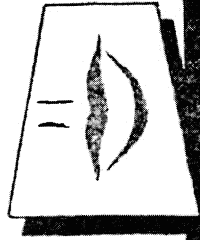


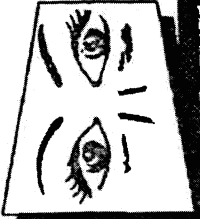
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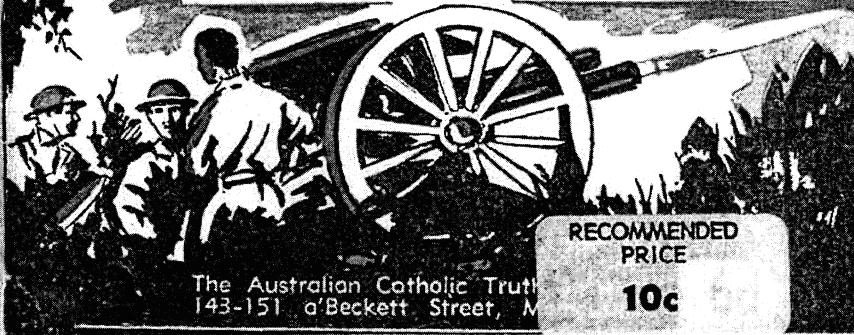
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A BRAVE SOLDIER

FATHER WILLIAM DOYLE S.J.

by E.M.G.



RECOMMENDED PRICE

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The Australian Catholic Truth
143-151 a'Beckett Street, M

"A Brave Soldier"

FATHER WILLIAM DOYLE, S.J.

By E. M. G.

WILLIAM JOSEPH GABRIEL DOYLE was born on March 3, 1873, in Dalkey, some eight miles south of Dublin. He was one of a family of seven. His father, Hugh Doyle, was chief clerk of the High Court of Bankruptcy. His mother was the daughter of an Englishwoman who was a convert to the Catholic Faith.

Even as a child, "Willie," though possessing a winning and attractive manner and a high spirit of fun, showed a marked capacity for the spiritual life. He was always ready to share his toys, sweets and pleasures with his brothers and sisters.

His parents were very good to the poor, and on many occasions Willie, even as a little boy, found ways of his own to help those in want who lived in the neighbourhood. He had a decided taste for music and a great love of flowers.

When he was eleven years old he went to Ratcliffe College, Leicestershire, England. He possessed good average ability, and gifts of organization and initiative often denied to the brilliant. He was very determined. During his holidays he stayed with his married sister in Sheffield. Her husband remarked one day: "Willie is the nicest schoolboy I've ever met."

One day, after he had left Ratcliffe College, during a four month's rest at home (his health had suffered from the strain of his studies during the last two years at school), his father

asked him if he had decided on a career. He says: "I answered, 'Yes; I intend to become a Jesuit'. I was sitting at the piano in the drawing-room when father asked the question. I remember how I played my joy and happiness into the piano after thus giving myself openly to Jesus."

On March 31, 1891, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate, Tullabeg, Ireland. He took the three vows of religion on August 15, 1893, and on July 28, 1907, was ordained priest.

His splendid gift of preaching, his zeal and power over souls, made him a Jesuit missionary to the manner born. One of the countless instances of his power over souls took place during a mission in Yarmouth. This had a strange sequel two years later. Late one night Father Doyle was returning to the presbytery after hearing confessions in the church, when he happened to meet a girl of the unfortunate class. Moved by an impulse, he stopped her and said: "My child, aren't you out very late; won't you go home?" Then, looking at her very earnestly, he added gently, "Don't hurt Jesus, He loves you." He passed on and soon forgot the incident.

Some years later, when finishing a retreat, his Provincial summoned him by telegram to Dublin. On arrival he was told that an urgent wire had come from a London prison. It read: "A woman to be executed tomorrow asks to see Father William Doyle, S.J." Father Doyle had no idea as to the identity of the woman. When he reached the prison in England, the Superintendent said: "It is indeed good of you, sir, to come all this way at such short notice. This poor woman has been constantly and earnestly asking for you, and it will comfort her greatly to see you." "But," said Father Doyle, "the whole thing is a mystery to me." "Her name is Fanny Cranbush," was the answer; "she is a girl of

the unfortunate class, who was convicted for her part in a poison case. You may have seen it in the papers. When brought here she was asked, as is the custom, if she desired to see some minister of religion. She said that she had no need of priest or parson. A few days ago, however, she sent for me and said she had changed her mind, and would like to see a certain priest, but that she did not know his name nor even where he lived; all she could tell me was that the priest was in Yarmouth about two years ago. She was told that he was giving what is called a mission in one of the churches there. 'For God's sake get him here for me,' she said, 'I want so much to see him before I die.' I wired to the Yarmouth police and asked them to enquire at the different churches if a clergyman had given a mission in any one of them two years ago. At the Jesuit church they were told that a Father William Doyle, S.J., had given a mission there two years previously, and they supplied the address of your Superior in Ireland." "I'm still in the dark," said Father Doyle, "however, take me to her."

When they entered the cell he saw a girl, still in her twenties, with a drawn and weary face, who, when she saw her visitor, sprang to her feet and cried, "Oh, thank God you've come, Father." She then told Father Doyle of his words to her on that night long ago in Yarmouth. "Don't hurt Jesus, He loves you." "You gave me such a look which seemed to go right through me," she said. Father Doyle nodded. "Now I remember," he said.

"Your look and words stunned me," said the girl. "I actually turned back and went home in a dazed state. I lay awake all night. Who was Jesus? Had I hurt Him? Did He love me? I had little schooling and no religion. My mother told me before she died that I had never been baptized. Yet,

'Don't hurt Jesus, He loves you,' seems to find an echo in my heart. I feel as if He was in some way within me. I saw you once again, Father, after that night—I was with another girl and you passed on the opposite side of the street. 'Who is that clergyman?' I asked my companion. She said, 'He is a priest, I think, and is giving a mission or something here.' For weeks after that I kept off the streets, but want and hunger drove me forth again. I sank lower and lower and now I am to be hanged. I came here, hard and defiant and unrepentant. I would have nothing to do with any clergyman. Then one day your words, 'Don't hurt Jesus, He loves you,' came back to me. Something snapped within me and for the first time I wept. Now that you've come, Father, won't you tell me more about Jesus? Won't you set my feet on the road that leads to Him?"

"Do you mean, my child," said Father Doyle, "that you want to know about the One True Faith and become a Catholic?" "With all my heart," she replied. The essential articles of Faith were quickly explained and eagerly absorbed by this poor soul thirsting for truth. Then the waters of Baptism were poured upon her head and all the wicked past was washed away. "I shall leave you now for a while, my child," said Father Doyle, "I am going to get permission to say Mass in your cell, then I shall give you Jesus in Holy Communion."

Father Doyle hurried to the nearest Catholic Church to get the necessary leave and the outfit for saying Mass. A tiny altar was erected in the condemned cell, and Fanny heard her first and last Mass, and received her God for the first and last time. She refused the breakfast offered her. "I have just eaten the Bread of Life," she said, as she smiled her thanks. As she walked to the scaffold with Father Doyle beside her, she

whispered to him, "I am so happy, Father, Jesus knows that I am sorry for having hurt Him, and I know that Jesus loves me." A moment later and Fanny Cranbush, with her baptismal robe unspotted, was folded in the loving embrace of Jesus Himself.

Father Doyle had a great desire to die a martyr, so, soon after his ordination, he offered himself for the Foreign Missions in Africa. He was not accepted. He then decided to become a living martyr by constantly and tirelessly going against his own human nature, seeking a life of complete annihilation, and crucifying his flesh, "which is," he writes, "far longer and a thousand times more painful than giving one's mortal life."

He was appointed to the teaching staff of Belvedere College, Dublin. The next year he was made Minister of the College. While he dutifully discharged the work of business administration and teaching, his great love of souls craved more opportunities than were afforded by the retreats and missions which came his way only during vacation time. When, therefore, in 1910, he was appointed to the mission staff, his joy was boundless, and he wrote to his Jesuit brother (who entered the Society two years before he did), "Jesus has chosen me to preach the Gospel to every creature; pray that I may not disappoint Him."

During five years on the mission staff he preached one hundred and forty missions and retreats. Between each mission he had scarcely a break, and with the exception of two months on the Continent, he never took a holiday.

His patient sympathy and broadmindedness made him an ideal confessor, and his confessional was always besieged. He loved to hunt out the most hardened and neglected

sinner, and once he found them, there was no escape! His simple, boyish ways, cheeriness and kindly methods of dealing with others' troubles, together with his handsome, attractive appearance, were irresistible, and he passed from cottage to hovel conquering all hearts and bringing sinful souls along to his confessional. He used during the missions to go down to the quays at midnight to meet arriving ships, and induce the crews to promise attendance or go to Confession at once. Next morning he was out before six o'clock on the same apostolic errand, waylaying factory and mill hands on their way to work. "It was wrong to allow Father Doyle to spend himself in this way," a curate in one of the parishes said, "yet, all this did more to impress and sanctify people than all the sermons of the mission."

A burning zeal for souls was the driving force behind all this. "My intense desire and longing," he once wrote, "is to make others love Jesus and draw them to His Sacred Heart. Recently at Mass I have found myself at the 'Dominus vobiscum' opening my arms wide with the intention of embracing all present and drawing them, in spite of themselves, into that Heart which longs for their love. 'Compel them to come in,' Jesus said. 'Yes, compel them to dive into that abyss of love.' Nearly always when speaking to people I am seized with an extraordinary desire to draw their hearts to God. I could go down on my knees before them and beg them to be pure and holy, so strongly do I feel the longing of Jesus for sanctity in everybody. Since I may not do this, I try to do what I find hard to describe in words—to pour out of my heart any grace or love of God there may be in it, and then with all the force of my will to draw their hearts into the Heart of Jesus."

Though Father Doyle's natural talents made him an outstanding missionary, he did

not attribute the grand results to his own merits, but to the working of God's grace. In a letter he refers to his mission work thus: "My success here has far surpassed anything I looked for. But it is, of course, the work of God's grace. I do not think I could possibly find food for vain-glory in anything I have done; no more than an organ grinder prides himself on the beautiful music he produces by turning a handle. God knows I only wish and seek His greater glory, and to make others love Him, if I cannot love Him myself. All along I felt it was all His doing, and that I was just a mere instrument in His hands, and a wretched one at that. All through I had the feeling that I was like an old bucket full of holes, which broke the poor Lord's Heart as He tried to carry His precious grace into the hearts of His children.

"I have had much consolation in my work recently. The last mission was the hardest I have ever given, yet it seems to have been singularly blessed. All this goodness on the part of Jesus only fills me with great sorrow that I can do so little for Him—I have this strange feeling that when I get to heaven, I shall have little merit for anything I have done for God's glory, since all has been the work of His hands."

He sought to increase this outpouring of God's grace on his work by his own prayers and mortifications and prayers of others—"I cannot tell you," he writes, "how grateful I am for your offering of Masses and prayers. It is what I call my 'ammunition' for the mission, which will mean the capture of many a poor sinner." "Pray for a hard case here—a 'big fish' of forty years whom I hope to land tomorrow." "Get all the prayers you can, even an aspiration may save a soul." "I am going to say a special Mass in future," he wrote (April, 1911), "on the first Sunday of each month, for all those who pray for

my missions and retreats." And again on the Feast of Corpus Christi, 1913—he had been hearing confessions from half-past five in the morning until eleven at night: "I wish nuns could know the miracles their prayers work during missions, in the hearts of poor sinners years away from God; it would make them do much more praying."

He "toiled" on his own knees also. After a heavy day in the pulpit and confessional, he would often spend half the night before the tabernacle, cutting his sleep down to three or four hours. During a mission in Drogheda, one of the curates observed Father Doyle, after emerging from his confessional at eleven p.m., retiring to the side chapel, where he remained on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament until two a.m., yet he was always up and out of the house before anyone was astir in the morning. On another occasion at Newry, the curate, receiving a sick call at night, went into the chapel, which was in darkness; there he stumbled over the prostrate form of Father Doyle, who was spending the night in prayer. During another mission, the parish priest, thinking to get Father Doyle from the oratory where he had been for a long time, sent the maid to ask him for his boots that she might clean them for next day. Father Doyle came out of the chapel, took off his boots, and returned in his socks to continue his prayer, and was still there when all had retired for the night.

Father Doyle was quite alive to the ordinary arguments of prudence concerning nocturnal prayer, but in his own case he felt he was responding to a higher call. On June 20, 1912, he writes:

"I learnt a valuable lesson today. I was thinking what I should do during the Novena to the Sacred Heart, when the thought came to me to make the Holy Hour each night;

but human prudence had several good reasons why this was foolish. The mission had begun—I was in bad form, dead tired and badly needing sleep—feeling anything but well—then there was an early rise and a long drive before Mass. The Holy Hour each night seemed out of the question. But did not Jesus ask it? It seemed to me He did, and that would help me. And I was not mistaken. The result of the first night was that I found myself fresh and vigorous next day, all weariness and pain had vanished; and during those nine days I never felt better."

Here is his account of how he spent the night during his mission in Glasgow, when, in addition, he was also suffering from a cold:

"I made the Holy Hour prostrate on the marble flags, and by moving from time to time, I continued to get the full benefit of the cold. Then for hours I made the Stations of the Cross, standing and kneeling and prostrate, taking fourteen strokes of the discipline at each Station. For the rest of the night I remained kneeling before the tabernacle at intervals with arms outstretched till I could stand the agony of this no longer."

This man of prayer was a healthy, good-humoured, hard-working missionary, "with no nonsense about him," as one penitent put it. But in his soul were chords vibrating to spiritual music far rarer than our worldly minds and hearts can capture. He gave to his missions the devotion of his whole being and lived this holy mortified life that sinful souls might find mercy.

Here are his comments on a little incident which occurred during his mission in Drogheda in 1913. "What I look on as a grace," he relates, "was told to me yesterday. A little child speaking of the missionaries said, 'I like Father Doyle best, because he is holy.'

The words cut me like a knife and wound round and round my soul till I could have cried with the pain of it. And this because of the loving compassion of Jesus Who covers over my wretched faults and failings, and magnifies in people's eyes the tiny good I do, misleading them when He cannot deceive me: and then because that little sentence contained a lifetime of pleading on the part of Jesus for holiness from me as an infallible means of drawing souls to Him. As long as I can remember He has kept that one idea before me; it is ever ringing in my ear; it comes to me with overpowering force, but never with such a thunder clap as when He sent an innocent child to tell me what He has said so often—that it is not learning or eloquence or any other natural gift which will do His work, but that holiness alone will open the way to every heart, and lead all captive to His feet."

Grace seemed to radiate from Father Doyle. He once wrote in a confidential letter: "I have not met a single refusal to come to the mission or to Confession so far during my missionary career. Why should there be one, because Jesus, for some mysterious reason seems to delight in using me, perhaps the most wretched of His priests, as the channel of His grace? When I go to see a hard, hopeless case I cannot describe what happens exactly, but I seem to be able to lift up my heart like a cup, and pour grace and love of God upon that poor soul. I can see the result instantly, almost like the melting of snow."

Though Father Doyle found full scope for his zeal in giving missions and retreats, yet his real gifts and tastes lay in the direction of souls. "You have guessed rightly," he wrote to a friend, "the longing of my heart is to help others to realize the words of Scripture, 'He that is holy let him be sanctified still'."

Souls in darkness and difficulty, souls struggling to rise to a higher level, chosen souls of God—all found in Father Doyle a sympathetic understanding and a wise, strong guidance along thorough and sane Catholic lines. His was an infectious gaiety, an attractiveness, a "way with him", that literally poured out the love of God with which he was afire. It was not so much what he said, but what he was that moved people to strive to love and serve Christ more and more.

His favourite aspiration, recited constantly, during the day, was: "Omnipotent God, make me a saint," and he worked with all his might to attain his great desire. But he had a real and hard fight against his very impulsive and ardent nature. He writes:

"I feel greatly annoyed today, because I was kept hearing confessions for nearly five hours without lunch, and also on arriving at —on being asked to hear more confessions. I was much annoyed at—yesterday about extra work and confessions during the retreat. Our Lord reproached me for this, making me see more clearly that all this came from His hand and not from the thoughtlessness of others, as I told myself."

Though he had such hinderances to holiness he had also many helps. The first was innocence and purity. Here is a passage from his notes: "As a boy, God gave me a horror of impurity, so that a passing glance at an immodest picture used to make me shudder." God was intensely real to him and prayer seemed to be an actual colloquy. He writes thus during his preparation for final vows in 1909:

"I feel a constant craving for mortification. Even walking along the streets, I feel God tugging at my heart, in a sweet, loving way, urging, always urging me to give myself absolutely to Him and His service." It was

especially during his retreats that he found God's voice clear and insistent in his soul. "I am beginning my own retreat tomorrow," he wrote in 1914, "I long for this time all the year until it comes, and then dread it. I am afraid of Jesus! It is a tremendous thing to be alone with Him for eight whole days, listening to His voice, drinking in His love—and then to think I may not go and do His bidding!" Just after this retreat he wrote to an intimate correspondent: "My own retreat was a happy time. It is the one little oasis in my wandering life when I can really be alone with Jesus. The chief feature of it was a feeling as if He were giving me great strength to face His work, and an increase of courage and confidence. In former retreats I used to suffer from a strange fear of our dear Lord, a fear that He might really make me see what He wanted; in my cowardice I dreaded that. In this last retreat this dread was absent in great measure, and help has come from the thought that everything will be His doing, and not mine." Even outside retreat time he often records periods of great grace. He writes:

"You know what a distracting and busy life is mine at present. I mention it, for I know it is His wish and I am doing His work. But no words could tell how I shrink from all this intercourse with people, and how hateful this necessary (?) gossip and chat is to me. More and more a positive passion to be alone and silent is taking possession of me. I am never so happy as when speaking to Jesus, while the attraction to His feet in the tabernacle at times is agony to resist. My soul hungers for prayer, not that I find much sweetness in it, but I do find immense strength and great light."

"Others may travel by other roads, the road of pain is mine," wrote Father Doyle as a Jesuit priest, after years of study of his soul.

"Jesus told me at Exposition," he wrote on October 11, 1914, "and (he adds significantly) I do not think I have mistaken His voice, that the way in which I must sanctify myself is by suffering, corporal penance, and denial in all things."

He writes again: "I awoke in the middle of the night with the feeling that Jesus wanted me. I resisted, but at last got out of bed. At the foot of the altar I was thinking of something else, when suddenly He reminded me of my prayer, 'Jesus, come and dwell within my heart, as in a tabernacle!' I felt Him urging me to this close union, and He seemed to promise me that He would remain with me from Communion to Communion, if only I was recollected, but that I would easily drive Him away by unfaithfulness, especially in want of guard over my eyes."

Father Doyle was very business-like, efficient and energetic; these qualities he brought to the task of making himself a saint. "There are," he wrote, "two patron saints to whom I have a tremendous devotion—a sheet of notepaper and a pencil. Mark down at least once a day everything you do, and every time you do it. It will not make you too proud to see all you do, but it will humble you to see all you don't do." The spiritual accountancy of Father Doyle was chiefly concerned with two things—aspirations and acts of penance. Aspirations he found extremely helpful in overcoming himself, and in acquiring union with God in all his actions.

There are many entries in his diary showing how much his efforts to overcome his appetite cost him. He had a hearty appetite and a keen taste for sweets and delicacies. He writes, "During Exposition Jesus asked me if I would give up taking second course at dinner. This would be a very great sacrifice,

but I promised Him, at least, to try to do so, and begged for grace and generosity."

Again he writes: "Having again indulged my appetite, I made this resolution, that whenever I do so, no matter for what reason (health, feasts, etc.), I will enter it in the book. I think this will be a check and will help me to do what Jesus has asked so long—no indulgence in food whatever."

As with food, so with sleep. We have already seen how Father Doyle often robbed himself of sleep in order to pray. Sometimes, too, he slept on the floor or put boards in his bed. "During the last three nights of the retreat," he writes (December 20, 1914), "I slept on the floor without feeling much inconvenience after, though I awoke very often on account of the pain. This is the first time I have slept this way for more than one night."

In 1915 he writes: "Not feeling well, I gave up the intention of sleeping on boards, but overcame self and did so. I rose this morning quite fresh and none the worse for it, proving once more, how Our Lord would help me if I were generous." And in September of 1915 he made the resolution to "put boards in his bed every night when at home."

It is scarcely necessary to remark that all these mortifications were extremely difficult to flesh and blood. There was no such thing in Father Doyle as a natural pleasure or pride in, or, at least, indifference to physical comfort and suffering. He really loathed and detested the life of going against himself always, which he voluntarily imposed on himself.

"My God," he once wrote, "this morning I was in despair. After some days of relaxation owing partly to sickness, I resolved to begin my life of crucifixion once more,

but found I could not. I seemed to have lost all strength and courage, and simply loathed the thought of the life. Then I ran to You in the Tabernacle, threw myself before You, and begged You to do all, since I could do nothing. In a moment all was sweet and easy. What help and grace You gave me, making me see clearly that I must never again give up this life or omit to mark my book."

"When, long years ago," he again wrote "I asked our Blessed Lord to make me a saint, cost what it might, I did not realize what even a small part of that cost would be. I have never regretted my compact, nor do I now, though I am half afraid God has forgotten His part of the bargain, so slow has been the process of sanctification. As time goes on I see clearly that God wants me for a life that consists mainly of two things—prayer and penance.

"Last night I rose at twelve and knelt in the cellar for an hour to suffer from cold. It was a hard fight to do so, but Jesus helped me. I said my Rosary with arms extended. At the third mystery the pain was so great that I felt I could not possibly continue, but at each Ave I prayed for strength, and was able to finish it. This has given me great consolation, showing me the many hard things I can do with the help of prayer."

To reveal what happened during these unutterably sacred moments of the still night seems almost sacrilegious. Just one citation from a personal paper will be enough: "He seems pleased when I am alone in the chapel if I kneel close to Him, uncover my breast and ask Him again and again to pour His love and grace into my heart. I often press my throbbing heart close to the tabernacle to let Him hear its beats of love."

In 1912 Father Doyle and his Jesuit brother were appointed to the missionary staff in

Australia, but at the last moment the plan was altered, and Father Willie continued his missionary work in Ireland. With the longing for martyrdom ever in his heart he volunteered for the Front as military chaplain, at the outbreak of the war in 1914. He was accepted a year later, and on December 15, 1915, he writes in a letter: "I cannot say I am quite in love with camp life, which in many respects is very repellent. But even in these disagreeable times there is a joy and secret pleasure, since it means all the more merit, and, let us hope, a richer harvest of souls. My eyes have been opened still more to the awful godlessness of the world, and the need—the immense need—there is for us, who owe so much to Our Blessed Lord, to try to make up to Him for all this by greater love and generosity. It will never equal, I fear, the worldly generosity of these men. For example, this morning a regiment marched out of the camp at 5 a.m. in torrents of rain merely for exercise. When they return tonight they will dry their wet underclothes merely by sleeping in them."

On New Year's Day, 1916, Father Doyle, with his regiment (8th Royal Irish Fusiliers), moved from Whiteley Camp to Bordon Camp. The change was a welcome one.

He writes: "Before I thank you for your letter, which was doubly welcome in my exile, I want to tell you the New Year's gift Our Lord gave me. We had an awful time of storm and rain coming over here, but the first thing I saw on reaching the barrack square was a hut marked 'R.C. Church.' I thought it was just the usual hut set apart for Sunday Mass, but on trying the door, you can imagine my delight to find a small, but beautifully furnished chapel with a lamp burning before the altar, which made my heart leap for joy. I felt as if all the hard-

ships of my life had vanished, for I had found Him Who makes the hard things easy and the bitter things sweet. What did anything matter now, since I could go and tell Him all about it, and get help and consolation from Jesus? I really think that this month's privation of the Blessed Sacrament has taught me the true value of the tabernacle. But His goodness did not stop here; his other priest, who has the key, gave it to me without my even suggesting it, so I can go to Him any hour of the day or night I want to. Is He not good to have the little chapel put where He did, as it might have been in any other part of the camp miles away? I do not think there is a happier man in England than I today. I am writing this sitting on a piece of wood—no chairs in our quarters. There are about 1200 Catholics in our Brigade now. I get a few 'big fish' each evening."

Father Doyle's work became very constant as the day of departure drew near. It was the last great chance for the soul of many a soldier.

"There is nothing like the prospect of a German shell," writes Father Doyle, "for putting the fear of God into one; and many an old rooster, whom no mission ever moved, has been blown out of his nest by the news of our departure. I cannot help thinking that, when the day of reckoning comes, in spite of all the misery and suffering caused, this war will turn out to have been the biggest act of God's love, saving the souls of scores of poor fellows, certainly among my own men."

On February 17, 1916, he received orders to proceed to France. It was not long before his regiment had their first experience of real danger. They were proceeding towards the trenches. On Sunday, March 5, he said

Mass for the 8th Fusiliers, who were stationed at Noeux-les-Mines. After he had finished (about 9 o'clock) he mounted his bicycle in order to go to the 8th Inniskillings, of whom he also had charge, to say Mass at 11 for them. They were stationed about four miles away at the ruined village of Mazingarbe. Here is his own description of the adventure: "On the way I noticed that heavy firing was going on ahead, but it was only when I reached a bend in the road that I realized the enemy was actually shelling the very spot I had to pass. Some soldiers stopped me, saying it was dangerous to go on. At the moment, I was wondering what had become of the side of a house which had suddenly vanished in a cloud of smoke, and I was painfully aware of the proximity of high explosive shells. Here was a fix. I knew my regiment was waiting in the village for Mass and also that half of them were going to the trenches that afternoon for the first time; if I did not turn up they would lose Confession and Holy Communion, but the only way to reach them was by that shell-swept road. What really decided me was the thought that I was carrying the Blessed Sacrament, and I felt that having Our Lord Himself with me, no harm could possibly come to me. I mounted the bicycle and faced the music. I don't want you to think me very brave and courageous, for I confess I felt horribly afraid; it was my baptism of fire, and one needs to grow accustomed to the sound of bursting shells. Just then I was wishing my regiment in Jericho, and every German gun in the Red Sea or any other hot place. Call it a miracle if you will, but the moment I turned the corner, the guns ceased firing, and not a shell fell until I was safely in the village church. My confidence in God's protection was not misplaced. Naturally, I did not know this was going to happen,

and it was anything but pleasant riding down the last stretch of road, which seemed to grow longer and longer the farther I went. At last I turned the corner, reached the church, and just begun Mass when down came the hail of shells once more. One or two must have burst very close judging by the way the walls shook, but I felt quite happy and quite ready to be blown from the altar, for I saw a fine plump Frenchwoman just behind me; she might have been killed, but I was quite safe!"

A colonel who knew Father Doyle intimately, said: "Father Doyle felt fear deeply. He had a highly-strung nervous system and a vivid imagination that visualized danger fully. He realized the risk before him—all the physical elements of cowardice were his. He went out to perils, not at the word of command that meant death to disobey, not with the lust of battle surging in his veins, and sweeping him along with a primitive savage longing to kill, not in the company of cheering, sustaining comrades. He had no word of command, but his conscience and his sense of duty. It may sound a paradox, but it is perfectly true: Father Doyle was the biggest coward in the 16th Division and the bravest man in the British Army."

Here is an extract from a letter of an officer who met Father Doyle at the war: "You need not worry about my poor soul, as you call it. I came across a Jesuit, a Father Willie Doyle, out here, and he settled up my account with the Lord. He has a wonderful influence over others, and can do what he likes with the men. I was out the other evening with a brother-officer and met him. After a few words, I said, 'This is a pal of mine, padre; he is a Protestant, but I think he would like your blessing.' Father Doyle looked at my chum for a moment with a smile, and then made the sign of the Cross

on his forehead. When he passed on, my pal said, 'That is a holy man; did you see the way he looked at me? It went right through me, and when he crossed my forehead I felt such an extraordinary sensation'."

This letter will show the unfailing humour of Father Doyle even during the horrors that daily surrounded him on the battlefield. "I have a good old beast of a horse," he writes, "quiet, but with plenty of pace, who simply turns up her nose with supreme contempt at a bursting shell. All went well until six of our guns, hidden by the roadside, went off with a bang. This was not playing the game, and Flunkibrandos (the horse's name) stopped dead, or rather reversed engines, and we began to go astern. I tried to think of all the manoeuvres, and was devoutly wishing I had a bridle tied to her tail, for Flunki backed and backed until she pulled up with a bump against a brick wall, which the Germans had kindly spared—one of the few, it must be confessed, left in the town; then she sailed ahead again as if nothing had happened. I am bringing home a brick of that wall, for, if it had not been there, I certainly should be half-way across Germany by now!"

On Easter Sunday, April 23, he celebrated his first Mass in the trenches. "My church was a bit of a trench," he writes, "the altar a pile of sandbags. Though we had to stand deep in mud, not knowing the moment a sudden call to arms would come, many a fervent prayer went up to heaven that morning."

Father Doyle writes of his first experience of gas: "I had come through the three attacks without ill results, though having been unexpectedly caught with the last one, as I was anointing a dying man and did not see the poisonous fumes coming, I had swallowed some of the gas before I could get my helmet on. It was nothing very serious, but left

me weak and washy. There was little time to think of that, for wounded and dying were lying all along the trenches, and I was the only priest on that section at that time. The fumes had quite blown away, but a good deal of the gas, being of a heavy nature, had sunk down to the bottom of the trench and gathered under the duckboards or wooden flooring. It was impossible to do one's work with the gas helmet on, so, as I knelt down to anoint or absolve man after man for the greater part of the day I had to inhale chlorine gas fumes till I had nearly enough gas in my poor inside to inflate a German sausage balloon. I did not know that when a man is gassed his only chance (and a poor one at that) is to be perfectly still to give the heart a chance of fighting its foe. In happy ignorance of my real state, I covered mile after mile of those trenches, until at last, in the evening, when the work was done, I was able to rejoin my battalion in a village close to the Line. It was only then that I began to realize that I felt 'rotten bad,' as schoolboys say. I remember the doctor, who was a great friend of mine, feeling my pulse, and shaking his head as he put me lying in a corner of the shattered house, and then he sat beside me for hours, with a kindness I shall never forget. He told me afterwards, that he was sure I was a 'gone coon,' but at the moment I did not care much. Then I fell asleep, only to be rudely awakened next morning at four, by the crash of guns, and the dreaded bugle call, 'Gas alarm, gas alarm.' The Germans had launched a second attack, fiercer than the first. It did not take long to make up my mind what to do—who would hesitate at such a moment, when the Reaper of Death was busy?—and before I reached the trenches I had anointed a number of poor fellows who had struggled back after being gassed, and had fallen dying by the roadside. The har-

vest that day was a big one, for there had been bloody fighting all along the front. Many a man had died happy in the thought that a priest's hand had been raised in absolution over his head, and the Holy Oils' anointing had given pardon to those senses which he had used to offend the Almighty. It was a long, hard day, a day of heartrending sights, with the consolation of good work done in spite of the deadly fumes, and I reached my billet wet and muddy, pretty nearly worn out, but **perfectly well**, with not the slightest ill-effect from what I had gone through, nor have I felt any since. Surely God has been good to me. That was not the first of His many favours, nor has it been the last."

Of another gas attack, he writes a year later: "There they lay, scores of them (we lost 800, nearly all from gas) in the bottom of the trench, in every conceivable posture of agony, the clothes torn off their bodies in a vain effort to breathe; while from one end of that valley of death to the other came one low, unceasing moan from the lips of brave men fighting and struggling for life. I don't think you will blame me when I tell you that, more than once, the words of absolution stuck in my throat, and tears splashed down on to the patient, suffering faces of my poor boys, as I bent down to anoint them. One young soldier seized my two hands and covered them with kisses; another looked up and said: "Oh, Father, I can die happy now. I'm not afraid of death since I've seen you.' Don't you think, dear father (Father Doyle was writing to his father), that the little sacrifice made in coming out here has already been more than repaid, and if you have suffered a little anxiety on my account, you have at least the consolation of knowing that I have, through God's goodness, been able to comfort many a poor fel-

low, and perhaps open the gates of heaven for them?"

After this terrible ordeal, Father Doyle was glad to have a few days' rest at the rear. For the first time in a fortnight he was able to remove his clothes, and he slept for thirteen continuous hours in a real bed. He had, as he himself said, "nearly reached the end of his tether." For his conduct on that occasion he was mentioned in dispatches. His colonel recommended him for the Military Cross, but was told that Father Doyle had not been long enough at the Front. So he was presented with the Parchment of Merit of the 49th Brigade. On which he remarks: "I hope that the angels have not forgotten me, and that I shall get a little corner in their report to headquarters above." Fortunately, there is no doubt about the latter point! Not angels only, but human souls speeding heavenwards bore tribute to the self-sacrificing zeal of the soldier of Christ.

From some of his letters, at this time, one gets a glimpse of his inner life, so calm and undisturbed, so perfectly hidden beneath all his activities as a cheerful and inspiring military chaplain.

"Life out here," he writes, "has had one strange effect on me. I feel as if I had been crushed under some great weight, and that the crushing had somehow got rid of much that was bad in me, and brought me closer to Jesus. If it should be God's holy will to bring me safe out of this war, life will be too short to thank Him for all the graces He has given me here. I am already dreaming dreams of the big things I shall try to do for Him, but I fancy He wants to crush me still more before I get out of this. I read a passage from one of the letters of Pere Liberman, which is consoling. He says that he found from long experience that God never

filled a soul with an ardent desire for anything—e.g., love, holiness, etc.—without in the end gratifying it. Has He not, in the lesser things, acted thus with me? You know my desire for the foreign missions, because I realized that the privation and hardships of such a life, the separation from all naturally dear to me, would be an immense help to holiness. And here, I am a real missionary, if not in the Congo, at least with many of the wants and sufferings, and even greater dangers than I should have found there. The longing for martyrdom God has gratified times without number, for I have had to go into what seemed certain death, gladly making the offering of my poor life, but He did not accept it, so that the 'daily martyrdom' might be repeated. How I thank Him for this keenest of all sufferings, the prospect of death when life is bounding within one, since it makes me a little more like the Saviour shrinking from death in the Garden! Even my anxiety to have more time for prayer has been gratified, because, while waiting for one thing or another or going on my rounds, I have many opportunities for a little talk with Him."

It was no human ideal which gave Father Doyle his strength and consolation, but his real and constant union with Our Lord. What he valued most was the privilege of being a living tabernacle, of always carrying the Blessed Sacrament around with him. It was his constant source of consolation, and helped him to overcome his loathing for the scenes of strife and slaughter, and to manifest an amazing and inspiring courage, which he was really far from feeling.

He says, "I have been living in the front trenches for the last week, in a sea of mud, drenched to the skin with rain, and mercilessly peppered with all sorts and conditions of shells. Yet I realize that some strange purify-

ing process in going on in my soul, and this life is doing much for my sanctification. This much I can say: I hunger and thirst for holiness, and for humiliations and sufferings, which are the short cut to holiness; though when these things do come, I often pull a long face and try to avoid them. Yet, lately, I have come to understand, as never before, that it is only 'through many tribulations' we can hope to enter the promised land of sanctity.

"Then, in addition, there is the great privilege and joy of carrying Our Dear Lord next to my heart, day and night. Long ago, when reading that Pius IX carried the pyx around his neck, I felt a foolish desire, as it seemed to me, for the same privilege. Little did I think then, that the God of holiness would stoop so low as to make me His resting-place. Why, this favour would be worth going through twenty wars for!

"Sometimes God seems to leave me to my weakness and I tremble with fear. At other times I have so much trust and confidence in His loving protection that I could almost sit down on a bursting shell, feeling I could come to no harm. You would laugh, or perhaps cry, if you saw me at this moment sitting on a pile of bricks and rubbish. Shells are bursting some little distance away on three sides and occasionally a piece comes down with an unpleasantly close thud. But what does it matter? Jesus is resting on my heart, and whenever I like, I can fold my arms over Him, and press Him to that heart, which, as He knows, beats with love of Him."

Father Doyle seemed to bear a charmed life. He had so many narrow escapes from almost certain death, that the men used to crowd around him when the shells were bursting. They said that if they were near "Little Father Doyle" (their term of endearment; he

was nearly six feet tall and of splendid physique) they need fear no harm from the biggest shell.

One of his many amazing escapes is recounted in his own words:

"I was standing in a trench, quite a long distance from the firing line, a spot almost as safe as Dalkey itself, talking to some of my men, when we heard in the distance the scream of a shell. It was evidently one of those random shots which Brother Fritz sends along from time to time, as no other came after it. We soon became painfully aware that our visitor was heading straight for us, and that if he did not explode in front of our trench, his career would certainly come to an end close behind us. I did not feel uneasy, for I knew we were practically safe from flying fragments, which would pass over our heads, but none of us had calculated that this gentleman had made up his mind to drop into the trench itself, a couple of paces from where I stood. What really took place in the next ten seconds, I cannot say. I was conscious of a terrific explosion, and the thud of falling stones and debris! I thought the drums of my ears were split by the crash, and I believe I was knocked down by the concussion, but when I jumped to my feet, I found that the two men who had been standing at my left hand (the side the shell fell) were stretched on the ground dead, though I think I had time to give them absolution and anoint them. The poor fellow on my right was lying badly wounded in the head; but I myself, though a bit stunned and dazed by the suddenness of the whole thing, was absolutely untouched, though covered with dirt and blood. My escape was nothing short of a miracle, for a moment before I was standing on the very spot where the shell fell, and had just moved away a couple of

paces. I did not think it possible for one to be so near a high explosive and not be killed, and even now I cannot account for my marvellous escape. In saying this, I am not quite truthful, for I have no doubt where the saving protection came from. I had made up my mind to consecrate some small hosts at my Mass the following morning, and put them in my pyx, as usual, but as I walked through the little village on my way to the trenches, the thought came to me that, with so much danger about, it would be well to have Our Blessed Lord's company and protection. I went into the church, opened the tabernacle, and with the Sacred Host resting on my heart, set out confidently to face whatever lay before me; little did I think I was to be so near death, or how much depended on that simple action. That is the explanation of the whole affair. I trusted Him, and I believe He just allowed this to happen on the very first day I got back to make me trust Him all the more and have greater confidence in His loving protection."

The following incident, in Father's own words, will illustrate his wonderful charity—the charity of a soul on fire with love of the God of Love. The 48th Brigade were given orders to follow up an attack made on the German lines—to consolidate, and, if need be, help the leading Brigades. He writes: "In a short time the wounded began to come in, a number of German prisoners, many of them wounded also. I must confess my heart goes out to these unfortunate soldiers, whose sufferings have been terrific. I can't share the general sentiment that they deserve what they get and one better! For, after all, are they not children of the same loving Saviour Who said: 'Whatever you do to one of these, My least little ones, you do it to Me'? I try to show them any little kindness I can—getting them a drink, taking off

the boots from smashed and bleeding feet, or helping to dress their wounds, and more than once I have seen the eyes of these rough men fill with tears as I bent over them, or felt my hand squeezed in gratitude."

No sacrifice was ever too great for his "poor brave boys," as he loved to call them. He used to crawl out under cover of darkness and give them absolution as they left the trenches to make a noiseless and surprise attack on the enemy. Whenever danger to the men was greatest, there was their saintly and brave chaplain to give them the strength and comfort of his holy ministrations.

He writes on another occasion: "Once again I had evidence of the immense confidence our men have in the priest. It was quite evident they were rapidly becoming demoralized, as the best of troops will who have to remain inactive under heavy shell fire. Little groups were running from place to place for greater shelter, and the officers seemed to have lost control. I walked along the line of men crouching behind the sandbag wall, and was amused to see the ripple of smiles light up the terrified lads' faces (so many were mere boys) as I went by. By the time I got back again the men were laughing and chatting as if all danger was miles away, for quite unintentionally, I had given them courage by walking along without my gas-mask or steel helmet, both of which I had forgotten in my hurry.

"When the regiment moved forward, the doctor and I went with it. By this time the 'impregnable' ridge was in our hands, and the enemy retreating down the far side. I spent the rest of that memorable day wandering over the battlefield looking for the wounded and had the happiness of helping many a poor chap. As I knew there was no chance of saying Mass next morning, I had taken

the precaution of bringing several Consecrated Particles with me, so that I should not be deprived of Holy Communion. It was the feast of Corpus Christi, and I thought of the many processions of the Blessed Sacrament which were being held at that moment all over the world. Surely, there never was a stranger one than mine that day, as I carried the God of Consolation in my unworthy arms over the bloodstained battlefield. There was no music to welcome His coming save the scream of a passing shell; the flowers that strewed His path were the broken and bleeding bodies of those for Whom He once died; and the only Altar of Repose He could find was the heart of one who was working for Him alone, striving in a feeble way to make Him some return at least for all His goodness. He certainly directed my steps on two occasions at least. I came across one young soldier horribly mutilated, all his intestines hanging out, but quite conscious and able to speak to me. He lived long enough to receive the Last Sacraments, and died in peace. Later on in the evening I was going in a certain direction when something made me turn back; I saw, in the distance, a man being carried on a stretcher. He belonged to the artillery and had no chance of seeing a priest for a long time, but he must have been a good lad, for Mary did not forget him at the hour of his death. The things I remember best of that day of twenty-four hours of work are: the sweltering heat, a devouring thirst which comes from the excitement of battle, physical weakness from want of food, and a weariness and footsoreness, which I trust will pay, at least a little, of St. Peter's heavy score against me."

The soldiers idolized their kindly and heroic padre. In a letter to his father, which he wrote on a roadside bank under a tree, but with the grim sounds of battle not very far

distant, he says: "Whilst I was writing, one of my men belonging to the Irish Rifles, of which I have charge also, passed by. We chatted for a few minutes, and then he went on, but came back shortly with a steaming bowl of coffee which he had bought for me. 'I am not one of your flock, Father,' he said, 'but we all have a great liking for you.' And then he added, 'If all the officers treated us as you do, our lives would be different.' I was greatly touched by the poor lad's thoughtfulness, and impressed by what he said: 'A kind word often goes further than one thinks, and one loses nothing by remembering that soldiers are human beings and have feelings like any one else'."

As the troops moved along on that terrible battlefield, Father Doyle recorded the ghastly events each day in his diary, at the end of which there followed this last letter to his father, so pathetic in the light of his death two days later:

"I have told you all my escapes, dearest father, because I think what I have written will give you the same confidence which I feel, that my old arm-chair up in heaven is not ready yet, and I do not want you to be uneasy about me. I am all the better for these couple of days' rest, and am quite on my fighting legs again. Leave will be possible very shortly, I think, so I shall only say 'au revoir' in view of an early meeting. Heaps of love to every dear one. As ever, dear father, your loving son, Willie. 14/8/17."

Before this letter reached home Father Doyle was dead. On August 16, 1917, the fighting became desperate; the doctor and chaplain received orders to retire. Father Doyle didn't obey the order—how could he when he was needed so badly? Word came to him that a wounded officer was lying out in an exposed position. Father Doyle crawl-

ed out and ministered to him. Then he proceeded to bring him to a safer place. He got him to a pill-box, out of which came three officers. Father Doyle asked for a water bottle to give the dying man a drink. As the bottle was being passed to him, a shell burst in the midst of the group, killing Father Doyle and the four officers instantaneously.
