

BRO. PATRICK BRASSEL. S. D. B.

The life of a lay-brother in a religious family is not one that readily lends itself to the spectacular. It is, of its nature, a life hidden with Christ in God. The impact of such a life faithfully lived, can however – as the story of the Catholic Church bears ample witness – be positively staggering. How much nobility there can be in simplicity! Yet the more one thinks of this great life which spanned almost a century, and within it embraced seventy years of faithful service as a Salesian brother, the more one is impressed by the genuine simplicity – in the very best sense of the word – that must have been at the heart of such dedication.

Our deceased Brother was born at Howth, Co. Dublin, Ireland, on the 12th January 1875. He would, then, have been 92 in January next. It was in 1897 that he came to Battersea. The college as we now know it did not then exist. There was but the poor house in Orbel St and the Church of the Sacred Heart, built 4 years previously. Life was poverty-stricken in the extreme, and the whole area was a much poorer place than we now know. Those who lived that life have often recorded what a life of hardship it was, but also what days those were of exhilarating Salesian family life, of loyalty work, apostolate and love. It produced men who proved themselves giants in the service of God – men with a love for Our Lady and Don Bosco.

After his novitiate in 1898, he made his first profession at Battersea. Here, too, on the 3rd April 1904, he had the joy of making his perpetual profession in the Salesian Congregation. The work for poor boys, so dear to the heart of Don Bosco, was to the forefront at Battersea in those days. Fr. Macey and his helpers, were striving, as their spiritual Father had done in Turin, to give poor lads the chance of an honest livelihood in the learning of a trade. At the turn of the century, a simple group of workshops came into existence where the new college now stands. There were shops for tailoring, carpentry and printing. Bro Patrick, who seems to have done some elementary tailoring in Cork as a boy went to Battersea Polytechnic and became fully qualified in his trade. Soon the tailors' shop was getting regular orders not only from Salesians but from other clerics. Bro. Patrick was in charge of the artisans and he took the keenest interest not only in their work but also in their spiritual and physical development.

Bro. Patrick the sportsman, the footballer and keen handball player, is not perhaps the picture that people of a more recent generation can easily conjure up. Yet he joined enthusiastically in those games of long ago. The story has often been told of the triumphs achieved by the artisans football team under his management. They swept the board in London, and thanks to the cooperation of that enthusiastic sportsman, Fr. Scaloni, had a triumphant tour of Belgium as well.

After the First World War, he was sent to the new foundation at Pallaskenry, Limerick. We are told that he arrived at the station at Limerick and asked the way to the college. He set out on what he imagined was a short walk to the house but in fact was about twelve miles away. At Pallaskenry he found many outlets for his talents and energy. There was an acute shortage of staff, and he seems to have become a Jack of all Trades and a Bursar/Catechist rolled into one. Some years later he was elected the Irish delegate to the Provincial Chapter meeting in London. He was the first lay-brother to gain such notoriety and he was very proud of the fact!

Back he went to Battersea and his tailor's shop in 1927 and he celebrated his Silver Jubilee of profession there in 1929. In himself he cut the figure of a great gentleman, a fervent religious and a real son of Don Bosco. In the early 1940s, failing sight and the shakiness of his hands made it impossible for him to continue in active work in the tailor's shop. He was asked to go to Farnborough, where he had previously spent a brief period of six months. For a quarter of a century, in so-called retirement, he devoted himself there to a life of edifying regularity and of simple service and prayer. Up first every morning, he opened the church for the community, parishoners and nuns. He helped in many little, but important, ways during the day – as porter, sacristan and gardener.

Standing high above all else was the intense reality of his spiritual life. All who knew him, know too the value of his rosary to him. What comfort and strength he always found in Our Lady's company and not least in those last years at Twyford as death approached and he awaited with a smile and with complete resignation and confidence, the call of God. Great is the debt which the province owes to the life and example of Bro. Patrick. If one may pick out a special feature of this debt, is it not to be found in the standard he set as the model for the Salesian lay-brother in the province? He was the doyen of them all. He placed before them – and how nobly they accepted it – a standard of dignity, courtesy, regularity, responsibility and of religious behaviour that are the admiration and envy of us all. May God bless him for all he did for them and for us – and now let us be instant in our prayers for the eternal repose of his soul.

May Our Lady, Help of Christians and St. John Bosco welcome him into his heavenly home.

Bro. Patrick Brassel. . . born on the 12th January 1875 in Howth, Dublin. Died at Twyford Abbey Nursing Home, London on the 8th November 1966 at the age of 91 after 66 years of religious profession.