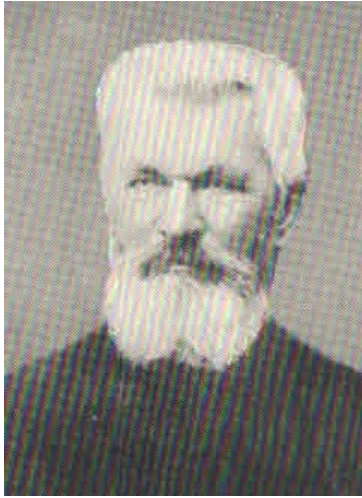


3 November

Fr VICTOR NICOT

23 December 1858 – 3 November 1935



There is something that shines out of this gentle Frenchman who lived through the thick of those early years of the Zambezi Mission and had a breakdown in the process. Born in Champagne of a mother related to the famous painter, Le Lorrain, and a father whose ancestor introduced tobacco to France in 1560, hence ‘nicotine’(!), he joined the Society in 1875 but was driven out of France during his formation by the Ferry laws.

Fr Alfred Weld asked him to go to Quelimane to start an observatory while still in his regency in 1882 and sent him to Portugal to learn the language. But then Weld changed his mind and sent him to Dunbrody instead to teach Maths and Physics. Nicot arrived in South Africa in 1884 and found the heat, flies, accommodation and food difficult to adjust to. Besides, the equipment for teaching physics was too basic to be useful. But he was a peaceful person and this came through.

He did his theology in Europe and on his return taught at St Aidan’s. The trek north in 1890 of Hartmann and the Pioneers, followed by Prestage and the Dominican sisters a year later, meant that they need replacing and Nicot was sent to Macloutsie, across the Limpopo in Botswana, to serve those sisters who remained. He was there for over two years and saw many comings and goings as the road north became more and more used.

Eventually he too went north and started the small improvised church in Salisbury. After the Ndebele war in 1893, Nicot was posted to Bulawayo where he kept the little school (St George’s) going while Fr Mark Barthelemy was a chaplain to the forces in the field. Nicot was at last settled and he stayed for 20



years. His energy was devoted to the church, the school, the local community (he had learnt Ndebele at Macloutsie), the poor, the sick, the prisoners and those who were condemned to the gallows. ‘To walk with the prisoner to the

scaffold,' he later wrote, 'and stand a yard or two away while the man is jerked into eternity is consoling to the spirit, but nerve racking for flesh and blood.'

By 1917 he had broken down: 'severe melancholy and hallucinations.' He went to stay at Chishawasha and Br Francis McGinty took care of him. In months of delicate nursing and cheerfulness he brought him back to normality so that Nicot could travel to France in 1920. From there he went to England and did some light work in Richmond, Yorks, for six years. Then, in 1927, he came back, first to the school for Afro Europeans at Embakwe and later the same kind of school at St John's. It was there that he died 'like a warrior taking his rest.'