

FATHER WILLIAM WILCOCK. S. D. B.

Father William was born in Preston 76 years ago. When God's call came to him, we do not know, for a vocation comes from God alone. Brought up in the surroundings of a good Catholic Lancashire home, the circumstances of the day do not seem to have allowed him to accept at once the call of God; and not until the early years of manhood was he able to begin the necessary preparation for the Religious Life and the Priesthood. It was surely God's will, for those few years in the working world amongst his fellow-men gave him that insight into humanity which he showed to be so beneficial to the high calling which was to be his.

For, though of a quiet, unassuming, and very humble nature he well understood that it is through the human that we reach the Divine True love of God is reached through true love of our neighbour. Fr. Wilcock remained throughout his life, humble and childlike amongst God's people, unseen and often unknown by many, as he showed forth Christ to his fellow men.

He entered Battersea, then the House for late vocations, in 1912. Like many others, it was through that great and energetic son of St. Ignatius, Fr. Lester, that he was recommended to the Salesians at Battersea, where a special section for the various works was for late vocations. The senior boys of the College often spoke to these young men, known to them as aspirants, and no doubt they did much good.

1914 saw the outbreak of the First World War and William entered the Salesian Novitiate at Burwash in September that same year. For many, aspirants and students the war meant the parting of the ways for the time being. Bro. William as he was then, took his vows at the end of the year. Religious in vows were exempted from joining the forces so he began the study of Philosophy in 1915. He remained there during the war doing a little of everything; cooking for the small community and teaching when free in the small Catholic village school.

In 1919 he returned to Battersea to begin his theological studies and in 1923 he was ordained a priest in Southwark Cathedral by Bishop Amigo. It was the custom in those days for the Bishop to give the deacons an examination, a short time before he ordained them, and Bro. William took the same diocesan examination. A few days previous to the ordination the Rector of Battersea received a letter from the Bishop praising Bro. William and saying that he had obtained the highest marks in the examination. In his usual modest way, Bro. William had not passed that information on to the Rector.

After his ordination, Fr. Wilcock was asked to remain with the Battersea community and put his practical ability to use as the assistant bursar of the house. 1925 found him on his way to Malta to work in the same capacity. For a short time he returned to the new foundation at Cowley and thence again to his early home at Battersea. In 1933 he came home to his native Lancashire for some four years, after which he was asked to return to Farnborough to teach the Junior boys there. This was work that he liked very much. He was a gentle character and he liked the young boys and they liked him.

In 1940 he returned for the last time to Bolton, where he worked in administration both in the House and School. His work was to increase, for in 1949 it became imperative for the school to be enlarged and a full building programme with all the amenities of a Direct Grant School had to be organised.

Fr. Wilcock worked in his own self-effacing way to build up that family of friends and cooperators who helped to organise various schemes for collecting money in order to pay off the the Governors' financial liability for the re-building programme.

Fr. Wilcock lived always in the background. The work he did so conscientiously was known to only a few. But his life was full of small acts of kindness which will have their reward from God, who sees and records these hidden things. Before he died he had suffered for many years but he accepted his condition without complaint.

Fr. Wilcock had spent 56 years of his life as one of Don Bosco's sons, 45 years of which were spent as Christ's ambassador in the Sacred Priesthood. We hope and pray that, joining our prayer with the prayer of Christ, his everlasting repose and happiness is with God in Heaven.

May his gentle soul rest in peace.