

God has again visited our Province and taken unto Himself the soul of

## FATHER JAMES CONNOR

Aged 76 years.

Father James Connor was born on the 16th October, 1863, at Gravesend. He was the son of James and Elizabeth Connor. Little is known of his early life. The only knowledge we have of him prior to his joining the Salesians comes from conversations he had from time to time with different Confrères.

He joined the late Father George Bamfield in his work at St. Andrew's, Barnet. This work was the care of boys and the assisting of the secular clergy in their parochial duties. Report spoke in glowing terms of his work and of his zeal which knew no bounds. His activity was immense. His work of teaching the boys whom these priests had gathered together was performed very conscientiously and thoroughly. His week-ends were devoted to parochial duties in various parts of London. The poverty of these zealous priests was very great and they were no strangers to hunger. Their table was of the most frugal and their sustenance in no way comparable to the demands made on their strength. Foremost amongst these workers was Fr. James Connor. He had been ordained priest at St. Thomas' Seminary, Hammersmith, on the 24th of September, 1887. For twenty-five hard years he laboured with Father Bamfield. When the work of that apostolic man came to an end in 1912, Father Connor applied to join the Salesians. Early in September in the year 1912 he entered the Novitiate at Burwash. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception in the following year he made his first Vows, and one can say that this feast had a direct and lasting effect on the whole of his Salesian life. He was always extremely devout to the Blessed Virgin and particularly to her under the title of the Immaculate Conception.

Father James Connor arrived at Burwash on a Saturday morning. On the Sunday he preached to the parishioners at Burwash. This was very typical of his whole life. He was ever ready to interpret a Superior's wish, and his obedience often anticipated their commands. Work was his prayer to God, and in that spirit he was ever ready to pray, to try to do what was asked of him, never seeking excuses to avoid failure, never allowing his own point of view to detract from his zeal for God's work. He was tireless in his efforts to help the Community and the Parishioners. The troubles of everybody were his own troubles, and he devoted himself to the alleviation of them with all the ardour of a fervent soul.

His motto might have been "*Semper paratus*," for he preached every Sunday and never refused any work he was asked to do, and was ever ready to co-operate with his Superiors both for his own sanctification and for that of his brethren and parishioners. His work in the parish at Burwash was thorough and Christ-like. He went to all, and his special care was given to the poor and to the young. He sought out the sinners, the lapsed Catholics and the wayward, and by his patience and kindness led them back to the practice of their religion.

It is well known that the Houses of formation receive a goodly proportion of their income from benefactors in Ireland, and Masses come to these Houses from all parts of Ireland. But it is little known that this is the direct result of Father Connor's enlightened foresight. He became aware that the House at Burwash had no Mass intentions. He asked the Superior's permission to appeal to Ireland for Mass Intentions. At first this permission was refused; but Father Connor, convinced that great good would come from this step, persevered in his request which was ultimately granted. The happy results that came from this cannot be measured in terms of money, for it was the means of making the Salesians known in Ireland and the cause of many Vocations that have come to the Congregation from that country.

During his stay at Burwash, he translated the "Sayings of Don Bosco." He was always working at it, seeking to improve it — changing a word here, remodelling a phrase there — to ensure that this Salesian work should be the best he could produce. And that sums up the whole of his Salesian life. He was, perhaps, the best Novice that ever passed through the Novitiate. He was ever anxious to learn about the Congregation. He celebrated the Silver Jubilee of his priesthood during his Novitiate; but he was as simple as a child in his thirst for knowledge of things Salesian. We can truly say of him that in the Salesian life he was "*Sicut gigans ad currendam viam*," so rapidly did he progress in the religious life. His observance of the Rule was meticulous and fervent. The common life was his delight. His obedience so prompt as to prove that it was inspired from his abiding sense of the presence of God in the person of his Superiors.

In August 1919 Father Connor was called to the duties of Parish Priest at the Mother-House at Battersea. He entered upon his duties here with the zeal and apostolic spirit that had characterised his work at Burwash. His whole objective was the salvation of souls. He cared nothing for the rebuffs, the setbacks, the difficulties that beset him in this work in the slums of Battersea. Provided he could gain a soul for God he counted as nothing the cost to himself. No sick call ever found him unwilling or indifferent. At any hour of the night he would arise with alacrity to hasten to the bedside of the sick and the dying, rejoicing that, maybe through his personal inconvenience, God might bestow upon his parishioner the gift of final perseverance. No disturbance of his night's rest ever allowed him to absent himself from Meditation. He was always first down to this initial duty of his religious daily life. He never took a holiday — he never asked for one. It seemed as if he were anxious to do as much work as he could whilst he yet had the strength.

Fr. Connor was a man of deep, personal piety. This manifested itself, not by any ostentatious act of his, but by his unfailing regularity in the observance of the smallest detail of his religious life. It was shown, too, by the sermons which he preached, which were models of thought and preparation. He preached many Retreats, and his sense of humour made him a popular preacher and a pleasant companion. He worked hard at his preparations for all his priestly functions, but in none of these duties did he labour more than at the sermons he preached in his Retreats to his Confrères. These brethren of his in religion were the special objects of his predilection, and only the very best of his labours was good enough for them. His veneration for his Superiors was marked and supernatural. He never uttered a word of criticism, and no order was ever given him that he did not obey promptly and to the best of his ability.

His work in the Confessional was enormous. He was at the call of everybody. He never refused a Confession, no matter at what time he was asked or at what personal inconvenience to himself. He was in much demand as a Confessor, for he was sympathetic, practical and encouraging. This work was a work of mercy and regeneration. His attitude to the penitent was one of Christ-like love and service. He gave the advice that the occasion required, and never allowed the penitent to depart without having striven to impress upon him the need for making each Confession a step forward in the work of his personal sanctification. His special love was for children and he delighted in hearing the Confessions of the boys and girls of the parish. Past pupils of the Salesian College, too, used to return regularly to go to Confession to the priest who had guided their youthful footsteps in the way of salvation.

In 1931 Father Connor's health began to fail, and by 1932 it was necessary to send him to a nursing home in Ireland. He was destined to spend the last eight years of his life in the care of these good Brothers. Their testimony to him bears out the evidence of his life's work. The letter conveying the news of his death says: "May I offer you my sincere condolence in your Congregation's loss of a saintly member. I am sure that he will obtain abundant blessings for your work. Father Connor gave great edification to both patients and Brothers alike by his example and holiness. We shall all miss him greatly."

The news of Father Connor's death reached Battersea late on Thursday, April 25th, 1940. It appears that he had been confined to bed for a few weeks owing to the gradual failing of his strength. It was decided to administer the Last Sacraments whilst he was still capable of understanding what was being done. This was carried out on the previous day, and Father Connor took an active part in the administration of the Sacraments. No one dreamt that the end was so near. The following day (Thursday) he refused food, but his condition was much the same as usual. At 7.0 p.m. he drank a glass of milk. The Brother in charge left him for a few moments, and when he returned he found that Father Connor had just quietly breathed his pious soul into the hands of his Creator.

Thus there has been taken from our Province one of the most observant of Salesians. His leave-taking was as unostentatious as his life had been. His absence during the last eight years had prepared us for his death, but his departure leaves us, none the less, with an acute sense of loss. His patience in suffering was remarkable, and he offered up every pain and affliction for the good of the Province to which he was devoted. He will be mourned by many, both inside and outside the Congregation. We cannot forget him in our prayers, for his life was spent in the service of his brethren. While recommending his soul to the charity of your prayers, I beg of you to remember also the needs of this Province and particularly the intentions of

Yours most sincerely in Dno.,

F. V. COUCHE, S.C.,

*Provincial.*

Data for the Necrology: Father JAMES CONNOR, born at Gravesend on October 16th, 1863, died at Dublin on April 25th, 1940, in the 77th year of his age, the 53rd year of his Priesthood and the 27th year of his religious Profession.