

FATHER WILLIAM SMITH. S. D. B.

The death took place on October 10th 1947, at Salesian College, Farnborough, Hants of Fr. Smith, aged 60. Fr. Smith was born of excellent Catholic parents at Gosport, Hants on February 13th 1887. He grew up in an atmosphere of solid Catholic piety and at the age of 12 he was sent to the Salesian College, Battersea to begin his secondary school studies. He soon showed himself to be an intelligent and painstaking student; he became a very popular boy and very soon distinguished himself by his prowess in the various games which were played in the College. But far more than mere intellectual learning or skill at games, he learned to love those early pioneers of Salesian work in England, and before long he manifested his ardent desire to enrol himself in the army of Don Bosco. These early Salesians had learnt their self-sacrifice, piety and hard-work at the feet of St. John Bosco himself, and it is not to be wondered at that William Smith should be fired with zeal and enthusiasm to share the life and labours of these stalwarts of Salesian life.

It was not therefore a surprise to the Superiors of the College when he asked to be admitted to the Congregation and, in his 16th year, he was sent to the newly-opened novitiate at Burwash and he made his first profession at Battersea on October 6th 1904. He was sent to our College at Farnborough immediately after his novitiate and then to Battersea to complete his philosophical studies and his practical triennium by the midsummer of 1908, when he commenced his theological studies. He was ordained on the 24th August 1915 in the Jesuit College at Hastings. The young priest continued his work at Battersea until 1919 when he returned to Farnborough for three years. Fr. Smith was essentially a teacher; his whole life and interests were bound up entirely with his boys. His was the complete Salesian vocation, to work with boys and for boys, to be tireless in their physical and spiritual welfare. He was endowed with an attractive and pleasing personality and his pupils ever remembered him with affection. It was always a pleasant sight to see how the past pupils would gather round him at their annual re-unions and whenever they came to visit their former masters.

Fr. Smith was gifted with an ability for organisation and this coupled with his other admirable qualities made him well-equipped for the position of headmaster to which he was appointed in 1923 at Battersea. He held this important office with much success until 1929, when he again returned to Farnborough to undertake similar duties at this College. However, in that year there began to show signs of the insidious malady which was to make the rest of his life a martyrdom, and although he continued to carry out his duties as a teacher at Bolton for the next four years, it was evident that he was working under great strain. He returned to Farnborough in 1934 and following the death of his great friend, Fr. Henry Parker, he was from 1935 once again courageous enough to take up his familiar role as headmaster. In the early Summer of 1936, however, his health grew suddenly much worse and he had to give up his teaching and administrative work.

From now on he, who had been such an active worker and a keen sportsman, was condemned to a life of physical inaction. However, if he could teach no more, there were, he felt, other ways in which he could still be of help. Accordingly he volunteered to make himself responsible for the senior boys in the Study Hall. Year in and year out he carried on this duty with exemplary fidelity until almost the last year of his life. At the same time he took charge of the college library and its arrangement under his care was a model of order, efficiency and organisation. As ever he retained his unbounded interest in the boys past and present. The past pupils of both Battersea and Farnborough never forgot that the progress and development of the Past Pupils Association, particularly at Battersea, had been, in large measure due to his enthusiasm and guidance.

It can be truly said of Fr. Smith that with the commencement of the twelve long years of his physical inactivity there began also "his finest hour" Finer and nobler it became as each stage of his illness advanced, reaching its fullest glory in those last moments of his life when, confined to his bed and scarcely able to move, his speech growing weaker and weaker, until he had to convey by signs or writing what he wanted to say, he gave to all the example of christian patience and resignation. He bore his martyrdom – and martyrdom it was – with the fortitude which only a really great christian can show.

Fortified by the rites of Holy Church, Father Smith died peacefully and gave up his courageous soul to God on October 10th. He had been a priest for over thirty-two years and a religious for nearly forty-four, accomplishing in that time great good; but the memory we shall cherish most of all is that of a long Purgatory on earth borne with heroic christian patience. In him we mourn one who was truly a model priest, a devoted Salesian, a born educator and a perfect gentleman.

Whilst we can have no doubt that by his wonderful example of union with his Crucified Lord, Fr. Smith must have gained the good pleasure of God, yet we must not overlook the charity of our prayers that God may speedily admit him to His eternal presence, there to enjoy for ever the blessed company of Our Lady and St. John Bosco and of all the valiant Salesians who have gone before. Begging you to remember in your prayers the Community of this House, three of whose members have been called to their eternal reward during this year.

William A. Walsh. S. D. B. (Rector)

Necrology: Fr. William Smith of Gosport, Hants, died at Farnborough in the 61st year of his age, the 33rd of priesthood and the 44th of his religious profession.