of the Sacred Heart and a school for Catholic boys. His early education was received in the local elementary school established by the London County Council. In 1900 he commenced his career in the printing trade and gained an experience that was to stand him in good stead when he undertook the management of the Salesian Press during World War 2.

From an early age he was interested in social work, particularly for youth. He was active in this field, and was, for some years, the Scout Commissioner for South London. In 1913, George was received into the Church by the Redemptorist Fathers and was baptised at St. Mary's Clapham. He was thirty years of age when the first World War broke out in 1914. Two years later he was a Sergeant-Instructor in the 2/4 Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers at Sandown, Isle of Wight. He maintained this position until 1919. While at Sandown he found an outlet for his apostolic spirit by teaching Catechism to the local children.

For some years after the war, he lived at Bury St Edmunds, directing a copper-plate engraving business, which he had entered as a partner. In 1928, having met the Salesians at East Hill, where they were running a parish and a hostel, George Wheeler asked to become a Salesian. He became an aspirant at Farnborough, preparing himself by teaching for two years. In 1930, he entered the novitiate and made his profession of vows the following year.

Immediately after profession he was sent to South Africa, and took up duties at Lansdowne, then an agricultural school. In 1938 he transferred to Cape Town to take charge of the Catholic Repository "for a few months" Those few months stretched into thirty years, for it was only in 1967 that Bro. George handed over responsibility for the management of affairs to Bro. Peter Simmonds. He continued to do a full day's work until the end of 1968.

On December 31st last he had a fall in his room and he was told to take a complete rest. On the 3rd January, the doctor sent him to Groote Schuur Hospital for tests. It was found that he had diabetes and that gangrene had set in. His left leg was amputated on the 13th January, and from then on there was a gradual deterioration in his condition, culminating in his death on the 26th February 1969.

His confreres had been visiting him regularly during this period. On occasions he would recognise them and make an effort to thank them for coming along; on other occasions he spoke a few words only, and then fell asleep. During these visits the priests would give him absolution and the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. He was anointed for a second time a few days before his death.

All of us came away from these visits amazed at the courage and faith of our confrere. When he was told of the amputation he insisted on signing permission for the operation himself – and only after he had asked the Rector whether he may do so. Jokingly he said that he would have to join the one-legged brigade (In our Community Bro. Paul Clarke has one leg, and Bro. Victor Clitheroe a stiff leg). He never referred to the fact that he had lost a leg but merely worried about the type of work he would be able to do for the Community when he returned home. He wanted to get back as soon as possible as there was much work to be done.

But he had done his life's work. He had not spared himself in the service of youth before becoming a Salesian, and, after his profession he was even more generous and devoted in this service. Nor did he limit his apostolate to youth. Many a person went into the repository to buy a religious article, met Bro. George and came away with a piece of advice.

Bishop Green of Port Elizabeth wrote: "Instead of sympathy, it would be more in keeping with our Faith to offer you and your congregation congratulations in having successfully hoisted an astronaut into heavenly orbit. I have no doubt that Bro. George is in that orbit due to the ideals of the S. D. B's. . . He was a great man and I am sure his reward will be equal to what he was and did over the years at Somerset Road."

During his life-time one of his confreres wrote of him: "As a religious he is exemplary in his regularity, fidelity to Salesian principles, and loyalty to authority." As we look back upon eighty-five years we see how true a picture of him this really is. We have lost a confrere who lived his Salesian life to the full, a confrere, who accepted no lowering of standards. He was a man who never let up in his daily task until the last month of his life, when his body was already weakening and only his indomitable spirit could keep it going. And even at this late stage he would finish his daily task, and then retire to his room for the rest of the evening to complete his devotions and retire to bed. He died as he had lived - simply, quietly, without fuss.

The Sacred Heart church was packed to capacity as His Eminence Cardinal McCann entered for the Concelebrated Requiem Mass. The Very Rev. Fr. M. Egan SDB, the Provincial Delegate for South Africa preached the panegyric, and the Cardinal gave the final absolutions. Bro. George was laid to rest with his confreres who had gone before him - in the Salesian plot at Woltemade.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.