

## Father Frederick Wilderspin, 1909—1913

FREDERICK WILDERSPIN WAS born in Cambridge in 1865. He became a school teacher and for a short period taught French and Latin at Midhurst Grammar School, having H. G. Wells as a colleague on the teaching staff. While at Midhurst he met a Catholic priest who greatly influenced him: he left the school and shortly afterwards became a Catholic. In his Autobiography Wells make mention of Wilderspin's conversion and describes a meeting with him many years later: "Years after, when I had a home in Woking, Wilderspin flickered back into my life for a few days as a full fledged itinerant priest. He called to see me, and



*Father Frederick Wilderspin*

he seemed to be needy, hungry, and uncomfortable. He told me he had to go into the oddest of quarters among the faithful, and that recently he had found the nest of a mouse in a bed he had been given. He gave me the impression of being still slightly astonished at the life he was leading and the mental and material disciplines to which he was subjected. We fixed for him to come to dinner, and he showed the keenest interest in planning the menu. We chose a day unrestricted by any fasts and disciplines. He came; we feasted, talked over Mid-

hurst and the school and the boys, laughed together more abundantly than we had ever done before, drank, smoked and parted cordially. It was evidently a spree for him. After which I never saw nor heard of him again".

The parishioners of St. Mary Magdalen's knew Father Wilderspin far better than H. G. Wells, and very different was their estimate of him. He was ordained on September 21st, 1889, and served in various parishes in the diocese: as a curate at the Cathedral and at Camberwell, and as Rector at Sheerness, Upper Norwood, and Rotherhithe. For some years he had also been Diocesan Inspector of Schools. Quiet and pleasant in manner, Father Wilderspin was greatly loved. There are many still in Brighton with memories of a visit to him in their problems and difficulties: he was always ready with a helping hand and the unfailing sympathetic word of counsel, consolation, and encouragement.

The Children of Mary and the Catholic Women's League he started and directed during his years here. An accomplished musician, he often did duty at the organ and in the choir, and he was a great supporter of the Brighton Municipal Orchestra.

Father Wilderspin had long wanted to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and early in 1913 he fulfilled this ambition. His diary revealed that while in Palestine he said Mass at all the shrines there, and every Mass was offered for the welfare of his parishioners. On the way home he contracted typhoid fever either in Damascus or Constantinople and arrived back in Brighton in a very serious condition. He was taken to a Nursing Home where he died on June 18th, 1913. Bishop Amigo presided at his Requiem, and he was buried in the Extra-Mural Cemetery close to Father Oldham and Father Crispin.