

FATHER SAMUEL BOLTON. S. D. B.

Fr. Bolton died at Bolton on the 31st August 1964 at the age of 59. For about ten years he had suffered from serious heart trouble: he knew of his condition – he knew that he might die suddenly, but he was prepared for death. His piety was simple but genuine, without any ostentation. He had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and every night he would remain behind after night prayers for a few minutes and ask the Sacred Heart to preserve him from dying alone – that he might be preserved from sudden death during the night without a fellow-priest to assist him. And each morning he would be found in the Church early, making the Stations of the Cross before meditation, and he used to make the Stations as an act of thanksgiving for his preservation during the night. And the Sacred Heart was faithful and granted his desire: he was given due warning of the approach of death, even though it came quite suddenly; he was anointed before death as he would have wished, and there was a priest with him when he died.

Samuel Bolton was born in Dublin on March 15th 1905, when God gave to Samuel and Elizabeth Bolton the greatest gift that he can bestow on a Catholic family – a son who was to be invested with the great dignity of the priesthood. In his schooldays he lived in the parish of the Passionist Fathers at Mt. Argus in Dublin and attended the school of the Christian Brothers from the age of eight years. It was there that he conceived the desire to join Don Bosco, and in a letter of recommendation his headmaster wrote of him: "I always considered him a very gentle, modest and well-behaved boy, rather timid and never guilty of any fault beyond the ordinary little failings of school-boys of his age."

Samuel entered the Salesian College at Battersea, as an aspirant to the Congregation on the 10th October 1921, and he began his novitiate at Cowley, Oxford, on the 6th September 1923, receiving the religious habit from the hands of Fr. Francis Scaloni, the Provincial at the time, on the 21st November of the same year. On the 13th September 1924 he made his first vows and after studying philosophy at the same House he made his perpetual profession there on the 17th September 1927.

He taught at the Salesian School, Burwash, Sussex, until 1928, when he was transferred to the Salesian College at Farnborough, where he remained until 1924 combining the duties of a teacher with his study of theology, as had to be done in those days. He received the tonsure and minor orders from Bishop Amigo of Southwark during the year 1932, and in the space of two months in the following year all three major orders were conferred on him by Bishop Cotter of Portsmouth, culminating in his priestly ordination which took place at the Benedictine Abbey at Farnborough on the 10th August 1933.

After his ordination he went to the Salesian College at Chertsey for five years, first as Catechist and then as Headmaster, and it was in this latter capacity that he returned to Burwash in 1939. But he was not to remain there long for in 1939 the Second World War broke out and Fr. Bolton became an Army Chaplain. He saw service in France and endured the hardships of Dunkirk: indeed it was at Dunkirk that he received the first of his two citations for bravery and selfless devotion to duty, but it was the hardships he endured at this time that marked the beginning of his decline in health. He was sent on leave for a short time, but was soon back with his men and served them in North Africa, in Italy and in Austria.

At the end of the war he returned once again to Chertsey as headmaster and remained for six years during which time his health began to give cause for concern. But it was not until he joined the teaching staff at Cowley in 1951 that he underwent a thorough medical examination and the specialist gave his verdict that his heart was permanently affected and he must avoid all strenuous work. Nothing daunted, he returned to Battersea and spent three years as assistant priest in the parish. In 1954 he went back to Cowley to do the same work with special responsibility for the Littlemore area and the expressions of appreciation of the work he did during those years which came into the Salesian House when his death was announced are an eloquent testimony to his apostolic zeal and work. In 1957 he had to leave this kind of work, which was proving too great a strain on his waning strength. He moved to the Manchester area, and for a year he was chaplain to the Catholic Rescue Society in Salford, and to the Little Sisters of the Poor. In 1958 he returned to the house of Thornleigh to undertake light duties as far as his failing health would permit, and he did much good work in connection with the administration of the school.

Throughout his Salesian life, Father Bolton always made great efforts to be of service to others; it was an attitude of mind that found expression in ways both great and small. It was shown forth in his work as a Chaplain to the Forces, and particularly in his heroism at Dunkirk but it was equally obvious in his attention to the smallest needs of his confreres in the dining room. No one ever asked him for a favour and was refused. But he hated publicity: he would cheerfully work for others, but he wanted to remain in the background himself. He held the Church, the Congregation, all his confreres, all with whom he worked, in high regard. And always there was that happy laugh and cheery smile that spread happiness about him.

We pray that God will have treated him in the same way – that he will overlook those human failings that are in all of us, and will give to Fr. Bolton the reward of one who fulfilled the Great Commandment, for in very truth he loved God with all his heart, and he loved his neighbour as himself.

May he rest in peace.