

R. I. P.

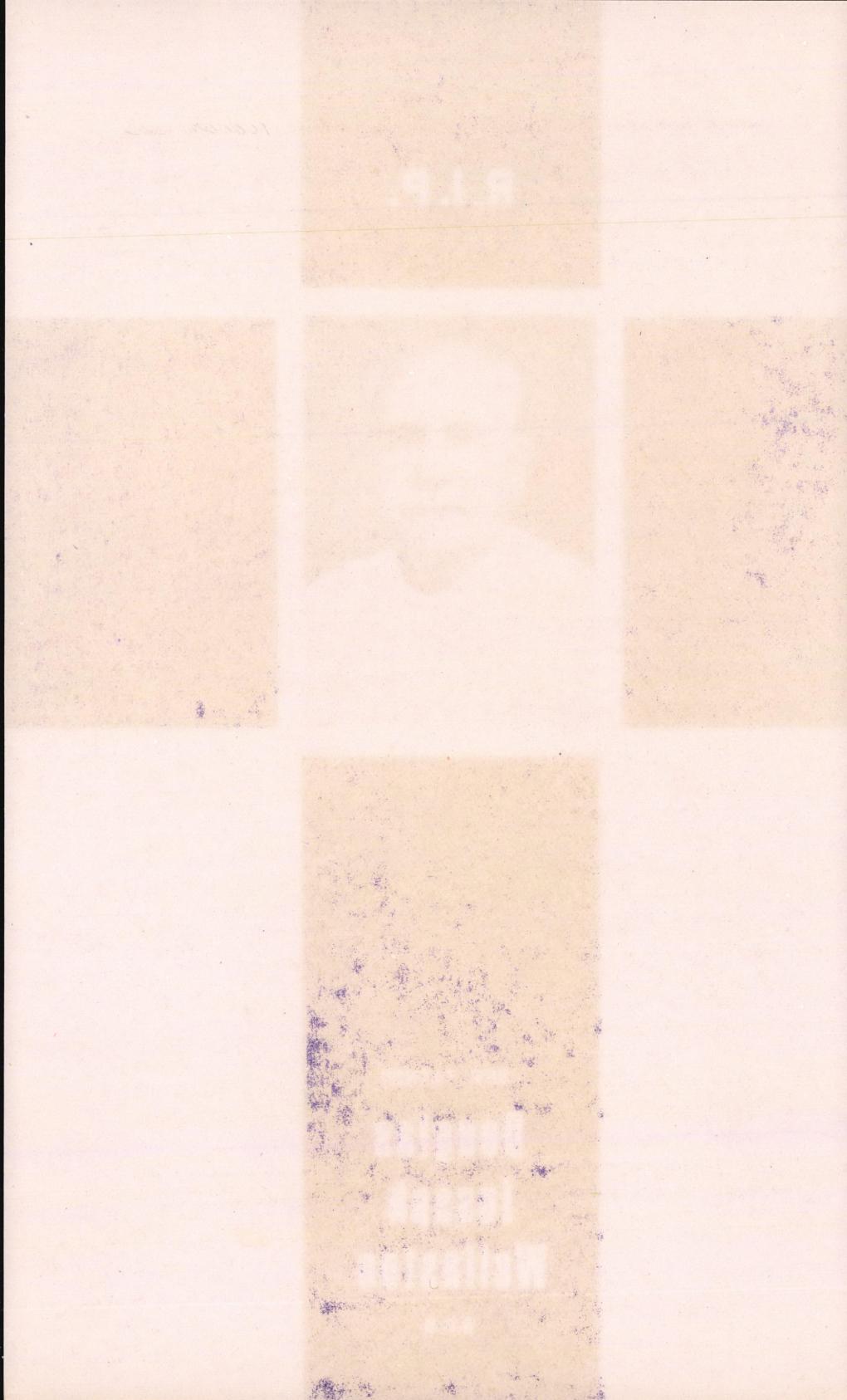
Fr. J. Wollaston
d.s.
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Superior
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Retired

Rev.



REV. FATHER
**Douglas
Joseph
Wollaston**

S.D.B.



REV. FATHER

Douglas Joseph Wollaston

S. D. B.

Fr. Douglas Joseph Wollaston is no more among us. On January 17, 1979, he went home, to his Father in heaven. "At 7.15 a.m." — relates Bro. Joachim Minj, who looked after him with great care, — "he opened his eyes, looked for a while at the Crucifix that hung on the wall of his room in the Nazareth hospital and closed them peacefully." He literally slept in the Lord, to use the ancient Christian expression to signify our passage from earth to heaven, from time to eternity.

Fr. Provincial in his first circular letter rightly stated that in Fr. Wollaston's death "The Province has lost a wonderful Salesian, who worked hard especially in the field of education in North East India. He has been definitely one of the widely known Salesians of the Province."

Fr. Wollaston was born on December 11, 1902 of Joseph Wollaston and Margaret Perry. He was the second of three brothers and two sisters. His father was a teacher. His family was very religious. Fr. Douglas was deeply attached to his devout mother.

He felt the call to religious life when he already had a job, after a brilliant career as a student. He was the first in the British Empire in an important Cambridge University examination. He resisted the lure of a promising future in the world and presented himself to Mgr. L. Mathias, the then provincial of all Salesian India, and asked to be accepted into the society.

He made his novitiate in 1924, with Bishop O. Marengo, Fr. J. Bacchiarello and Fr. J. Sandanam to mention only the three still alive, and his profession on January 21, 1925. He began the study of philosophy at once and completed it in two years and a half. His four years of theology he did at the Crocetta in Turin. He crowned his studies with his priestly ordination (5.7.31) and a doctorate in theology.

Back from Europe, his service on behalf of the province and the Church began, and lasted 47 years.

His first assignment was in Bombay as headmaster of our Don Bosco High School, then housed in the poor and cramped premises of Tardeo Castle. Great poverty prevailed: the house, the confreres, the boys, all were poor. At the time the world was in the grip of the great depression.

Two years later, he was in Shillong, prefect of studies in the house of formation — the old Our Lady's House — and professor of theology. He revealed himself a born teacher: his lessons were meticulously prepared in every detail and delivered with utmost clarity.

He longed to work for boys in mission areas. His desire was fulfilled when, after the disastrous fire that destroyed the house of formation in 1936, he was posted in Krishnagar as Rector of Don Bosco's, just shifted to its present site from the Cathedral compound, where it could not have grown. It was poverty again, but, as earlier in Bombay, Fr. Wollaston's warmth and kindness compensated for privations and discomforts, and all were happy. He at once threw himself into the study of Bengali and gave himself to the thorough human and Christian formation of the boys entrusted to his care. In three years he put the school on its feet and on the way to progress.

The second world war loomed large. He was needed in Bandel as headmaster of St. John's High School and Prior of the Shrine of Our Lady. For three years he strove and strove successfully to organize the school and raise its standard of studies. He was helped in his efforts by the whole-hearted

cooperation of the staff, who were completely won over by his spirit of sacrifice and kindness.

After a year of mission work in the Krishnagar Diocese, he was sent to Khulna within the same diocese. There in seven years, he founded, developed and guided St. Joseph's High School. The people of Khulna never forgot him. While he was there, Independence came, and India's partition was brought about. The districts of Jessore, Faridpur and Khulna fell to Pakistan. Gradually Salesian personnel was withdrawn in favour of the Xaverian Fathers. Also Fr. Wollaston opted for India and returned to Bandel now to take charge of the aspirants, many of whom, now priests, speak eloquently of his genuine Salesian kindness and ways.

Soon after, the post of Principal in St. Anthony's College, Shillong, fell vacant. The times were hard. He was sent for to shoulder the heavy burden of Principal of St. Anthony's for seven long years. He felt the separation from the aspirants immensely, but God's will was the supreme rule of his life.

He loved the mission field. With enthusiasm he accepted to be the head of a mission and school in Manipur in the cold heights of Hungdung. He used to say jokingly that he was living in an air-conditioned bungalow — same temperature inside and outside, for the cold came in through the slits between the planks. Three years later he was rector and headmaster of Don Bosco High School, Imphal.

Before long, he had to take a few months' rest. But wanted by all means to be useful. So he was made headmaster of the school of Marbisu, a windy and cold place. His last grind was as headmaster, one year, in Don Bosco's, Tura.

His health began to give way under the strain. He still strove to carry on. While working at Haflong, he had the first big collapse in his health and his long way of the Cross began in a more intensive way. He was to go through much suffering for four or five years. When asked about his health, he would wittily reply, "Ever better, never well." He had brief spells of comparative well being. At once he would ask if he could do

something and be useful. Over four decades of work had not satisfied his yearning to do good.

He had a deep sense of duty. He used to spend hours at his desk scrupulously seeing to every detail of his work. He was patient and persevering in the fulfilment of his duties. He had a longing for improving things and so studied problems and offered solutions. He would send letters to advise his superiors on matters in which he was competent. He was a perfectionist in everything.

Tall, kindly and dignified in appearance, he was gentlemanly, interested in every confrere, indeed in all who came in contact with him. But the warmest corner in his heart was ever for the poor and the needy, whom he was very happy to help according to his circumstances.

He was an observant religious. He kept poor to the limit. Very particular about never wasting anything, he not only kept his accounts most exactly, but he would carefully undo packets so as to save the pieces of string, and he would keep pieces of paper that might serve some useful purpose. In this he took a page out of Don Rua. When he died he had only a few pieces of clothing to leave behind.

It was edifying to hear him pray when suffering. He would address God lovingly and trustfully. He would ask Jesus to come and take him. Patients in rooms adjacent to his affirmed that two hours before he died they heard him exclaiming: "Why don't you come, Jesus? You don't love me?" Jesus was soon to show him his love and hear his prayer, which Father used to repeat often during his long illness, a prayer that recalls the one of the first Christians looking forward to the second coming of Jesus.

He was a Salesian, and happy and proud to be one. He loved the boys entrusted to his care. He followed each personally: he saw to their good manners, behaviour and studies, as our Founder Don Bosco used to. Everywhere boys looked up to him impeccably dressed in his long soutane, straight,

stately, but always friendly and cheerful. He knew how to be little with the little, and his boys never forgot him. He was indeed a gifted educationist, and the Lord saw to it that he exercised his talents in a dozen institutions. His was certainly a record.

He was tried in the fire of suffering, a lingering and progressive illness that caused him much pain and disablement, because it incapacitated him from work and even from looking after himself. Total dependence on others must have made him suffer acutely. He offered his sufferings to God. In the course of his long illness, he received the anointing of the sick five times, four from his devoted friend Fr. N.J. Kenny and the last one from Don Bosco's Rector Fr. Thomas Menamparampil. He had stamina and often rallied unexpectedly. But at the beginning of the new year it appeared that the time of the final fulfilment of his religious consecration was at hand. On January 17, 1979, he entered the joy of the Master, from Nazareth Hospital, Shillong.

He would be very happy to thank all those who helped him, if he could. He would thank the confreres of Dibrugarh, those of Gauhati, Dr. Angeles and the staff of Nazareth Hospital, where he was taken several times in a critical condition, the clerics of the Sacred Heart College, Mawlai who nursed him for two years, and the aspirants of Don Bosco, Shillong, who joined to help him whenever he was in the hospital, so too the Rector and the Brothers of that house who prepared and did everything required for the funeral. But if he cannot thank them, he certainly prays for them; and that is more important.

On January 18, at 1.30 p.m. Fr. D.J. Wollaston's coffin was carried from Don Bosco's to the Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians, Shillong. There followed Holy Mass presided over by Bishop O. Marengo of Tura with about forty concelebrants. Fr. Provincial gave the funeral oration.

Holy Mass over, the procession wended its way to the Laitumkhrah Catholic cemetery. In spite of the winter holidays,

the funeral was well attended: every community was there. Before the burial, Mr. John Deng, Minister for Family Welfare, bid adieu to Fr. Wollaston in Khasi; and Bishop O Marengo in English. Both the speakers spoke feelingly and beautifully of all Fr. Wollaston did and was to the Church and congregation. They knew him personally.

Fr. Wollaston has gone to his eternal reward. To many of us he was a help and an inspiration. We express our love and gratitude to him by praying for the repose of his soul. A fitting conclusion to this all too short a letter are the beautiful words of our constitutions (66), "We keep alive the memory of our confreres now at sleep in the peace of Christ. For the love of our Lord they have worked in our society, some even to the point of martyrdom. We pray for them. "Their remembrance is for us a stimulus to continue faithful in our mission."

ORESTES PAVIOTTI, S.D.B.

Sacred Heart College

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Meghalaya - India.

REV. FR. DOUGLAS JOSEPH WOLLASTON

Born : 11.12.1902 (Akyab, Burma).

Died : 17.1.1979 (Shillong, India).

54 — 61 years of Religious Profession.
— 48 years of Priesthood.