

Dear Confreres,

It was in the early hours of Thursday, 23rd November, 1978 that, here in Farnborough, there passed into the eternal peace of Our Lord the soul of

REV. FATHER GEORGE VINCE GLADSTONE S.D.B.

in the 72nd year of his age, the 53rd of his religious profession and the 44th of his sacred priesthood. He had slipped quietly away whilst convalescing after severe heart attacks suffered at Hastings a few weeks earlier. To all in this house, which he loved so much, his sudden death came as a particularly sharp shock. He had seemed to be his usual happy self and had been enlivening us, as always, with his fund of reminiscences and his endless curiosity which were, in any company, a priceless tonic and a source of lively sharing.

One always wonders how best, in a letter of this kind, to describe simply and sincerely the one who has gone. No-one will, I think, disagree with the summing-up of George Gladstone as "a man incapable of a malicious thought, word or deed; one adorned with a heart of gold". George was everyone's friend, and, because he was so loved, his saucy sallies were never resented but thoroughly enjoyed. In them there was fun, but nothing unkind. The Province will sorely miss him.

He had been, for as long as most of us knew him, a sick man and we wondered how he could continue so energetically on an absolute minimum of food of any kind. But he did live and he lived to the full. The story of his work and of his travels bears eloquent witness to this. Once again it is the tale of a man whose spiritual life has deep roots being able, with God's help, to accomplish 'multum in parvo'.

Years ago in Farnborough, one recalls, we used to tease him every summer as to where he would be going that year. He was always coming up with notions of India, Africa and the Lord knows where. He was obviously restless. Today folk might call it 'seeking fulfilment'. George's restlessness was not, however, linked with any uncertainty of vocation or insecurity as to what manner of man he was. His faith was solid and his vocation strong. His greatest joy was that he was a Salesian and a priest. His restlessness sprang rather from his poor health which prevented him from doing all the good he wanted to do.

To understand him, one must appreciate the richness of his gifts and the inventive genius that was his. As his great friend, Father Bell, so happily revealed in his funeral homily, George was always on a voyage of discovery, seeking the 'why' and the 'how' of everything, and was never satisfied until he had the answer to all his questioning. His range of interests covered anything and everything . . . plants, birds, animals, clocks and watches, photography, gardening, crochet work, whatever you will. As Father Bell reminded us, his room was a succession of snares and traps for the unwary visitor. One never knew into what strange mould one's foot would next disappear! It was all great fun and George was the master craftsman.

Nothing has been said yet of the details of his career, but these are almost irrelevant in comparison with the great good that he did everywhere. Born in Lancaster on 17th September 1907, many of his friends thought of him in terms of an Aylesbury 'duckling'. On leaving Battersea, he made his Novitiate at Cowley from 1925–1926, and his first profession took place there in 1926. His final profession was made in 1932 and, in the only ordination ever to have been held in the Battersea College Chapel, he was raised to the priesthood by Archbishop Amigo on 15th August, 1935. He had completed his philosophical studies whilst teaching in Malta from 1927–29 and his theology at Battersea where he taught mathematics from 1929–37. A brief stay at Chertsey then opened the way to the first of his several happy stays in Farnborough. They embraced the years 1937–38, 1941–55 and 1972–78. South Africa and Swaziland enjoyed his happy presence from 1955–68 and of his escapades there with snakes as well as with the people of those countries many tales are told. A glance at the subjects which he taught during his long career provides ample evidence of his many talents. Add science, history and art to those already mentioned and then join to that his work as infirmarian, catechist, prefect and the rest, and you can begin to know something of the measure of the man.

He came back to England in 1968 and, for the next four years, with his indifferent health, he did splendid service as confessor at Cowley and at Bolton. Thereafter, for the rest of his life, he was attached to Farnborough, but even there another call came to him. This was to take the place of that man of all the talents, the late Fr. Leaver S.D.B., as chaplain to the Sisters at Hastings. How great was the good that he did there for the Sisters, the girls and for many others in the neighbourhood.

The Old Boys' badge has on it the words 'Praeit ac tuetur', which roughly translated means 'he goes before and guards'. That is applied to Don Bosco, but could be well applied to our brother as well. The Preventive System came alive in him. George was always ahead of his boys, awaiting their arrival in the playground and the classroom. He had great fun with them and they with him. He always had something to interest them and they flocked to him and loved him. There was no need for severity; all was smiles. He went ahead and his guardianship was that of one loved as a father and friend.

At his funeral Mass a priest from Hastings, who had brought a party of parishioners with him, said in the sacristy. "We had to come, we all loved him so!" What a happy ending!

Please pray for the speedy reward of heavenly happiness to Father Gladstone. May Our Lady Help of Christians bring him into the company of her Son, and may She, to whom this house is dedicated, watch over and guide us all.

Yours affectionately in D.B.

CYRIL KENNEDY S.D.B.

Rector.