

### **BRO. PAUL FRANCIS CLARKE. SDB.**

Bro. Paul died in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1982. His name was Francis but for many years there was a Bro. Francis at the Salesian Institute, a valiant Salesian, who was a baker of fine bread; so Francis became Paul.

He was born in Johannesburg on August 9th 1895. While still a child, his parents died and the Sisters of Nazareth received the orphan into their warm and kindly care, a care Bro. Paul never forgot and cherished all his life. It was another generation of the Sisters who received him into their Cape Town House and cared for him in his declining years, as they have done for so many Salesians.

The Salesians and the Nazareth Sisters worked together for poor boys and it was natural for Francis to go to the Salesian Institute in Cape Town when he was old enough to learn a trade. Soon he wanted to join their ranks, but at sixteen, a playground accident resulted in his losing a leg and by the rules of that time, he could not be accepted. His desire to become a religious son of Don Bosco never wavered and, after some years of delay, his pleas were heard and he was accepted as a Salesian Brother. He was sent to England for his novitiate and he made his first profession in 1926. He returned to the Cape and for the rest of his life lived and worked at the Institute, a half-century of labour for underprivileged boys. He was now Bro. Paul.

His disability prevented him from becoming a master in one or other of the trades taught at the Institute and he became literally a "factotum" one of whose multiplicity of activities there can be no price.

Most boys would meet him first in the linen room. As each boy entered the school, he was given a number for his linen and it was by that number that Bro. Paul would call out the identification when, in later years, the boys became grown men and would visit him. He had a remarkable memory, which for some years he put to good use in writing the House Chronicle. But his whole life was for God and the boys. He would arrange all the rail trips for the boys and for the community, some of whom would be in the train for two days or so on route for Rhodesian farms. When the time came for the boys to leave the school, Bro Paul would stump the city looking for jobs. As many of the early boys were in good positions in the various firms, it would be to these he would turn in looking for openings for the boys, now facing the world on their own.

As guest-master he prided himself on always having four rooms ready for priests or brothers from "Up-country" or arriving by sea. Taxi-men asked by worried priests where they could get accommodation, would bring them to the Salesians as a matter of course; since we were not far from the docks.

His religious life was on a par with his work; he was always ready to serve Mass, however early, especially for departing travellers. In the evening his rosary was never out of his hands. For the entire fifty years or more of his life at the Institute, he lived in an attic room, attached to the linen room, where he worked in spartan conditions. He would refuse all attempts to make things more comfortable; he had a bed, a chair, a bedside light, that was all he needed. After night prayers, he could often be heard on his sewing machine, patching torn clothes for someone for the morning.

No one was more astonished than Bro. Paul when in 1976, Cardinal McCann presided over a gathering of many friends from far and wide, to make his Golden Jubilee of profession a rare and wonderful day; and when on March 6th, 1982, he died in the peace of Nazareth House, aged 86, surely all the heavenly trumpets sounded for one whose entire life was spent in the background, mostly unseen, but ever a humble and faithful servant of the Lord.

May his good soul rest in peace with Don Bosco in Heaven.