

Dear Confreres,

I am writing to fulfil the customary duty of fraternal affection, by recalling the memory of one of our brothers

FATHER CHARLES BURKEY SDB

who was a member of our community at Cowley from 1977 until his death at Twyford Abbey last week in the early hours of Thursday 17th March.

Charles was born in Birkenhead on March 6th 1904, one of six children, of Thomas and Ellen Burkey. He left school at the age of fourteen, and for four years he worked in his native town, at one time driving a horse and cart to and from the haymarket. All the while his thoughts were on a higher form of christian service; he dreamed of the priesthood, and so, on the recommendation of his parish-priest, Father Curran, he came to us via a short period at Osterley College. In a testimonial letter submitted on his behalf by Father Bridge SJ of St. Francis Xavier, Liverpool, reference is made to Charles' "manly piety" and to his love for the Eucharist. In his own letter at the time, Charles proudly signed himself "Charles Burkey KBS" (Knight of the Blessed Sacrament). He was eighteen.

After an aspirantate at Battersea, Charles came to Cowley. Here he made his novitiate and his philosophical studies from 1924-1927. After two years of Practical Training at Chertsey he began his study of theology at Battersea, but after one year he was sent to Turin. He evidently impressed his superiors, one of whom was Father Vismara, for in promoting him to orders they described him as "ottima pasta", (really good stuff). At the conclusion of his theology, Charles was ordained priest on July 9th in the Holy Year of 1933. Now, fifty years later, in another Holy Year and just four months short of his Golden Jubilee, Charles has gone to his reward, to celebrate, we trust, in Royal fashion with Christ the King and Eternal High Priest.

Following on his ordination to the priesthood he was sent to teach theology at Shrigley, but after only one year he returned to Italy for further studies at the Gregorian University. In 1936 he obtained his licentiate in Canon Law. The rest of Father Burkey's active Salesian life is one of great simplicity: it is, indirectly, the story of our wandering House of Theology: apart from one brief two-year interval spent at Thornleigh (1938-1940), he followed our House of Studies in its peregrinations: to Blaisdon (1936-1938; 1940-1942); to Cowley (1942-1945); back again to Blaisdon (1945-1951); to Beckford (1951-1954); and finally to Melchet Court (1954-1962).

When Melchet Court was destroyed by fire and our students transferred to other countries, Father withdrew to a chaplaincy at Little Massingham, near King's Lynn in Norfolk. There he was gradually overtaken by Parkinson's disease, and so in 1977 he returned, a frail but cheerful old man, to the House where more than fifty years earlier he had arrived in the full vigour of his young manhood, eager for the service of God in the work of the Society.

At the beginning of this current academic year, Father's state of health gave serious cause for concern. There was a noticeable deterioration in his condition in the month of October and there followed short spells of hospitalisation, first in the Radcliffe and then in a private Nursing Home in Headington where, on the 9th November, he suffered a mild stroke. From then on his condition was always serious, and when he contracted viral pneumonia at Christmas it seemed as if the end could not be far off. Increasingly too, he suffered from periods of mental confusion. On March 1st we had him transferred to Twyford Abbey where the Alexian Brothers gave him every care until he died on March 17th.

The end came with dramatic suddenness: at 2.30 a.m. the infirmarian looked in to see him, tidied his bed, made him comfortable and was about to leave the room when she heard him cough; on returning she saw that Father had had a stroke: in a matter of minutes he was dead. The chaplain was called at once. Although Father had received communion on the 16th, he quickly administered the last rites, and then offered Mass a few hours later for his eternal happiness.

This brief outline of Father Burkey's life does little justice to the man.—Do statistics of this kind ever do justice to anyone?—Only God knows the full story of grace in Charles' life; but out of our own experience we can guess at the hidden depth; the golden dreams of his youth and the cost of his fidelity over more than sixty years; we can imagine the secret successes and the mortifying failures he met on the way, his deep desire for God and his glory, together with a growing awareness of his own human limitations. In substance it was probably the same as every good man's life.

Father's pupils will long remember his lessons on the law, and his lectures on moral theology. Perhaps the classroom was never really conducive to a true knowledge of Father Burkey. His final years at Cowley would suggest that he was deeply imbued with knowledge of a Law quite different from the Canon Law he was called on to explain in bygone years. He was a gentle, quiet, cheerful old man, who made light of his infirmities and virtually no demands on the community. He was wholly uncomplaining. He lived simply, with few possessions, waiting in faith for his meeting with Him whose "Knight" he had been from the days of his boyhood.

Now he has met his Lord. In Him he will have seen the Mother and Guide who called and cared for him, the founder who was always interested in him, his dear parents and friends. Please join us in prayer that the joy which Charles has seen may rapidly be his to the full and for evermore.

Faternally yours in Christ,

Martin McPake SDB, *Rector*.

DATA FOR THE NECROLOGY: Father Charles Burkey born in Birkenhead March 6th 1904, died at Twyford Abbey, London, March 17th, in the 58th year of his profession and the 50th year of his priesthood. He was 79 years of age.