

16 August

Br EDWARD de SMEDT 14 April 1869 - 16 August 1904



Born in Lille, France, Edward de Smedt lost both his parents when he was about three and was brought up by a grandfather who had many tales of fighting in the Napoleonic wars and the final denouement at Waterloo. He had the further suffering of being dropped by a nurse and injuring his back in a way that stunted his growth and gave him a hunched back. But he was intelligent and quick to understand and Mother Raphael at his school cared for him like a mother and corresponded with him right up to the time of his death. After mastering what the sisters were able to teach him, he learnt the tailoring trade and became an expert. But he was disturbed by the talk of his fellow workers and yearned for another way of life.

The Jesuits would not accept him because of his stunted appearance but there was one Jesuit who tried to help and eventually introduced him to Fr Daignault who was looking for volunteers for the Zambezi Mission. Daignault accepted him in 1894 and made arrangements for him to travel to South Africa. De Smedt knew no English and knew no one on the boat so it was a lonely journey and when he reached Port Elizabeth, he did not know what to do next. Eventually he thought of knocking on the door of the presbytery and Bishop Richards took him in and gave him a ticket to St Aidan's. After a while there he went to Dunbrody where he spent eleven happy years.

He had found his place and he took up tailoring again and taught the locals the trade. He was a charming person full of jokes and was good company. But his health was always frail and the eventually gave way. When he was dying, they attached hot bricks to his feet with the idea of stimulating his heart! No one explained why they did this and he managed to kick them away. 'Ah, that's better he said'. He died the next day. His file contains just one item – a postcard in Dutch written to him in 1903.