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(AUTHOR UNKNOWN)

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Father William Doyle, S. J., never abandoned the hope of laying down his life for Christ. In 1914, he wrote to a friend saying, "What I am going to tell you now may pain you. I have volunteered for the Front as Military Chaplain, though perhaps I may never be sent. Naturally, I have little attraction for the hardship and suffering the life would mean, but it is a glorious chance to make the "ould body" bear something for Christ's dear sake. However, what decided me in the end was a thought that flashed into my mind when in the chapel: the thought that if I am killed I shall die a martyr of charity, and so the longing of my heart will be gratified. This much my offering myself as chaplain has done for me: it has made me realize that my life may be very short and that I must do all I can for Jesus now."

A similar thought occurs in his private diary under next day's date (10 November 1914). He writes, "My offering myself as war chaplain to the Provincial has had a wonderful effect on me. I long to shed my blood for Jesus and, if He wills it, to die a martyr of charity. The thought that at any moment I may be called to the Front, perhaps to die, has roused a great desire to do all I can while I have life. I feel great strength to make any sacrifice and little difficulty in doing so. I may not have long now to prove my love for Jesus."

He waited a year before the sacrifice was asked of him. On 15 November 1915, he makes this brief entry:

> "Received my appointment from the War Office as chaplain to the 16th Division. *Fiat voluntas Tua."*
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> "What the future has in store I know not," he writes to a correspondent on the same day, "but I have given Jesus all to dispose of as He sees best. My heart is full of gratitude to Him for giving me this chance of being really generous and of leading a life that will be truly crucified."

A few letters survive to tell us his impressions of camp life. On 15 December 1915, he writes, "I cannot say I am quite in love with camp life, which in many respects is very repellent. Even in these disagreeable things, 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 and 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

camp at 5 a.m. in torrents of rain merely for exercise. When they return tonight, they will dry their wet underclothing by sleeping in them!"

On New Year's Day, Father Doyle with his regiment (8th Royal Irish Fusiliers) moved from Whitely Camp to Borden Camp. The change was welcome to him for the reason given in the following letter four days later:

"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 took it for granted that 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 with joy."

"I felt as if all the hardships of my life had vanished, for I had found Him again 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. The other priest who had the key gave it to me without my even suggesting it, so I can go to Him at any hour of the day or night if I want to; do you think I shall? Is He not good to have put the little chapel 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 quarter. There are about 1,200 Catholics in our brigade now. I get a few "big fish" each evening."

The reference to soul-fishing will remind us that Father Doyle's life was by no means contemplative at this time except so far as he was able to be Martha by day and Mary by night. His work was very arduous and grew more so as the day of departure drew near. It was the last great chance for the soul of many an Irish lad.

"There is nothing like the prospect of a German shell 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," he adds, "that when the final reckoning day 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 men." "We are having desperate work these days," he told a friend on 14 February 1916. "The good God is simply pouring out His grace on these poor fellows and reconciling them before they die. It has to be quick work, no time for "trimmings." I have positively a pain in my arm giving Absolution and Communions in the morning.

I was able to manage Exposition all day last Sunday, which brought in many an erring sheep. I realize that, from this day on, my life will be a martyrdom in a way I never thought of. I love my brave lads almost like my own brothers and sisters. They are all so wild and reckless, and at the same time so full of faith and love of God and His blessed Mother. Yet, soon I shall have to see the majority of them blown to bits, torn and mangled out of shape. Our brigade is leaving tomorrow for France. I am waiting till Friday night, so as to get in all the confessions I can. Do pray I may be able to say daily Mass. I shall carry everything necessary on my back, and so may manage the Holy Sacrifice in the train."

"Whilst here, I have given Jesus two things for which He often asked, but which I refused through "prudence and a fear of interfering with important work"—a very old trick of the devil, which my eyes are open to see now. The first was to fast strictly all day—once I did a hard day's work, ending up with a fifteen-mile march, on a cup of tea. The second was to spend the whole night in prayer. Including confessions, I was able one night to pass eleven hours with Jesus—telling Him every five minutes I was going after five more."

On 17 February, Father Doyle received unexpected orders to proceed overseas. He wrote to his father a brief description of the crossing, which indirectly revealed some of his characteristic traits.

One passage stated, "The moon was surrounded by a magnificent halo or crown, which I promptly bagged for myself. I was fortunately able to get some tea on shore, for though they served us out with lifebelts, nothing in the shape of a dinner or rations came along. There were only a few bunks, which I left to the other officers, and as there was no place to sleep except the stoke-hole, which I was not having this journey, I picked a comfortable(?) corner on deck and prepared for a snooze, when, alas, down came the rain. Providence, however, came to my rescue. The second engineer was passing by and very kindly offered me a share of his cabin. I slept like a top on the settee. He was awfully kind to me, even offering me a share of his bunk, and this morning he had hot coffee and buns ready when I awoke, but as I was hoping to be able to celebrate Mass on shore, I had to postpone that luxury. At present, there seems little prospect of either Mass or breakfast, as it is now nine and we have been lying off shore since four this morning."

"1.30 p.m. Just landed. Seeing there was no chance for Mass, I rooted up a Chinaman and secured a welcome cup of tea. He brought me also a plate of cold liver and potatoes, likewise cold—a dish to tempt one's appetite after a Channel crossing!"

"After a tiresome day at Havre, the rain never for a moment ceasing, the men entrained for their base. After twenty-one and a half hours in the train, there was a march of twelve miles. "I shall not try to describe that march," writes Father Doyle, "but you can gather what it was, with strong, big men falling down now and then

from sheer exhaustion. Under other circumstances I should not have minded the tramp, but I was near the end of my tether, and was carrying a great coat, pack, and water-bottle."

After about two hours' plodding, an officer, seeing Father Doyle's exhaustion, induced him to get on an artillery limber. It was only when the wagons stopped at 2 a.m. that he discovered he was separated from the infantry and his regiment had gone to its unknown destination. He was lost. After three hours sleep under a cart, he walked on for a couple of miles and found himself in a good-sized town. Though he had not tasted food for thirty-five hours except for two sandwiches, he deferred breakfast until he could say Mass. Finding there were no passenger trains, he boarded a slow-moving, goods train and, sitting on uncomfortable explosive shells, was taken a good way on his journey. Finally, a Catholic officer whom he chanced to meet, motored him to his destination—Amettes, the birthplace of Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, to whom, since his college days, Father Doyle had a special devotion. Father Doyle had a comfortable room in the little convent. Since he had a bad chill as the result of his three-night exposure, he was lucky to have come under the kindly care of the good Sisters.

On 26 February, the men left their comparatively snug quarters and began moving in easy stages towards the trenches. The grim reality of war grew nearer.

It was not long before Father Doyle experienced real danger. On Sunday, 5 March, 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 to go to the 8th Inniskillings, of whom he also had charge, and say Mass at eleven for them. They were stationed about four miles away near the ruined village of Mazingarbe. Father Doyle described his adventure in his own words.

"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 too dangerous to go on. At that moment, I was wondering what had become of the side of a vacant house that had suddenly vanished in a cloud of smoke and I was painfully aware of the proximity of high-explosive shells."

"Here was a puzzle! I knew my regiment was waiting in the village for Mass and 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. Yet, the only way to reach them was by the shell-swept road. What really decided me was the thought that I was carrying the Blessed Sacrament. 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 do not 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 that my regiment was in Jericho, and that every German gun was at the bottom of 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 till 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, listening for the scream of the coming shell. Have you ever had a nightmare in which you were pursued by ten mad bulls, while the faster you tried to run, the more your feet stuck in the mud? These were just my feelings as I pedaled down that blessed road which seemed to grow longer and longer the farther I went."

"At last I turned the corner, reached the Church, and had 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!"

Father Doyle described some of his activities on Sunday 19 March.

"I started at seven in the morning by giving Holy Communion to the men whose Confessions I had heard the previous evening, a goodly number I am glad to say. This was followed by a number of Confessions in French for the townspeople and some French soldiers. I am quite ready to face any language at the present moment! This brought me up to nine, when my men had Mass Parade."

"By chance the whole regiment was in the village, which meant of course that the Church would not hold them, so I had arranged for Mass in the open. The spot I selected was a large courtyard in front of the school—whereby hangs a tale. Armed with the Mayor's permission, I approached the schoolmaster for his sanction. I must say, I found him most obliging and very gracious, even helping to get things ready. It was only afterwards that I discovered that this man was a red-hot anticlerical, anti-everything that was good, in fact, quite a bad lot; so that my request was about the same as asking the Grand Master of the Orange Lodge in Belfast for permission to have Mass in his hall! He was so staggered, I suppose, by my innocent request, that he could not find words to

refuse. But the good folk of the town are wild with delight, and immensely tickled by the idea of Mass in the porch of his school above all people; needless to say, they have rubbed it into him well."

"I had never celebrated Mass in the open before, and I think the men were as much impressed as I was. It was a glorious morning, with just a sufficient spice of danger to give the necessary warlike touch to the picture by the presence of a German aeroplane scouting nearby. I was a wee bit anxious lest a bomb might come down in the middle of the men, but I fancy our unwelcome visitor had quite enough to do dodging the shells from our guns, which kept booming all during Mass. Besides, I felt confident that, for once, our guardian angels would do their duty and protect us all till Mass was over."

"When I finished breakfast, I found a big number of men waiting for Confession. I gave them Communion as well, though they were not fasting, as they were going to the trenches that evening and, as they were in danger of death, could receive the Blessed Sacrament as Viaticum. It was the last Communion for many poor fellows who, I trust, are praying for me in Heaven now."

"Having polished off all who came to the Church, I made a raid on the men's' billets, and spent a few hours in stables, barns, and, in fact, anywhere, shriving the remainder, who gladly availed themselves of the chance of settling up accounts before they started for the front. The harvest, thank God, was good and consoling. Just before they marched at six in the evening, I gave the whole regiment—the Catholics, at least—a General Absolution. So, the men went off in the best of spirits, light of heart with the joy of a good conscience. 'Goodbye, Father,' one shouted, 'we are ready to meet the *divil* himself now!'"

"I dined with the two transport officers who bring up the rations and ammunition to the soldiers, and then mounted my horse and rode up to Headquarters at the communication trenches."

"I have a good old beast of a mare, quiet but with plenty of pace, who simply turns up her nose at a bursting shell with supreme contempt. All went well till suddenly six of our guns, hidden by the roadside, went off with a bang. This was not playing the game, and Flunkibrandos (the mare's name) stopped dead, or rather reversed engines, and began to go astern. I tried to think of all the maneuvers and was 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 the Germans had kindly spared—one of the few, it must be confessed, left in that 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 now."

"My work done, I mounted again and made for home. It was rather weird riding past the shattered houses in the dark, with the ping of a stray bullet to make you uncomfortable, while every few minutes a brilliant star shell would burst overhead and the guns would spit viciously at each other. I reached my billet and tumbled in just as the clock struck midnight."

Father Doyle was chaplain to half the 49th Brigade, that is, to two regiments (the 8th Royal Irish Fusiliers and Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers), who were billeted four or five miles apart. To train them, the newly arrived men were sent to hold the trenches with other troops. Hence, half of each regiment remained behind, while the other was at the firing line. The chaplain's position was therefore, rather difficult, for he could not be at the dressing station to look after the wounded and at the same time minister to the men at the base. "Up to this," he says, "I stayed behind, as practically nothing can be done in the trenches themselves. While at the rear, I had my hands full, with just an odd visit to my absent men to cheer them up in their mud and slush."

Then, at 6 p.m. on 31 March, the whole four regiments of the 49th Brigade left their quarters in Noeux-les-Mines and moved forward to the firing line. On this occasion, Father Doyle accompanied the men. Nearly all had been to Holy Communion that morning or the morning before, and they now received General Absolution. The town of Loos was in a salient* and, as the road to it was commanded by the German guns, it could be entered only at night.

"Single file, no smoking," came the order as the danger zone was reached. After another mile, came the second order, "Men will advance by twos, twenty paces apart."

Stray bullets were buzzing about and, fortunately, there were no shells. Suddenly, down the line came the command, "Every man lie flat." The road was being swept by a machine gun. After the leaden hail had stopped, the men moved on again into the town—where the Staff remained—and then moved out to man the trenches.

That night, Father Doyle slept in a dugout for the first time. "I had rather an amusing experience the first night I spent in the trenches," he writes. "On arriving here, I found two officers in the dugout that was intended for me. As they were leaving the next day, I did not care to evict them. After some searching, I came across an unoccupied, glorified, rabbit-hole—any port in a storm. It was not too inviting, looking rather damp; but I got a trench board that made a capital foundation for a bed and spread my sleeping bag over it. Let me say here that I do not recommend a trench board for a bed. A trench board is simply a

* Military: Part of a military front, line, or fortification that projects outward into enemy-held territory or toward the enemy.

kind of ladder with flat steps. It is laid at the bottom of the trench and, as it is very narrow, requires great skill to stop oneself from rolling off during the night. In addition, the sharp edges of the steps have a trick of cutting into your back and ribs, making you feel in the morning as if you had been at Donnybrook fair the night before."

In spite of it all, I slept soundly till I was awakened by feeling a huge rat sitting on my chest. The rats round here beat anything I have ever seen. If I told you they were as big as sheep you would scarcely believe me, so let me say a lamb. In any case, this fellow was a whopper, weighing fully seven pounds, as I proved afterwards. As I gradually awoke more fully, I felt his weight and could dimly see his black outline. Before I quite realized what was happening, a warm, soft tongue began to lick my face and I recognized my old friend—the dog!"

WW I - TRENCH DOGS

Father Doyle's further references to this dugout are not without humor and horror. "When introducing you to my friends the rats," he writes, "I made a serious omission in forgetting another class of most attentive friends, smaller in size but much more active in a close personal way. They are not called teas, but something very like that. You must remember that the unwashed German lived in our cellar for months, and, upon departing, left behind him a large number of small fierce warriors from across the Rhine. Next, the French moved in. There is not much picking on a Frenchman, so it is small wonder that, when they in turn departed, their small companions remained in hope of better things to come. Tommy Atkins then appeared and, not to be outdone, left a legacy also. Fortunately, these visitors were natives of different countries, speaking different tongues; otherwise, had they been friends and united in policy, we should have been literally pulled out of bed."

WW I - DUGOUT SLEEPING SPACES

In a letter written the following January, Father Doyle mentions more gruesome details. "One end of the dugout had been blown in by a big shell, burying two men

whom it was impossible to get out. We lived at the other end. They, poor chaps, were covered with clay, but were not deep enough to keep out the smell of decaying bodies—which did not help one's appetite at mealtime. When your nerves were more jumpy than usual, you'd swear the dead man's boot was moving as if he were alive."

The next morning (which he notes was the twenty-fifth anniversary of his entrance into the Society) Father Doyle emerged to view the havoc and ruin of what was once a town. He discovered a tiny wayside chapel, "Our Lady of Consolation." The altar was still standing and here, amid the inferno of shot and shell, he celebrated Mass.

That afternoon Father Doyle had "the most exciting experience of his whole life." He and the doctor set out to visit the Field Ambulance Station at the other end of the town, where the wounded were sent at night from the Regimental Aid Post. Without knowing it, they walked along a road in broad daylight in full view of the German trenches and escaped only by a miracle. Father Doyle joined some officers in the cellar, who were having a tea party enlivened by a gramophone.

"McCormack," says Father Doyle, "had just finished the last bars of 'She is far from the Land,' which brought back old memories, when suddenly Berths Krupp opened her mouth in a most unladylike way, let out a screech you could hear in Dublin, and spat a huge shell right into our courtyard. It was a six-inch gun, so the artillery officer who was present said, but I am certain that sixty inches would be nearer the mark. I shall not easily forget the roar as the shell burst only a few feet from where we sat. A moment later, there was a deafening crash. A second shell had hit what was left of the upper wall and brought it tumbling down, half smothering us with the dust that came through the open slit that served as window and chimney combined. This was not bad shooting so far. The next shot went wide, but did useful work among the stables and out-houses. Then came a fearful dull thud. The walls quivered, I was nearly knocked off my chair by the concussion, and the cup in the officer's hand sitting next me was sent flying—a shell had landed clean on top of our cellar. That was too much for the rats. Out they came—from hole and corner, scores of them, scurrying for the open. Evidently, they thought our poor ship was in a bad way. I said a fervent prayer for the Germans who had formerly occupied the house. They had done their work well, propping up the cellar roof with huge beams. Otherwise, we might have all been buried in the ruins. Shell after shell kept raining down—at least six fell upon our heads. We were perfectly safe, as the battered-in roof and walls on top of our cellar made a natural dugout, but we all knew there was a chance that a shell could come

through and possibly smash the cup and gramophone. It was an exciting half-hour—one that none of our party had any great anxiety to repeat for some time at least."

"As we went home in the dusk of the evening," he adds, "I came to the conclusion that there are worse places to live than poor old Ireland. I also concluded that I had quite enough thrills for one day."

It was not to be, however, for still another adventure awaited him. Upon returning, he found that a dead man had been brought in for burial.

"The cemetery, part of a field, was outside the town in the open country. It was so exposed to shell and rifle fire that it could not be approached by day. As soon as it was dark, we carried the poor fellow out on a stretcher, just as he had fallen. As quietly as we could, we began to dig the grave. It was weird. We were standing in front of the German trenches on two sides, though a fair distance away, and every now and then a star shell went up, which we felt certain would reveal our presence to the enemy. I put my Ritual in the bottom of my hat and, with the aid of an electric torch, read the burial service. The men screened the light with their caps, as a single flash would have turned the machine guns on us. I cannot say if we were seen or not, but all the time bullets came whizzing by, though more than likely stray ones and not aimed at us. Once I had to get the men to lie down as things were rather warm; but somehow, I felt quite safe, as if the dead soldier's guardian angel was sheltering us from all danger, till the poor dust was laid to rest. It was my first war burial though assuredly not my last. May God rest his soul, and comfort those left to mourn him."

WW I - FIELD CEMETERY

Burials soon became more frequent, and Father Doyle had many gruesome experiences. A few days later, two bodies fell to bits when lifted off the stretcher and he had to shovel the remains of one poor fellow into the grave—a task that taxed his endurance. On 1 April, he had a rather vivid experience of the horrors of war:

"Taking a short cut across country to our lines, I found myself on the first battlefield of Loos, the place where the French had made their attack. For some reason, this part of the ground had not been cleared, and it remained more or less at it was the morning after the fight. I had to pick my steps carefully for numbers of unexploded shells, bombs, and grenades lay all round. The ground was littered with broken rifles, torn uniforms, packs, and so forth, just as the men had flung them aside while charging the

German trenches. Almost the first thing I saw was a human head torn from the trunk, though there was no sign of the body. The soldiers had been buried on the spot where they fell. That is, if you can call hastily throwing a few shovelfuls of clay on the corpses a burial. There was little time, I fancy, for digging graves, and, in war, there is not much thought or sentiment for the slain. As I walked along, I wondered if they had made certain each man was really dead. One poor fellow had been buried before the breath had left his body, for there was every sign of a last struggle and one arm was thrust out from its shroud of clay. A large mound caught my eye. Four pairs of feet were sticking out, a German, judging by his boots, and three Frenchmen—friend and foe are sleeping their long last sleep in peace together. They were decently covered compared with the next I saw. A handful of earth covered the wasted body, but his legs and arms and head were exposed to view. He seemed quite a young lad, with fair, almost golden hair. "An unknown soldier" was all the rough wooden cross over him told me about him. Yet, I thought of the sorrowing mother, far away, thinking of her boy who was 'missing' and hoping against hope that he might one day come back. Thank God, one day Heaven will reunite them both. I found a shovel nearby and, after a couple of hours' stiff work, was able to cover the bodies decently, so they might rest in peace at least on earth."

These few weeks in Loos were a time of great strain; but, of course, there were intermissions. After three days and nights in the front trench, for the next three days the men moved back to a village out of range of rifle fire. Here though, they were not immune from occasional shells. After this triduum* of comparative rest, they moved up to the support trench and then three days later moved back once more to Loos.

"It was a memorable six days for us all," he writes on 16 April, "living day and night literally face to face with death at every moment. When I left my dugout to go up or down the street, which I had to do scores of times daily, I never knew if I should reach the end of it without being hit by a bullet or a piece of shell."

"In the comparative safety of the cellar, at meals or in bed, there was always the pleasant prospect of being blown to bits or buried alive if the shell came in a certain direction. Life there was a big strain on the nerves, for it does make one creepy—as happened to myself yesterday. I heard the rattle of shell splinters on the walls on either side of the road, almost feeling the thud of a nice jagged lump right behind and seeing another fragment go hopping off the road a few yards in front. Why, Daniel in the lions' den had a happy time compared to a walk through the main street of Loos."

* A period of three days of prayer before a Roman Catholic feast.

The secret of his confidence can be guessed from the description of the Cross of Loos that he saw on 3 April.

"I had an opportunity, a rare one, thanks to the fog, of examining closely in daylight one of the wonders of the war, the famous Crucifix or Calvary of Loos. This is a very large cross standing on a mound in a most exposed position, the center of fierce fighting. One of the four trees standing by it has been torn up by a shell, the branches of the others smashed to bits, a tombstone at its feet lies broken in half, and the houses on either aide are a heap of ruins. Yet, neither cross nor figure has been touched. I looked closely and could not see even one bullet hole. Surely if the Almighty can protect the image of His Son, it will be no great difficulty to guard His priest also, as indeed He has done in a wonderful way."

Father Doyle was curé of this parish of trenches, his church being his dugout situated in the support trench near the doctor's dressing station. He also humorously included innumerable rats, insects, and vermin among his parishioners! Of his men, he was really proud.

"Our poor lads are just grand," he says. "They curse like troopers all the day, they give the Germans hell, purgatory, and heaven all combined at night, and next morning come kneeling in the mud for Mass and Holy Communion when they get a chance. They beam all over with genuine pleasure when their Padre comes past their dugout or meets them in the trench."

It may be added that he was often in the front trench to encourage and bless the rain-sodden, mud-stained, weary watchers. On Easter Sunday, 23 April, he celebrated his first Mass in the trenches. He had quite a congregation, chiefly of officers, as the men were unable to leave their posts.

"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."

On the evening of Wednesday, 26 April, the Germans began a slight bombardment that was the prelude to a formidable attack. It was Father Doyle's first experience in a battle and proved to be almost his last. Having met an officer who, though only slightly scratched, was badly shaken by an exploding shell, Father Doyle brought him to his dugout, tended to him, and made him sleep in his own bunk. Later on when he himself tried to sleep, he found he could not do so as the night was cold and he had given up his own blanket. His subsequent adventures may be best given in the words of his own vivid narrative.

"About four o'clock the thought struck me that it would be a good thing to walk back to the village to warm myself and say an early Mass for the nuns, who usually have to wait hours for some chaplain to turn up. They have been very kind to me, and I was glad of this chance of doing this little service to them. The village is about two miles behind our trench, in such a position that one can leave cover with perfect safety and walk there across the fields. As I left the trench about 4:45, the sun was just rising. It was a perfect morning with a gentle breeze blowing. Now and again came the crack of a rifle, but all was unusually calm and still. Little did I think of the deadly tempest about to burst and hurry so many brave men into eternity. I had just reached a point half way between our trenches and the village when I heard behind me the deep boom of a German gun quickly followed by a dozen others. In a moment, our gunners replied and before I could realize what was taking place, the air was alive with shells. At first I thought it was just a bit of the usual "good-morning greeting" and that after ten minutes of "artillery strafe" all would be quiet once more. I soon saw this was a serious business, however, for gun after gun, and battery after battery, was rapidly coming into action, until at the lowest number, 500 guns were roaring all round me. It was a magnificent if terrifying sight. The ground fairly shook with the roar of the guns, for the "heavies" now had taken up the challenge, and all round the horizon I could see the clouds of smoke and dust from the bursting shells as both sides kept searching for their opponents' hidden cannon."

"There I stood in the very center of the battle; the one man of all the thousands engaged who was absolutely safe, for I was away from the trenches. There were no guns or troops near me to draw fire and, though thousands of shells went over my head, not even a splinter fell near me. I felt that the good God had quietly "dumped" me there till all danger had passed."

"After a while, seeing that this heavy shelling meant an attack of some kind, and that soon many a dying man would need my help, I turned round and made my way towards the ambulance station. As I approached, I noticed smoke from the bursting shells was hanging thickly over the trenches and was drifting towards me across the fields. For once, I said to myself, I am going to smell the smoke of real battle, and I stepped out quite envigorated. The next moment, I turned and was running back for my life—the Germans had started a poison-gas attack that I had mistaken for shell smoke and I had walked straight into it!"

"After running about 20 yards I stopped to see what was to be done, for I knew it was useless to try to escape by running. I saw (again providentially) I had struck the extreme edge of the gas and the wind was blowing it away, towards my left and a hundred yards in the opposite direction. I was safe."

WW I - GAS ATTACK AT LOOS

"I must confess, for a moment I was shocked, as a gas attack was the very last thing I was thinking about—in fact, we thought the Germans had given it up. Fortunately, too, I had not forgotten the old days of the chemistry room at Ratcliffe College and its "stink bottles," so I knew at the first whiff it was chlorine gas and time for this child to make tracks."

"However, I was not yet out of the wood. Even as I was congratulating myself on my good fortune, both right and left from where I stood, I saw the green wave of a second gas attack rolling towards me like some huge specter, stretching out its ghostly arms. As I saw it coming, my heart went out to God in one fervent act of gratitude for His goodness to me. As probably you know, we all carry a case slung over our shoulders containing 'smoke helmets,' to be used against a gas attack. That morning as I was leaving my dugout, I threw my helmet aside. I had a long walk before me, the helmet is a bit heavy on a hot day, and, as I said, German gas was most unlikely. So, I made up my mind to leave it behind. In view of what happened, it may appear imagination now, but a voice seemed to whisper loudly in my ear, 'Take your helmet with you. Don't leave without it.' I turned back and slung it over my shoulder. Surely, it was the warning voice of my guardian angel, for if I had not done so, you would never have had this letter."

"I wonder can you picture my feelings at this moment? Here was death in its most awful form sweeping down towards me. Thank God I had the one thing that could save me, but with a carelessness for which I ought to be scourged. I had never tried the helmet on and did not know if it was in working order. In theory, with the helmet on, I was absolutely safe, but it was an anxious moment waiting for the scorching test, and to make things more horrible, I was absolutely alone. Yet, I had the companionship of One who sustained me in the hour of trial and, kneeling down, I took the Pyx from my pocket and received the Blessed Eucharist as Viaticum. I had not a moment to spare and had just fixed my helmet when I was buried in a thick green fog of poison gas. In a few moments, my confidence returned, for the helmet worked perfectly and I found I was able to breathe without any ill effects from the gas."

"By the time I got down to the dressing-station, the guns had ceased fire, the gas was blown away, and the sun was shining in a cloudless sky. Already a stream of wounded was coming in and I soon had my hands full, when an urgent message reached me from the front trench. A poor fellow had been desperately wounded. A bullet had cut him like a knife across the stomach, with results you can best imagine. He was told he had only a few minutes to live, and asked if they could do anything for him. 'I have only one wish before I die,' he answered. 'Could you possibly get me Father Doyle? I'll go happy then.' It was hard work to reach him, as parts of the communication trench were knee deep in water and thick mud. Then I was misdirected and sent in the wrong direction, but I kept on praying I might be in time. At last, I found the dying man still breathing and conscious. The look of joy that lit up his face when I knelt beside him was reward enough for the effort I had made. I gave him Absolution and anointed him before he died. Occupied as I was, I did not notice that a third gas attack had begun. Before I could get my helmet out and on, I had swallowed a couple of mouthfuls, which did me no serious harm beyond making me feel rather sick and weak."

"As I made my way slowly up the trench, feeling altogether 'a poor thing,' I stumbled across a young officer who had been badly gassed. He had got his helmet on, but was coughing and choking in a terrible way. 'For God's sake,' he cried, 'help me tear off this helmet—I can't breathe, I'm dying.' I saw if I left him, the end would not be far. So catching hold of him, I half carried, half dragged him up the trench to the medical aid post. I shall never forget that ten minutes, it seemed hours. I seemed to have lost all my strength. Struggling with him to prevent him killing himself by tearing off his helmet made me forget almost how to breathe through mine. I was almost stifled, though safe from gas, while the perspiration poured from my forehead. I could do nothing but pray for help and set my teeth, for if I once let go, he was a dead man. Thank God, we both at last got to the aid post and I had the happiness of seeing him in the evening out of danger, though naturally still weak."

"Fortunately, this last attack was short and light, so I was able to take off my helmet and, after a cup of tea, was all right. The best proof I can give you of this lies in the fact that I have since put in three of the hardest days work of my life, which I could not possibly have done had I really been gassed, as its first effect is to leave one as helpless as a child."

Father Doyle made this last remark to relieve his father's anxiety. However, it was, to say the least, a meager summary of his heroic work and almost miraculous escape. A year later, he lifted the veil somewhat. "I have never told you," he then confessed, "the whole story of that memorable April

morning or the repetition of it the following day. I have never told you when I was lying on the stretcher going to 'peg out' as the doctor believed, God gave me back my strength and energy in a way that was nothing short of a miracle to help many a poor fellow die in peace and perhaps to open the gates of heaven to not a few."

"I had come through the three attacks without ill results, though having been unexpectedly caught by the last one. As I was anointing a dying man, I did not see the poisonous fumes coming. Thus, I had swallowed some of the gas before I could get my helmet on. It was nothing very serious, but left me rather 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 the 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 duck-boards or wooden flooring. It was impossible to do one's work with the gas helmet on, so, as I knelt down to absolve or anoint man after man for the greater part of that day, I had to inhale the chlorine fumes till I had nearly enough gas in my poor inside to inflate a German sausage balloon."

"I did not then know that when a man is gassed his only chance (and a poor one at that) is to lie 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. Then, he sat beside me for hours with a kindness I can never forget. He told me afterwards he was sure I was a 'gone coon,' but, at that moment, I did not care much. Then I fell asleep only to be rudely awakened at four the next morning 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? Before I reached the trenches, I had anointed a number of poor fellows who had struggled back after being gassed and then had fallen dying by the roadside."

"The harvest that day was a big one, for there had been bloody fighting all along the Front. Many a man died happy in the thought that the priest's hand had been raised in Absolution over his head and the Holy Oils anointing had given pardon to those senses that he had used to offend the Almighty. It was a long, hard day, a day of heartrending sights, a day with the consolation of good work done in spite of the

deadly fumes. 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 favors, nor has it been the last."

This was written a year later. In his first letter, while concealing the extreme risks he had incurred, he gave his father a brief consoling account of his two days' work amid the ghastly battlefield.

"On paper, every man with a helmet was as safe as I was from gas-poisoning. Now, it is evident many of the men despised the 'old German gas,' some did not bother putting on their helmets, others had torn them, and others (like myself) had thrown them aside or lost them. From early morning till late at night I worked my way from trench to trench single-handed the first day, with three regiments to look after, and could get no help. Many men died before I could reach them; others seemed just to live till I anointed them and were gone before I passed back. There they lay, scores of them (we lost 800, nearly all from gas) in the bottom of the trench, in every conceivable posture of human agony. The clothes were torn off their bodies in vain efforts to breathe; while from end to end of that valley of death 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 the tears splashed down on the patient suffering faces of my poor boys as I leant 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, sure I'm not afraid of death or anything else since I have seen you.' Don't you think, dear, father, that the little sacrifice made in coming out here has already been more than repaid? 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 fellow and perhaps to open the gates of Heaven for them."

After this terrible experience, 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 during that time, 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 remarked, "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.

During the comparative lull that followed this attack, Father Doyle was kept busy by the men, "scraping their kettles," as they expressed it. "I wish mine were half as clean as some of theirs," he adds. Thus, on Sunday, 14 May, between 0600 and 0700, the men went to Holy Communion. Once more, Father Doyle eulogizes his little flock. "One cannot help feeling proud of our Irish lads," he writes. "Everyone loves them—the French girls, naturally, that goes without saying, and the shopkeepers love them for their simplicity in paying about five times the real value of the goods they buy. Monsieur le Curé would hug them each and every one if he could, for he has been raking in the coin these days. Many a one put three and five-franc notes in the plate, to make up, I suppose, for the trouser-buttons of the knowing ones. Surely, our Blessed Lord loves them best of all for the simple unaffected piety that brings crowds of them at all hours of the day to visit Him in the Tabernacle. Need I add that the Padre himself has a warm corner in his heart for his boys, as I think they have for him, judging by their anxiety when the report spread that I had got knocked out in the gas attack. They are as proud as Punch to have the chaplain with them in the trenches. It is quite amusing to hear them point out my dugout to strangers as they go by. 'That's our priest,' with special stress on the 'our.'" For which, assuredly, the Fusiliers had good reason.

What did he think of it all? The following little description of another Crucifix will help show us where his thoughts lay.

"I paid a visit recently to another wonder of the war, the Church of Vermelles. Little remains of it now, for the town has been held in succession by the Germans, French, and ourselves, and every yard of ground was lost and won a dozen times. The church is just a heap of ruins: the roof has been burnt, the tower shot away, and the statues and Stations are smashed to dust. Yet, hanging still on one of the broken walls is a large crucifix absolutely untouched. The figure is beautiful, a work of art, and the face of Our Lord has an expression of sadness such as I have never seen before. The eyes are open, gazing as it were upon the scene of desolation and, though the wall upon which the crucifix hangs is riddled with bullet holes and shell splinters, the image is untouched save for one round bullet hole just through the heart. The whole thing may be only chance, but it is a striking sight and cannot fail to impress one and bring home the fact that, if God is scourging the world as it well deserves, He is not indifferent to the sorrows and sufferings of His children."

A few intimate letters written at this time give us a precious glimpse of Father Doyle's inner life. We are thus enabled to see a little of that inner soul world, so calm and undisturbed, so perfectly hidden beneath the multifarious activities and cheerful vigor of a military chaplain. He felt that his present life, so repellent to his natural self, was at once the fulfillment and the test of all his previous aspirations for the foreign missions and martyrdom. His experience seemed to him a purifying preparation for some great task, the consummation of all his striving and sacrifice.

"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 recently in the letters of Pere Libermann, which is consoling. He says that he found from long experience that God never filled a soul with an ardent and lasting 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 missioner, 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 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 Savior 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."

"I have seen very clearly since I came out here," he writes in a hurriedly penciled note on 16 April, "that Jesus wanted to teach me one lesson at least. I think the want of absolute submission to His will has been the cause of much I have suffered. He asked me to make the sacrifice of my life, but I was unwilling. Not that in any sense I fear death—would not heaven be a welcome exchange? Yet, knowing what I do about the state of the world, the millions to be saved, and how little He is known or loved or thought about, I feel it hard, very hard, to leave all that work there, and go to enjoy the happiness of His company. Then, too, my mind is full of plans for His glory and, perhaps more than

all, I know well that I have not done the work He gave me to do, that is, I have never fully lived the life He has so often asked for, and made clearly known to me. I was too ungenerous and cowardly. That life, to put it in a word, was to be one in which I should 'refuse Him no sacrifice He asked.' However, grace has won the day. I think I can say with truth that I have now no desire or wish except His. I have told Him He may do just as He pleases with me and take all, even my life. This has brought great peace and a sense of great security in the midst of danger, since I know I am in His hands. In return, He has made me see that without this absolute abandonment to His pleasure, without the breaking of my own will, a life of immolation as His victim is a farce. The 'perfect renunciation' may be easy, but 'without murmur or complaint' is the real test of the true lover."

Seen in its practical outcome of fearless and selfless service, this ideal of a life of immolation can be appreciated even by those who value holiness only by its direct social worth. It was no merely human ideal, however, but rather Father Doyle's constant union with our Lord that gave him strength and consolation. What he especially valued was the privilege of being a living Tabernacle, of always carrying the Blessed Sacrament around with him. To Father Doyle, this was not only a constant source of consolation, but it also enabled him to overcome his natural loathing for the scenes of strife and slaughter around him and to manifest an amazingly serene courage that he was really far from feeling. "I have been living in the front trenches for the last week," he says in another letter, "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 purifying process is going on in my soul and that 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 shortcut to holiness. I find however that, 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. I think, when this war is over (about twenty years hence), I shall become a hermit! I never felt so utterly sick of the world and worldlings. All this bustle and movement has wearied my soul beyond measure. I am longing for solitude, to be alone with Jesus, for He seems to fill every want in my life. All the same, as the days go by, I thank our Blessed Lord more and more for the grace of getting me here. Not exactly because of the consolation of helping so many poor fellows or because of the merit the hard life must bring with it, but because I feel this experience has influenced my whole future, which I cannot further explain except by saying that God has given me the grace of my life since I came."

"Then, there is also 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 favor alone would be worth going through twenty wars for! I feel ashamed at times that I do not profit more by His nearness, but I know He makes allowances for weak, inconstant nature and, even when I do not directly think of Him, He is silently working in my soul. Do you not think that Jesus must have done very much for Mary during the nine months she bore Him within her? I feel that He will do much, very much, for me too whilst I carry Him about with me."

Writing on 7 May, he lets an intimate correspondent clearly see the source of all his strength and courage.

"Sometimes God seems to leave me to my weakness and I tremble with fear," he confesses. "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 a short 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 that, as He knows, beats with love of Him."

With what wonderful literalness does this attitude reproduce the message of our Lord Himself: "I say to you, My friends: Be not afraid of them who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. . . . Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings and not one of them is forgotten before God? Yea, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke. 12.4).

The convent of Mazingarbe, reference to which was made earlier, did not long survive. "You will be sorry to hear," says Father Doyle in his letter of 22 May, "that I have lost the good nuns and my little chapel. I call it mine, as it was associated with so many stirring events in my life at the Front. I was on my way there on that famous Sunday morning when the shells miraculously stopped falling on the road I had to pass. I was going to the same little chapel when the bombardment and gas-attack of April 27 began. Further, several times I have said Mass at the altar that is now in fragments. A few mornings ago, a big shell hit the chapel, burst inside, and literally blew it to bits, not a brick was left standing on another. It was the most complete bit of destruction I have ever seen. I remember the poor nuns telling me that they had become so accustomed to the shelling that they did not bother taking shelter in the cellar. For some reason or other—God's providence over them no doubt—they had gone down to the lower

regions on that morning and, thus, escaped without a scratch. I am very sorry to lose them, for we had become great friends. More than once, they bound up my wounds, internal ones be it noted, pouring in hot rolls and strong coffee. I think I never met four pluckier women. They were sent away three times by the military authorities and came back three times. I should not be a bit surprised to find them some morning encamped once more on the ruins of their convent."

In the same letter, he announced that he had applied for a much needed leave of absence. "I do not think," he says, "in my life, that I ever looked forward to a holiday with such keenness before."

Though outwardly he was as joyous and happy as ever, much had told severely on Father Doyle. He had endured the nerve-racking, ear-splitting, ceaseless warfare; the constant stream of soldiers to be helped, shriven, anointed, or buried; the physical discomforts; the rats and the vermin; the intense cold and knee-deep slush followed by the aching glare of the chalk trenches; the poison gas working on his body, and the nauseating scenes of bloodshed working on his mind. He endured all this, quite apart from his self-imposed martyrdom of prayer and penance. His all too short holiday of ten days was soon over, however, and, once again, he was back in the trenches.

He was hardly back when a new adventure befell him. "It seems right," he tells his father, "that I should not keep from you this last mark of the good God's wonderful protection that has been so manifest during the past four months."

"I was standing in a trench, quite a long distance from the firing line, a spot almost as safe as Dalkey itself. I was 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 that Brother Fritz sends along from time to time, as no other came after it. We very soon became painfully aware that our visitor was heading for us and, 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 that 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."

"I cannot say what really took place in the next ten seconds. 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. 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, the side where 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. A moment before, I was standing on the very spot the shell fell and had just moved away a couple of paces. I did not think it was possible for one to be so near a high explosive and not be killed. Even now, I cannot account for my marvelous escape. In saying this, I am not quite truthful, for I have no doubt where the 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. However, as I walked through the 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."

Even a week's rest in billets, though a change from life in the trenches, meant no cessation of work or risk. It was a busy time for Father Doyle, as the men availed of the opportunity for Confession and Holy Communion. Even here, well behind the firing line, danger was not absent, for the German long-range guns often sent unwelcome visitors.

"One shell hit this house," he said. "It came slick through the brick wall into my poor bedroom of all places. Very shabby, I call it, missed my bed by just an inch, took a dive through the floor into the room below, and, having amused itself with the furniture, coolly waltzed out through the opposite wall without condescending to burst, in indignation, I suppose, because I was not there. No one was hurt and not much harm done. I have put the head of my bed in the hole in the wall, for it is a point of honor among shells not to come twice through the same spot. In consequence, I sleep securely." "With all these prayers going on," he added to reassure those at home, "a fellow has no chance of getting hit. It's not fair, I think!"

At any rate, it was not Father Doyle's fault that he was not hit, for when there was question of ministering to his men, he was absolutely heedless of danger. Further proof of this is unnecessary, but one or two more instances occurring at this time (July 1916) may be recorded. He wanted to go quickly to a certain village that his men were holding. The journey by "the underground," otherwise known as "Trench Street," would take a couple

of hours, whereas a fifteen-minute bicycle ride over the high road would bring him to the village. That shorter route, however, was in full view of the German trenches, which were quite near, and no one ever ventured along it in daylight. Father Doyle was the exception. He cycled the whole way without one bullet being fired. Moreover, he had to slacken speed several times to avoid the shell holes with which the road was pitted and he had to dismount once to pick up his bicycle pump, which had bounced off the carrier.

"Judging by some remarks that have reached me since," he concludes, "people cannot make up their minds whether I am a hero or a fool—I vote for the second. However, they cannot understand what the salvation of even one soul means to a priest. So I just laugh and go my way, happy in the thought that I was in time."

"My second adventure, if I may so style it (says Father Doyle) was of a different kind. Preparations had been made to blow up a gigantic mine sunk under the German trenches, while at the same time our men were to make a raid or night attack on the enemy. The fixed hour was eleven o'clock, so shortly after ten I made my way up to the firing fine, where the attacking party was waiting. The men were grouped in two bodies, one on either side of the mine, waiting for the explosion so they could rush over the parapet and seize the newly-formed mine-crater."

"As I came along the trench I could hear the men whisper, 'Here's the priest.' I also noticed that the faces that a moment before had been marked with the awful strain of waiting, now lit up with pleasure. As I gave the Absolution and the blessing of God on their work, I could not help thinking how many a poor fellow would soon be stretched lifeless a few paces from where he stood. Though I should have been hardened by that time, I found it difficult to choke down the sadness that filled my heart. 'God bless you, Father, we're ready now,' was reward enough for facing the danger, since every man realized that each moment was full of dreadful possibilities."

"It was well known that the Germans were countermining and, if they got wind of our intention, they would certainly try to explode their mine before we had the chance to explode it. It was strange walking along, knowing that at any moment you might find yourself sailing skywards, wafted by the gentle breath of four or five tons of explosive. Fortunately, nothing happened, but the moments were running out, so I hurried down the communication trench to the dressing-station that was located in a dugout about a hundred yards away. There, I intended to wait for the wounded to be brought in."

"On the stroke of eleven, I climbed up the parapet and out of the trench. As I did so, there was a mighty roar in the bowels of the earth; the ground trembled, rocked, and quivered; and a huge column of clay and stones was shot hundreds of feet in the air.

As the earth opened, dense clouds of smoke and flames burst out, an awful and never-to-be-forgotten sight. God help the poor fellows, even though they were our enemies, who were caught in that inferno and buried alive or blown to bits."

"For a second, there was a lull. Then, it seemed as if hell were let loose. Our artillery was in the rear and standing ready, waiting for the signal. The moment the roar of the explosion was heard, every gun opened fire with a deafening crash. With a yell that must have terrified the enemy, our men were over the parapet, up the side of the crater, and digging themselves in for their lives. Under cover of our guns, the raiding party had raced for the enemy's trench, fought their way in, and fought their way back out again, as our object was not to gain ground."

At this stage, the German guns had come into action and Father Doyle retired to the dugout and, soon, he was busy with the wounded and dying.

"It was nearly four," he concludes, "when I got back to my cellar, tired I must confess, and sad at heart after the scenes I had just witnessed. I was, however, happy and thankful to God that I had the chance to speed many a brave fellow on his way to eternity."

On this occasion, as on others, Father Doyle was able to show kindness to a prisoner.

"One German prisoner had been slightly wounded in a couple of places and was carried in," he writes. "Poor beggar, he was certain his last hour had come. He was only a young lad and his teeth chattered with fear. I tried to get him to take a drink but he pushed it away, thinking, I suppose, it was poison. My knowledge of German is limited to 'der Hund' but a repetition of this word only increased his terror and convinced him we had sent for the dogs of war to tear him to pieces. By degrees, I calmed him and (with the help of a few French, Flemish, and Latin words) found out that he was a Bavarian and a Catholic. I gave him a rosary, which he devoutly kissed and hung round his neck. Then, evidently reassured that no harm would come to him with a priest by his side, he fell asleep. Next morning he asked to see the "Pastor" and seemed anxious to thank me for the little I had been able to do for him."

Still, here is another adventure. On the afternoon of 15 August 1916, the men were out of the trenches and most were engaged in athletic sports in a field outside the village of Mazingarbe. Suddenly, the Germans began shelling the village. Needless to say, Father Doyle at once started for the scene of danger.

"August 15 has always been a day of many graces for me," writes Father Doyle. "It is the anniversary of my consecration to

Mary and of my vows in the Society. This particular August 15 very nearly made me surpass our Lady herself by sending me higher up than she ever got in her life."

"Knowing a good number of my boys were about (he writes), I hurried there as quickly as I could, making my way up the long narrow street. The shells were all coming in one direction, across the road, not down it, so, by keeping close to the houses on the shady side there was little danger. There were, however, occasional thrills of excitement—enough to satisfy Don Quixote himself. I reached the village cross roads in time to lift up the poor sentry, who had been badly hit. With the help of a couple of men, we carried him to the side of the road. He was unconscious, but I gave him Absolution and was halfway through the anointing when, with a scream and a roar that made our hearts jump, a shell whizzed over our heads and crashed into the wall directly opposite on the other side of the street, covering us with brick-dust and dirt. Bits of shrapnel landed thud, thud, on the ground and against the wall around us, but neither the men nor I were touched."

"Begorra, Father, that was a near one, anyhow," said one of them, as he brushed the dust off his tunic, and started to fill his pipe. It was well we had your Reverence with us when Jerry sent that one across."

"You must not thank me, boys," I said, "don't you know it is our Lady's feast and Mary had her mantle spread over us to save us from all harm?"

"True for you, Father," came the answer.

"But I could see by their faces that they were by no means convinced that I had not worked the miracle."

"Though it was 15 August, I was taking no risks, especially with this reputation to maintain! So, the poor boy being dead, I bundled the rest of them down a cellar out of harm's way, and started off again. Heavy as the shelling was, little damage was done, thanks to the fact that the sports had emptied the village. One man was beyond my aid, a few others were slightly wounded, and that was all. As I came round the corner of the Church, I met four of my boys calmly strolling along in the middle of the street as if they were walking on Kingstown pier. I will not record what I said, but my words, helped by the opportune arrival of an unpleasantly near H.E. (High Explosive), had the desired effect and we all took cover in the church. It was only then that I realized my mistake, for it soon became evident that the Germans were firing at the church itself. One after another, the shells came in rapid succession, first on one side and then on the other, dropping in front and behind the building, which was a target with its tall, white tower. It was madness to go out and I do not think the men, some score of them, knew of their danger, nor did I tell them. But 'man of little faith' that I was, I cast anxious eyes at the roof and wished it were stronger, even

though Mary's mantle was stretched over it, for I thought perhaps there might be a hole in the garment that she had forgotten to patch. All's well that ends well, they say. Not a shot hit the church, though the houses and road got it hot. Our fiery ordeal ended at last, safely and happily for all of us. And August 15, 1916, went down on my list as another day of special grace and favor at Mary's hands."

Quite apart from these special escapes, Father Doyle's ordinary days were filled with thrilling dangers, and exhausting toil.

"I often congratulate myself," he says, "on my good fortune in being appointed to the Irish Brigade, more especially as the last vacancy fell to me. The vast majority of the chaplains at the Front seldom see anything more dangerous than the shell of an egg of doubtful age. They are doing splendid work along the lines of communication, in the hospitals, or at the base. Even those who are attached to non-Catholic Divisions have little time to get to the trenches, their men are so scattered, but we with the Irish Regiments live in the thick of it. We share the hardships and dangers with our men and, if we have less polish on our boots and belts than other spruce padres, let us hope we have something more to our bank account in a better world."

Almost before daybreak, Father Doyle was up and had the happiness of offering the Holy Sacrifice. In August 1916, he was able to fit up a room in a deserted house, and here from time to time he was able to celebrate Mass for the men, calling it, "a privilege that the poor fellows appreciate." In one corner were the cellar steps down which, when occasion required, priest and congregation vanished with marvelous haste. Once a shell came through the wall and fell on the floor without bursting, covering the little altar with bricks and plaster. When in the trenches, Father Doyle celebrated Mass in his dugout. The mornings were spent in visits to five dressing-stations in various parts of the trenches, saying some of his Office, hearing Confessions, or chatting with the men.

"Quite often," he says, "an officer will drop in for a friendly controversial talk, resulting, thank God, in much good. There is no doubt that the faith and sincere piety of our men have made an immense impression on non-Catholics and have made them anxious to know more about the true Church."

"In the afternoon," he continues, "I make a tour of the front-line trenches. To be candid, it is a part of my work that I do not like. We chaplains are not bound to go into the firing line. In fact, we are not supposed to do so, but the officers welcome us warmly, as a chat and a cheery word bucks the men up so much. It is not that the danger is very great. In fact, I think it is much less than in other parts of the trenches because the track is built in a zigzag. Thus, you

are perfectly safe, in a 'bay' of sorts, owing to the walls of clay on either side, unless a shell fell on the very spot where you are standing. Yet, it is the uncanny feeling that comes over one, knowing that the enemy is only thirty yards away, which makes the trip unpleasant. I have often come to a 'bay' blown in shortly before by a shell from a mortar (a gentleman weighing 200 lbs). You can see him coming in the air and when you do, well, you slip into the next 'bay' and try to feel as small as you can. I have had to crawl past a gap in the trench, but I can honestly say I have never had anything approaching a near shave. The Lord does not forget His goats when He is minding His sheep."

Night did not mean rest for Father Doyle for it was then that he usually conducted burials. Moreover, as most of the ordinary fighting was done at night, it was then that he was most liable to "sick calls."

"Often the morning light is breaking," he says, "before I get the chance of lying down. For example, the other night I had to bury one man at 11:30 and a second man after 2 a.m. and I had barely turned in when word came that one of my poor boys had his leg shot off in a distant part of the trench. I was directed the wrong way, which added an extra half-hour to my walk and a great deal to my anxiety lest the lad should be dead. Thank God, he was alive when I reached him, a comfort surely to us both."

WW I - FRONT – DUGOUT

"Let me introduce you to my house and home," he writes to his father. "It is nothing very grand, just a hole dug in the side of the trench, the entrance made as small as possible to keep out stray splinters of shell, not to speak of the cool night breezes, for my house does not boast of doors or windows. I am fortunate, however, in that I am just able to stand upright, though at times I forget my surroundings and bang my head against the beams of the roof. At present, I have 972 bruises on various parts of my skull but am expecting to have more later on. The German officer who lived here before my arrival was evidently a man of taste. He put planks on the floor and lined the walls with boards, making it very dry and comfortable, for which I bless the dear man; but it makes my 'appy 'ome'' look like a respectable packing case. In one corner is my bed (?), just a couple of planks raised off the ground, not too soft, but welcome as any couch of down to a dead-tired man."

"I am never lonely at night, for I have many visitors—a stray dog, a trench cat or two who stroll in to say "bon jour," and, of course, my never-failing friends the mice and

rats. I never knew till I came out here that rats sing! It is a fact. They have built their nests behind the boards of my mansion walls—which, I may add, does not add to the sweetness of my abode—and many a time I have heard them singing to one another for ever so long, quite a sweet musical note. From time to time, they poke their heads out and look at me, as much as to say, 'You are a queer sort of rat, you are.'"

"The rats and fleas have recently been making things uncommonly lively," he wrote a little later, referring to his period in Loos.

"My last dugout was evidently their council chamber, and they resented my intrusion. They literally danced on me. I woke up the first night to find King Rat calmly sleeping on my feet. Before I quite realized it, he ran along my legs and over my face; a procedure that I do not recommend, as the sensation is quite horrible. I gave one yell, which must have startled the Germans for miles round. Twice the same night I woke up again with one of his wives sitting on my head, which is about the limit, I think. I am not exaggerating or dreaming. As I jerked my head, I heard their ladyships go plop against the wall. I hope the King lost a couple of his wives that night; for, without being uncharitable, he seems, like King Solomon to have a warm corner in his heart for the ladies. I know our Lord says to turn the other cheek; but I know no text saying we should be walked on by rats."

He had other companions. "We have fleas by the million," he writes, "and innumerable flies that eat the jam off your bread before you can get it into your mouth. We have wondrous and varied smells not to speak of other unmentionable things." He also alludes to "scratches, many and deep, made by the loving embraces of the 'Misskitties,' (mosquitoes) who are absolutely shameless in this part of the world."

Amid all these hardships, the severity of which we must not be blinded to by Father Doyle's humorous descriptions, he was consoled by the thought of how much his presence and ministrations meant to the poor fellows around him.

"Though the life is at times rough and hard enough (at least the floor feels so at night), there are many consolations for a priest, not the least of which is the number of converts, both officers and men, coming into the Church. Many of them had never been in contact with Catholics before and knew nothing about the grandeur and beauty of our religion. Above all, many were immensely impressed by what the Catholic priests, of all the chaplains at the Front, are able to do for their men, both living and dying. It is an admitted fact, that the Irish Catholic soldier is the

bravest and best man in a fight, but few know he draws that courage from the strong Faith with which he is filled and the help that comes from the exercise of his religion."

Among his own flock, of course, he had a few straying sheep, and he has some amusing stories to tell concerning their capture.

"One of the men not too famous himself for piety," he writes, "brought in a black sheep to Confession. He was a brawny boy, and I fancy he helped his argument with a little physical force. Seeing a good opportunity for landing another fish, I said to him, 'What about yourself, were you with a priest recently?' 'Oh, Father,' he answered, 'I'm all right, I was at my duty three years ago.' I believe the poor chap was really sincere; but I am glad to say he is 'righter' now."

He was naturally solicitous for his men, especially as the months dragged on with no intermission save a few brief days spent in reserve amid the ruins of a village behind the lines. It was customary for a division that had been in the line for three months to get back to the base for a month's rest. The other divisions round the Sixteenth went back and returned, but the Irishmen were now six months without relief.

"I suppose," writes Father Doyle, "it is a compliment to the fighting qualities of the 16th Division, for we are holding the most critical sector of the line; but it is a compliment all of us would willingly forgo."

"As a matter of fact," he adds, "the very night we handed over a certain portion of the Front to another regiment, the Germans—how did they know of the change?—came over and captured the trenches. So we had to go back again."

Still, the unfortunate Irishmen could not be kept in the trenches forever. On 25 August, the welcome order came to move to the rear. Sudden and secret as the order was, the Germans knew all about it, and put up a board with the message, "Good-bye, 16th Division, we shall give it hot to the English when they come." The Irish did their work well in Loos. In those six months, they did not lose a trench or a yard of ground. Out of the Division of 20,000, over 15,000 men (including, of course, many sick and slightly wounded) had passed through the doctor's hands.

They went back through Amiens to the rear, away from the sounds and sights of war. These long marches, made more trying by official incompetence, were exhausting. As usual, Father Doyle was where his Master would have been, following the Ignatian ideal of *mecum laborare* in the *Kingdom of Christ*.

"The Officers, from Captain up," he writes, "have horses; but I prefer to shoulder my pack and foot it with my boys, for I know they like it, and besides I don't see why I should not share a little of their hardship."

Incidentally, we learn that he had been carrying a young lad's equipment in addition to his own, all day without dinner or supper. It is clear that the saints are incorrigibly "imprudent."

The men of the 16th Division were under the impression that, after having done so much more than their share, they were making their way steadily towards the place appointed for their well-deserved rest. As a matter of fact, many of these brave fellows were never to enjoy that promised time of quiet on this earth, for their road was leading them to the battlefield of the Somme.

WW I - ROAD TO SOMME

A few months later Father Doyle recounts "two stories about our Irish lads at the Somme, which prove once again there are no soldiers in the world like them. They have all the dash and go of the hot-blooded Celtic race, the courage of lions, and that strong deep faith that makes them see the hand of God in everything, even their own death. During the bombardment of Ginchy—the most intense artillery preparation, it is said, of the whole war—one Paddy was seen sitting calmly in a shell-hole, smoking his pipe and sewing a button on his trousers, regardless of the fact that bullets and shells were falling like hail all round him! Another lad was half-way through a tin of bully beef, when the order came to 'go over the top' and take the town. As he charged up the slope of that awful inferno—I saw it, and even now cannot understand how anyone got through alive—he wired into that beef till the last scrap was gone, then flung away the tin, unslung his rifle and bayonet, and made for Berlin in track of the fleeing Germans. They are just grand, these brave boys of mine; it would be hard indeed not to love them. One of them told me yesterday in great confidence that he was not sixteen yet and he has already been through a year of hard fighting. No wonder the angry German officer called the 16th Division 'a pack of devils.'"

Father Doyle declared, "The 16th Division, weak in numbers as it was, has covered itself with glory. Our boys fought as only Irish lads can do. They took, by a splendid dashing charge, two villages that had beaten off all previous attacks, thus making an opening for the big things that are sure to follow now. The price was a heavy one, and I am left to mourn the loss of scores of my poor boys and many a good friend, with just this consolation: I know my presence was a help and a comfort. Every man was well prepared to meet his Maker when he fell."

The religious spirit of his men is shown by the pride and devotion with which they received a beautiful handmade flag, sent by a nun to Father Doyle, which arrived the very night they left for the Somme front.

"On one side," writes Father Doyle, "is a large picture of the Sacred Heart and on the other the name of the brigade and regiment, with O'Neill's war-cry, 'Ave Maria.' The men are immensely proud of it, and feel it is a sign of the protection of God and of His Blessed Mother, for of all the twelve Irish regiments in action at the Somme, the 8th Fusiliers had by far the smallest casualties."

This letter had been written from Bray, near Albert, on the river Somme, where there was a huge concentration of French and British forces. Each morning Father Doyle said Mass in the open and gave Holy Communion to hundreds of the men.

"I wish you could have seen them," he writes, "kneeling there before the whole camp, recollected and prayerful—a grand profession, surely, of the faith that is in them. More than one non-Catholic was touched by it; and it made many a one, I am sure, turn to God in the hour of need."

On the evening of Sunday, 3 September, just as they were sitting down to dinner, spread on a pile of empty shell boxes, urgent orders reached the 16th Division to march in ten minutes.

"There was only time," says Father Doyle, "to grab a slice of bread and hack off a piece of meat before rushing to get one's kit. As luck would have it, I had had nothing to eat since the morning and was famished, but there was nothing for it but to tighten one's belt and look happy."

There are occasions when even the world can appreciate Jesuit obedience! After a couple of hours' tramp, a halt was called, and an order came to stack all impediments (kits, packs, blankets, etc.) by the side of the road. Father Doyle, it is almost needless to say, held on to his Mass things, though to his great sorrow, he was unable to offer the Holy Sacrifice for five days—"the biggest privation of the whole campaign."

The night was spent sitting on the ground without covering or blankets. The next morning there was a short march over the brow of a hill and down into a valley still nearer to the front line. It was a great change from the trench life of the past six months. At Loos, one never saw a soul on the ground for days and all guns were carefully hidden. Here, scores and hundreds of cannon of all shapes and sizes stood out boldly in the fields and "roared as if they had swallowed a dish of uncooked shells." Amid this infernal din and never-ending roar and crash of bursting shells,

men and horses moved about as if there were no war. In this valley of death, Father Doyle's men had their first casualties, and he himself had a very narrow escape, which is best described, in his own words.

"I was standing about 100 yards away watching a party of my men crossing the valley. I saw the earth under their feet open, and all twenty men disappear in a cloud of smoke while a column of stones and clay was shot a couple of hundred feet into the air. By the merest chance, a big German shell had landed in the middle of the party. I rushed down the slope, getting a most unmerciful 'whack' between the shoulders, probably from a falling stone, as it did not wound me, but it was no time to think of one's safety. I gave them all a General Absolution, scraped the clay from the faces of a couple of buried men who were not wounded, and then anointed as many of the poor lads as I could reach. Two of them had no faces to anoint and others were ten feet under the clay, but a few were still living. By this time, half a dozen volunteers had run up, and were digging the buried men out. War may be horrible, but it certainly brings out the best side of a man's character. Over and over again, I have seen men risking their lives to help or save a comrade, and these brave fellows knew the risk they were taking, for, when a German shell falls in a certain place, you clear as quickly as you can, since several more are pretty certain to land close. It was a case of duty for me, but real courage for them. We dug like demons for our lads' lives and our own. To tell the truth, every few minutes another 'iron pill' from a Krupp gun would come tearing down the valley, making our very hearts leap into our mouths. More than once we were well sprinkled with clay and stone, but the cup-of-cold-water promise was well kept, and not one of the party received a scratch. We got three buried men out alive, not much the worse for their trying experience. Yet, so thoroughly had the shell done its work that there was not a single wounded man in the rest of the party—all had gone to a better land. As I walked back, I nearly shared the fate of my boys, but somehow escaped again and pulled out two more lads who were buried only up to the waist and uninjured. Meanwhile the regiment had been ordered back to a safer position on the hill, and we are able to breathe once more."

WW I - CRATER FROM BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The men's resting-place that night consisted of some open shell-holes.

"To make matters worse," writes Father Doyle, "we were posted fifteen yards in front of two batteries of field-guns. On our right a little further off were half a dozen huge sixty-pounders; not once during the whole night did these guns cease firing, making the ground tremble and rock like a small earthquake, till I thought my head would surely crack in two with the ear-splitting crashes. Shells, as one soon learns, have an unpleasant trick of bursting prematurely as they leave the muzzle of the gun. In the next shell-hole lay the body of one of our men who had been killed in this way. The prospect of a night spent in this dangerous position was not a pleasant one. A soldier has to go and stay where he is sent; but to move would have made little difference, for, dodge as you might, you could never get out of the line of fire of the innumerable batteries all round. Many a time have I seen the earth open in front and around me, ploughed up by bits of our own shells, which helped to make things more lively still."

"Rain was falling in torrents as we prepared to go to bed in our shell-hole. Seated on a bog in the bottom of the hole for protection against our guns, huddled together for warmth, our feet in a pool, we watched the water trickle down the sides, and wondered how long it would take to wash us out. I have spent many more pleasant nights in my life, but never a more uncomfortable one—drenched by the falling rain that persisted in running down my neck, ravenous enough to eat a live German, and so tired and weary that the roar of the guns failed to keep me awake. I could not help thinking of Him who often had nowhere to lay His head, and it helped me to resemble Him a little. Providence was good to us for, after some time, a tarpaulin was found—stolen, I am afraid—that we stretched over our cave. So, we bailed out the water, and settled down for a night of 'Shivery O.' Strange to say, I am not one bit the worse for this trying experience and others like it, nor did I even get a cold."

At last came the expected order to advance at once and hold the front line, the part assigned being Leuze Wood, the scene of much desperate fighting. Father Doyle is left to describe the journey and the scene.

"The first part of our journey lay through a narrow trench, the floor of which consisted of deep thick mud, and the bodies of dead men trodden under foot. It was horrible beyond description, but there was no help for it and, on the half-rotten corpses of our own brave men, we marched in silence, everyone busy with his own thoughts. I shall spare you the gruesome details, but you can picture one's sensations as one felt the ground yield under one's foot, and one sank down through the body of some poor fellow."

"Half an hour of this brought us out on the open into the middle of the battlefield of some days previous. The wounded, at least I hope, had all been removed, but the

dead lay there stiff and stark, with open staring eyes, just as they had fallen. Good God, such a sight! I had tried to prepare myself for this, but all I had read or pictured gave me little idea of the reality. Some lay as if they were sleeping quietly, others had died in agony, or had had the life crushed out of them by mortal fear, while the whole ground, every foot of it, was littered with heads or limbs, or pieces of torn human bodies. A British and a German soldier laid in the bottom of one hole, locked in a deadly embrace. Neither had any weapon, but they had fought on to the bitter end. Two others seemed to have realized that the horrible struggle was none of their making, and that they were both children of the same God. They had died hand-in-hand praying for and forgiving one another. A third face caught my eye, a tall, strikingly handsome young German, not more, I should say, than eighteen. He lay there calm and peaceful, with a smile of happiness on his face, as if he had had a glimpse of Heaven before he died. Ah, if only his poor mother could have seen her boy, it would have soothed the pain of her broken heart."

"We pushed on rapidly through that charnel-house, for the stench was fearful, till we stumbled across a sunken road. The retreating Germans had evidently made a desperate last stand here but had been caught by our artillery fire. The dead lay in piles, the blue-grey uniforms broken by many a khaki-clad body. I saw the ruins of what was evidently the dressing-station, judging by the number of bandaged men, but a shell had found them out even here, and swept them all into the net of death."

"A halt for a few minutes gave me the opportunity I was waiting for. I hurried along from group to group and, as I did, the men fell on their knees to receive Absolution. I offered a few words to give them courage, for no man knew if he would return alive. A 'God bless and protect you, boys,' and I passed on to the next company. As I did, a soldier stepped out of the ranks, caught me by the hand, and said, 'I am not a Catholic, sir, but I want to thank you for that beautiful prayer.' The regiments moved on to the wood, while the doctor and I took up our positions in the dressing-station to wait for the wounded. Our dressing-station dugout was on the hill facing Leuze Wood, and had been in German occupation the previous afternoon."

"To give you an idea of my position: from where I stood, the ground sloped down steeply into a narrow valley, while on the opposite hill lay the wood, half of which the Fusiliers were holding with the Germans occupying the rest. The distance across was so short I could easily follow the movements of our men without a glass."

"Fighting was going on all round, so I was kept busy, but all the time my thoughts and my heart were with my poor boys in the wood opposite. They had reached the wood safely, but the Germans somehow had worked round the sides and temporarily cut them off. No food or water could be sent

up, while ten slightly-wounded men who tried to come back were shot down, one after another. To make matters worse, our own artillery began to shell them, inflicting heavy losses. Though repeated messages were sent back to the artillery, the shelling continued for a long time. It appears the guns had fired so much that they were becoming worn out, making the shells fall 300 yards short."

"Under these circumstances it would be madness to try and reach the wood, but my heart bled for the wounded and dying lying there alone. When dusk came, I made up my mind to try to creep through the valley, especially as the fire had slackened very much. Once again, the Providence of God watched over me. As I was setting out, I met a sergeant who argued the point with me. 'You will only run a great risk and can do little good down there in the wood, Father,' he said. 'Wait till night comes and then we shall be able to bring all the wounded up here. Don't forget that, though we have plenty of officers to spare, we have only one priest to look after us.' The poor fellow was so much in earnest I decided to wait a little at least. It was well I did so, for shortly afterwards the Germans opened a terrific bombardment and launched a counter-attack on the wood."

Unfortunately, Father Doyle gives no further details of his experiences except a brief account of Saturday, 9 September, in a letter dated 11 October, he described a Mass for the Dead that he celebrated at the Somme, apparently on that Saturday morning.

"By cutting a piece out of the side of the trench," he says, "I was just able to stand in front of my tiny altar, a biscuit box supported on two German bayonets. God's angels, no doubt, were hovering overhead, but so were the shells, hundreds of them, and I was a little afraid that when the earth shook with the crash of the guns, the chalice might be overturned. Round about me on every side was the biggest congregation I ever had. Behind the altar, on either side, and in front, row after row, sometimes crowding one upon the other, but all quiet and silent, as if they were straining their ears to catch every syllable of that tremendous act of Sacrifice; but every man was dead! Some had lain there for a week, and were foul and horrible to look at, with faces black and green. Others had only just fallen, and seemed rather sleeping than dead, but there they lay, for none had time to bury them, brave fellows every one, friend and foe alike, while I held in my unworthy hands the God of Battles, their Creator and their Judge, and prayed Him to give rest to their souls."

It was arranged that, on 9 September, the 16th Division should storm Ginchy, a strong village against which previous English attacks had failed. The 8th Fusiliers, having lost so many officers, were held in reserve. From seven in the morning till five in the evening the guns played on Ginchy.

"Shortly before five," writes Father Doyle, "I went up to the hill in front of the town and was just in time to see our men leap from their trenches and dart up the slope, only to be met by a storm of bullets from concealed machine guns. It was my first real view of a battle at close quarters, an experience not easily forgotten. Almost simultaneously all our guns, big and little, opened a terrific barrage behind the village, to prevent the enemy bringing up reinforcements, and in half a minute the scene was hidden by the smoke of thousands of bursting shells, British and German. The wild rush of our Irish lads swept the Germans away like chaff. The first line of them went clean through the village and out the other side. Were it not for the officers, acting under orders, they would certainly be in Berlin by this time! Meanwhile the supports had cleared the cellars and dugouts of their defenders. The town was ours and all was well. At the same time, a feeling of uneasiness was about. Rumor said some other part of the line had failed to advance, the Germans were breaking through, etc. One thing was certain, the guns had not ceased. Something was not going well."

At about nine o'clock the Fusiliers were getting ready to be relieved by another regiment, but one further experience was to be theirs. There came an urgent order to hurry up to the Front.

"To my dying day," says Father Doyle, "I shall never forget that half-hour, as we pushed across the open, our only light the flash of bursting shells, tripping over barbed wire, stumbling and walking on the dead, expecting every moment to be blown into Eternity. We were halted in a trench at the rear of the village, and there till four in the morning we lay on the ground listening to the roar of the guns and the scream of the shells flying overhead, not knowing if the next moment might not be our last. Fortunately, we were not called upon to attack and our casualties were very slight. Probably because the terrible strain of the past week was beginning to tell or the Lord wished to give me a little merit by suffering more, the agony, fear, and suspense of those six hours seemed to surpass the whole of the seven days."

"We were relieved on 10 September at four o'clock Sunday morning and crawled back (I can use no other word) to the camp in the rear. My feet, perhaps, are the most painful of all, as we are not allowed to remove our boots even at night. Otherwise, I am really well, thank God, and a few days' good rest will make me better than ever. At present we march one day and rest the next, but I do not know where."

The opening sentences of the letter that Father Doyle wrote to his father on 11 September 1916 sufficiently indicate the terrible nature of the ordeal he and his boys had been through.

"I have been through the most terrible experience of my whole life, in comparison with which all that I have witnessed or suffered since my arrival in France seems of little consequence. It was a time of such awful horror that I believe if the good God had not helped me powerfully by His grace, I could never have endured it. To sum up, for the past week, I have been living literally in hell, amid sights and scenes and dangers enough to test the courage of the bravest. Through it all, my confidence and trust in our Blessed Lord's protection never wavered, for I felt that somehow, even if it needed a miracle, He would bring me safe through the furnace of tribulation. I was hit three times, on the last occasion by a piece of shell big enough to have taken off half my leg. Wonderful to relate, I did not receive a wound or scratch—there is some advantage, you see, in having a good thick skin! As you can imagine, I am pretty well worn out and exhausted, rather shaken by the terrific strain of those days and nights without any real sleep or repose, with nerves tingling, ever on the jump, like the rest of us, but it is all over now. We are well behind the firing-line on our way at last for a good long rest, which report says will be enjoyed close to the sea."

On 23 September, Father Doyle wrote to his father, "Life in the army is a life of delightful and unexpected surprises. You are told that you are going to some large town. At once visions of comfortable quarters, with perhaps the luxury of a real bed, loom up before you. You reach the town, only to find that you do not stay there, but have to tramp out into the open country and fight for a corner in some ancient barn. You hear that this journey is to be done by rail, but nothing is said about a ten-mile march before and after reaching the stations. While the crowning joy of all is to count on a month's rest and then find yourself back in the trenches within a week. All these pleasant surprises have been mine recently."

"We had a few very pleasant restful days in the place from which I last wrote, a delightful spot on the banks of a wooded river. Since then, we have been on the move by rail, motor lorries, and 'shanks mare,' till we found ourselves in Normandy, where the boys had the time of their lives among the apple orchards. On once more, over the frontier and into a country not unknown to both of us. There, we have settled down to work again, but in almost the quietest part of the line, a striking contrast to our stirring times at Loos."

Thus, once more, the men of the 16th Division were defrauded of their month's rest so long overdue. They were thankful to have at least a quiet section of the line in Belgium.

"If Loos was hell," says Father Doyle, "this place is heaven. To begin with, there is scarcely any shelling even on the front line, with the result that for days we have not a single casualty. Then, the country is extremely pretty, well wooded, and undulating so, even close up to the firing line, one can walk about in the fields with perfect

safety. This sense of security and freedom, with green hedges and trees all round, makes life quite a different thing. At Loos, and more so at the Somme, scarce a vestige of vegetation remains. Long ago, every leaf and twig was torn from the trees by the rush of the passing shells, the wind of which would carry you off your feet. What once were woods are now a few gaunt naked poles still standing in the midst of smashed boughs and splintered trees, while the smoke and poisonous vapors from millions of shells have killed and blasted the grass and shrubs, the result being a vast arid plain of desolation. You can therefore imagine our relief to find ourselves walking through green fields and along hedgerows covered with blackberries, trying to persuade ourselves that a war is really going on, and that the enemy is just beyond the neighboring hill."

WW I – THE SOMME BATTLEGROUND

"On Sundays," he continues, "I am able to gather a good number of the men together for Mass, under cover of the trees, as there is danger otherwise of a bomb or two from a passing enemy aeroplane. I need not tell you what a pleasure it is for them."

Here, in this relatively quiet corner of Belgium, Father Doyle went through the ordinary chaplain's work until early in November when he was able to come home on a week's leave of absence.

Some quotations from letters written at this time to a few intimate friends and relatives will help to give us a glimpse of that inner life that was naturally not revealed in the letters he wrote home and destined for private circulation among a circle of acquaintances.

"I am getting to feel that God does not want the sacrifice of my life and that I shall return safely to do His work. Some time ago, I was feeling very depressed because that sacrifice was greater than even you know, when my eyes fell on these words:

> 'The essence of the act of sacrifice did not consist in the slaying of the victim but in its offering.'

That seemed to make me realize that God was satisfied with my willingness to die and that He had granted me my heart's desire to be a martyr, because the mere act of dying would add little to the crown of suffering I have

gone through. At the same time I feel, oh! with what joy, since it is for Him, that I have still very much to face and that I shall have the happiness of being wounded and shedding my blood for Jesus. I try to crush down the longing and to wish only what He wishes. One more word about self. You have guessed my little secret concerning decorations. I have asked God that I may not receive any. For my dear father's sake, and the pleasure it would give my loved ones at home, it would be great happiness to hear I had been honored. But, I have made the sacrifice of this to God. Thus, though my name has again gone to Headquarters, nothing has come of it."

Father Doyle's interests and happiness lay elsewhere.

"They have given me the M.C.," he said, "but *His* crosses are far more welcome…."

On 7 November, he wrote, "I wonder is there a happier man in France than I. Just now Jesus is giving me great joy in tribulation, though conditions of living are about as uncomfortable as even Saint Teresa could wish—perpetual rain, oceans of mud, damp, cold, and a plague of rats. Yet I feel that all this is a preparation for the future and God is laboring in my soul for ends I do not clearly see as yet. Sometimes, I kneel down with outstretched arms and pray that God, if it is a part of His divine plan, to rain down fresh privations and sufferings."

Then, he adds with a characteristic touch of whimsical humor, "I stopped when the mud wall of my little hut fell in upon me—that was too much of a good joke!"

The idea that his hard experience was preparatory to some great consummation reappears in the following interesting letter he addressed to his sister on 19 December.

"I want to have a little chat with you," he begins. "But you must promise to keep to yourself what I write to you. Did I ever tell you that my present life was just the one I dreaded most, being from a natural point of view repugnant to me in every way? So, when our Blessed Lord sent me to the Front, I felt 'angry' with Him for taking me away from a sphere of work where at least the possibilities of doing good were so enormous and giving me a task others could perform much better. It was only after a time that I began to understand that 'God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts.' The meaning of it all began to dawn on me. In the first place, my life, especially here in the trenches, has become a real hermit's one, cave and all, a mixture of solitude with a touch of the hardships of a foreign mission. The result has been that God has come into my life in a way He never did before. He has put strange thoughts into my head and given me many lights that I feel have changed my whole outlook upon life. Then I feel, oh, so strongly, that I am going through a kind of noviceship, a sort of spiritual training, for some big work He wants me to do in the future. I feel every day as if spiritual strength and power were growing in my soul.

This thought of being trained or fitted for God's work (if I may use the comparison with all reverence) like Saint John the Baptist, has filled me with extraordinary joy and made me delight in a life that could not be much harder."

"Here I am in a bit of a hole in the side of a ditch, so low that I cannot stand upright and have to bend my head and shoulders during Mass—I can tell you my back aches at the end. My only window is the door (without a door) through which the wind blows day and night; and a cold wind it is just now. I was offered a little stove but my 'Novice Master' did not want that luxury, for it never came. My home would be fairly dry if I could keep out the damp mists and persuade the drops of water not to trickle from the roof. As a rule, I sleep well, though one is often roused to attend some poor fellow who has been hit. Still it is rather reversing the order of things to be glad to get up in the morning and try to get warm. It is certainly not pleasant to be wakened from sweet dreams by a huge rat burrowing under your pillow or scampering over your face! This has actually happened to me. There is no great luxury in the matter of food, as you may well guess. Recently, owing to someone's carelessness, or possibly because the bag was made to pay toll on the way up to the trenches, my day's rations consisted of a half of a pot of jam and a piece of cheese!

"Through all this and much in addition, the one thought ever in my mind is the goodness and love of God in choosing me to lead this life and thus preparing me without a chance of refusal for the work He wants done. No amount of reading or meditating could have proved to me so convincingly that a life of privation, suffering, and sacrifice, accepted lovingly for the love of Jesus, is a life of great joy and surely of great graces. You see, therefore, that I have reasons in abundance for being happy and I am truly so. Hence, you ought to be glad that I have been counted worthy to suffer something for our dear Lord, the better to be prepared to do His work. Ask Him, won't you, that I may not lose this golden opportunity, but may profit to the full by the graces He is giving me. Every loving wish from my heart for a holy and happy Christmas. Let our gift to the divine Babe be the absolute sacrifice of even our desires, so His Will alone may be done."

One final quotation will be given from an intimate Christmas letter, so while we are following Father Doyle's very heroic and, from a safe distance, picturesque outward career, we may not misread the real man within, so hidden and unsuspected and, to most men, so unintelligible.

"I certainly did not think this time twelve months (he writes) that my next Christmas greetings to you would be from a military camp. I cannot help wondering where my good wishes will reach you from when another year has passed. God has given me one grace at least since I came here. I feel

absolutely in His hands and joyous in the thought that no matter what happens it will be all for His greater glory. Though Christmas Day was miserably wet, the Divine Babe filled my heart with joy at the thought that my life now was a little bit at least more like to His. I am learning better every day that there is no life of happiness like one full of 'hard things' that are borne for love of God. For some time past I have felt, I know not why, an intense longing for holiness at any price."

"In some ways, I have found life out here much easier than I expected and, in other respects, a good deal more trying. Still, if I only get a little bit of holiness out of it all, will it not be well worth it all? Jesus knows I have only one wish in this world—to love Him and Him alone—for the rest He has carte blanche to do as He pleases in my regard. I just leave myself in His loving Hands and, thus, have no anxiety or care, but great peace of soul. I am off now for a fortnight's spell in the trenches, and if it is not to be Saint Teresa's *mori*, it will at least be *pati*."

Early in December 1916, Father Doyle was changed from the Irish Fusiliers to the 8th Dublins. Accordingly, he was henceforth attached to the 48th Brigade, which was also part of the 18th Division. He was naturally sorry to part with his men, some of whom cried when told he was leaving. But, he was once more among Irishmen and quite close to his old Battalion in the line. Father Doyle was not far from the convent of Locre where he had a comfortable week's billet when his six days spell in the trenches was done. His dugout merits a passing notice. Father Doyle gives a humorous description.

"Picture a good respectable deep Irish ditch with plenty of water and mud in the bottom; scrape a fair-sized hole in the bank, cover the top with some sheets of iron, pile sandbags on top; and you have my dwelling. The door serves also as window and lets in not only light and air, but stray cats, rats galore, and many creepy crawly beasties, not to mention rain, snow, and at times a breeze that must have been hatched at the North Pole."

"Close beside us," writes Father Doyle on 21 December 1916, "we have installed a Flying Pig and the Germans are searching for his sty. A Flying Pig, let me explain, is the pet name for a huge trench-mortar shell weighing 250 lbs. The first one we sent over landed near two big trees, which were lifted out of the ground, root and branch, and pitched yards away. Fritz does not like the Pig and is thirsting for his blood."

"Again the Germans were almost silent. Then about one o'clock, just as our artillery had ceased, they gave it back to us. For two hours and a quarter, they pasted us with shells, till I thought not a man would be left alive to tell the tale. Words could never convey the pent-up agony—it is the only word to use—of those two hours; waiting, waiting, waiting, always waiting for something to happen, without being able to fire

even a bullet in return. I do not think the feelings of a condemned man on the scaffold, waiting for the bolt to be drawn, could be much worse. You know your chances of being hit are relatively small, but there is always the chance that you may; and as shell followed shell in quick succession, sometimes two or three together, even the bravest seemed to shrink up as if they were struck and faces grew long and drawn."

"For the moment there was nothing to be done, so I went on with my Office. Yet, all the time I was torn with anxiety for the safety of my poor boys. It seemed to drive all anxiety and fear for my own safety out of my head. Even when one shell burst very near, and the smoke and fumes drifted in through the door of my 'castle,' nearly smothering me, my chief thought was for them and my prayers were for their safety. The prophet of old never called on the good God more earnestly than I did then—Spare, O God, spare Thy people—for humanly speaking the casualties were bound to be heavy, as the whole German fire was concentrated on this one spot, evidently with the object of knocking out, as I earlier said, the Bloody Pig."

"At last I could stand it no longer; I felt I must go round and see what damage had been done, though I knew I should be called if I were really wanted. The fire had slackened considerably, not more than four or five shells coming over each minute. So out I went and started down the trench. I had only taken six paces when I heard the scream of a shell coming right for me.

"Every shell has a special note. You hear some and do not even look up, for you know by the sound that they are safe overhead and will burst far away. A second makes you a wee bit anxious for a moment, till you locate its direction and know, all is well, for you at least. But there is a third kind of note and when you hear it, you don't even stop to think but dive straight for the first rat-hole or gooseberry bush, anything no matter what, that might give cover. Failing that, you dig your nose as deep as you can into the ground and try to feel small. Here the value of practical experience comes in, and many an old campaigner will save himself where a novice would come to serious harm."

"I flung myself on my face, and as I did, the ground took a jump and the sky came tumbling down from the crash that followed. I heard myself exclaiming, 'Good Lord, I'm killed,' which was so obviously untrue that I burst out laughing. There is some consolation in the thought that, if you do get hit or buried by a kindly crump, you hear nothing about it till someone pulls you out by the legs. So, the fact that I heard the crash told me I was safe. I looked up and saw that my unwelcome visitor had

fallen two feet from my own door. Had I been five seconds later, I probably would have been converted into a beautiful specimen of a cabbage strainer and at last made really hol(e)y."

"I did not go back to see how much of my crockery was left, but sped on, thanking some good soul for his prayers. A few yards further on, a substantial sod of earth—weighing, it seemed to me, a ton and a half, though it was probably less—nearly knocked all the breath out of my body. But that was a trifle, seeing it might have been a similar lump of Rhineland iron. I found three of my boys, who had been sheltering together, wounded—two of them slightly and the third, rather badly. The third was only a lad and was moaning in great pain. When I had anointed him, I put my arms round the poor boy. He could not lie down, being hit in the back in several places. He rested his head on my breast like a little child."

WW I COMFORTING THE WOUNDED

"It seemed to ease the pain, for he ceased moaning and, possibly, he felt safer, for the shells were still bursting around us and he was trembling with fear. We then got him under cover of the dressing-station and I was able to inquire about the rest. Marvelous to relate, not another man had been hit, nor was there a single other casualty at the end of the bombardment, though hundreds of shells had rained down on all sides of us, in fact lead and iron enough to have put half the British army out of action, if only they stood in the right place."

"One good result came from this attack," Father Doyle observes with satisfaction, "the Pig, the cause of all our trouble, was removed the next day. Since then, we have been left in peace."

Father F. M. Browns, S. J., met Father Doyle in Father Doyle's dugout on the evening of 23 December 1916, when he came up with the 2nd and 9th Dublins who were relieving the 8th Dublins and R. I. Rifles.

"During our whole time there," writes Father Browne, "we relieved each other in this way every eight days. I remember how decent Father Willie used to be on the relief days, coming up early before his Battalion came up, that I might get away. He knew how I hated it—and I did not hate it half as much as he did. We used generally to confess each other before leaving. We were very exact about waiting for each other, so I do not think the (48th) Brigade was ever without a priest in the line."

The invulnerability of this dugout became famous. The men used to say, "Little Father Doyle's dugout can't be hit!" (The adjective denoted endearment rather than

stature—Father Doyle was nearly six feet in height.) Whenever there was heavy firing, cooks and other non-combatants used to crowd into it. Once when Father

Doyle hurriedly returned to get something he had forgotten, he found twelve men squeezed into the little dugout that was hardly big enough to contain four!

Though this interval at the Front was comparatively quiet, it was not altogether devoid of incidents.

"I had just finished breakfast," notes Father Doyle on 21 December, "when I heard Miss Krupp come singing overhead with that peculiar note that warns you of her proximity. I ran to the door—the running consisted of one step—and saw the explosion at the bottom of the little hill about two hundred yards away. A moment later another scream, and the earth is flying sky-high, this time fifty yards nearer. I waited anxiously for the next shot. Again, the range was shorter, the third shell bursting half the distance from the first. Then I realized that at this rate of progression I should soon have an unwelcome visitor landing at my very door, for my dugout was in the direct line of fire. There was no time to adopt the Dublin lad's advice when faced with a difficulty, and 'send for the polis' nor was there any use trying to get out of the way, for, as likely as not, another shell would land in the trench itself, while my dugout afforded some protection. I knew there was nothing to fear while His powerful protection was over me, as it has never failed me yet. But I confess I shook with fear as another shell came crashing down and the stones and clay rattled in a shower outside and on the roof."

"It is a curious thing," he observes, "that I have never had a moment's hesitation nor ever felt fear in going into the greatest danger when duty called and some poor chap needed help. Yet, to sit in cold blood, so to speak, and to wait to be blown to pieces or buried by a crump is an experience that tests one's nerves to the limit. Thank God, I have been able to conceal my feelings and help others to despise the danger, when I was just longing to take to my heels. An officer said to me at the Somme, 'I have often envied you your coolness and cheerfulness in hot corners.' I rather surprised him by saying that my real feeling was abject fear and I often shook like a leaf."

That same afternoon another big shell came down close to where he was sitting at his lunch. "Three of my lads," he recounts, "came tearing in to my dugout. They had nearly been sent to glory and felt they were safe with the priest. The poor priest cracks a joke or two, makes them forget their terror, and goes on with his lunch while every morsel sticks in his throat from fear and dread of the next shell. A moment passes, one, two, here it comes; dead silence and anxious faces for a second, and then we all laugh, for it is one of our own shells going

over. Five minutes more and we know all danger has passed. It has been a memorable day for me, though only one of many such in the past."

The approach of Christmas meant the arrival of many presents to Father Doyle, presents that, needless to say, soon found their way to the Dublins.

"L. and W's gift of 'smokes,'" he writes, "was a godsend (for the men, not for himself—Father Doyle was a non-smoker all his life). The parcel arrived in the midst of pelting rain that had been going on all day. I put on my big boots and coat and trotted—or I should rather say, waded—up to the front line and gave each man a handful. You would not believe how it bucked them up or how welcome that smoke was to the brave fellows, as they stood there in the mud and water, soaked through and through, hungry and sleepless."

"The rough lads look at their hardships and say, 'Sure, Father, it's little enough to bear for our sins.' Almighty God would be an odd God if He did not forgive and forget whatever they may have done with such a spirit as this."

"Just now," he writes to his sister, "I got from a convent a present of a lovely cake in a large box. It was well packed up, but I could feel its softness and see in imagination the sugar and almond paste on top. This child had visions of a glorious tea in his dugout, lasting from six till nine, during which large slices of cake would receive a military burial. The string was cut, the paper unrolled, and lo!—there appeared a large piece of fat bacon—no cake! The Germans have sent over asking to know the meaning of the fearful howls they heard in our lines all the morning."

His sister-in-law sent him a plum pudding.

"As I write," he says on 13 December, "a huge plum pudding, sent by the thoughtful J., has just walked in at the door. A hundred thousand welcomes! The Lord grant that I do not get killed till after Christmas at least. It would be a fearful disaster to leave that treasure behind to be devoured by the holy nuns."

A week later, he conveys the sad news that "a villain of a rat worked his way into the middle of the pudding and built himself a home there. There was not so much of the plum pudding left after that, but the remainder was all the sweeter."

Father Doyle had the good luck of spending Christmas in billets. He got permission from General Hickie to have Midnight Mass for his men in the Convent. The chapel was a fine large one, as in pre-war times, over three hundred boarders and orphans were resident in the Convent. By opening folding-doors, the refectory was added to the chapel and thus doubled the available room.

An hour before Mass, every inch of space was filled, even inside the altar-rails and in the corridor, while numbers had to remain in the open. Word had in fact gone round

about the Mass, and men from other battalions came to hear it, some having walked several miles from another village. Before the Mass, there was strenuous Confession-work.

"We were kept hard at work hearing Confessions all the evening till nine o'clock," writes Father Doyle, "the sort of Confessions you would like, the real serious business, no nonsense and no trimmings. As I was leaving the village church, a big soldier stopped me to ask, like our 'Gardiner Street friend,' if the Fathers would be *sittin'* anymore that night. He was soon polished off, poor chap, and then insisted on escorting me home. He was one of my old boys, and having had a couple of glasses of beer—'It wouldn't scratch the back of your throat, Father, that French stuff'— was in the mood to be complimentary. 'We miss you sorely, Father, in the battalion,' he said, 'we do be always talking about you.' Then in a tone of great confidence, 'Look, Father, there isn't a man who wouldn't give the whole world, if he had it, for your little toe! That's the truth.' "

"The poor fellow meant well, but 'the stuff that would not scratch his throat' certainly helped his imagination and eloquence. I reached the Convent a bit tired, intending to have a rest before Mass, but found a string of the boys awaiting my arrival, determined that they at least would not be left out in the cold. I was kept hard at it hearing Confessions till the stroke of twelve and seldom had a more fruitful or consoling couple of hours" work, the love of the little Babe of Bethlehem softening hearts that all the terrors of war had failed to touch."

The Mass itself was a great success and brought consolation and spiritual peace to many a war-weary exile.

Father Doyle commented, "I sang the Mass, the girls' choir doing the needful. One of the Tommies, from Dolphin's Barn, sang the *Adeste* beautifully, with just a touch of the sweet Dublin accent to remind us of 'home, sweet home,' with the whole congregation joining in the chorus. It was a curious contrast: the chapel packed with men and officers, almost strangely quiet and reverent (the nuns were particularly struck by this), praying and singing most devoutly, while the big tears ran down many a rough cheek. Outside the cannon boomed and the machine guns spat out a hail of lead: Peace and good will—Hatred and bloodshed!"

"It was a Midnight Mass none of us will ever forget. A good 500 men came to Holy Communion, so I was more than rewarded for my work."

On Christmas Day, all was quiet up at the front line. The Germans hung white flags all along their barbed wire and did not fire a shot all day, nor did the English. For at least one day, homage was paid to the Prince of Peace.

The very day after Christmas, slaughter recommenced with renewed energy. Two little incidents that Father Doyle records as having occurred on 26 December are here given in his own words.

"On Saint Stephen's Day the men were engaged in a football match. The Germans saw them, sent over a lovely shot at long range, which carried away the goalpost—the referee gave a 'foul'—and burst in the middle of the men, killed three, and wounded seven. The wounded were bandaged up and hurried off to hospital, the dead carried away for burial, the ball was kicked off once more, and the game went on as if nothing had happened. The Germans must have admired the cool pluck of the players for they did not fire any more. This is just one little incident of the war, showing how little is thought of human life out here. It sounds callous, but there is no room for sentiment in warfare, and I suppose it is better so."

The other incident is more personal.

"I was riding my bicycle past a wagon when the machine slipped, throwing me between the front and back wheels of the limber. Fortunately, the horses were going very slowly and I was able, how I cannot tell, to roll out before the wheel went over my legs. I have no luck, you see, else I should be home now with a couple of broken legs, not to speak of a crushed head. The only commiseration I received was the remark of some passing officers that 'the Christmas champagne must have been very strong.' "

On 1 January, he writes, "Whatever may be said of the birth and life of the old year, it certainly died in a glorious burst of noise. All last evening, with intervals for refreshment, our gunners were hard at it. 'Worrying' the enemy they call it, not caring of course whether or not they worry the men of peace who would dearly love sleep. Then, when midnight struck, we had a tremendous cannonade to usher in the new year. Fritz was strangely quiet, not retaliating—drinking our health, probably, in the depths of his safe dugout, except the unfortunate sentries, who had to face the music in the opposite trenches and kept sending up Verey lights or star-shells to make sure we were not coming over to raid him. It was a fine display of artillery work, but we shall pay for it, of that I am certain. ('We" being the poor infantry holding the trench, and not the good gunners."

Early in January, Father Doyle was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery at the Somme. He disliked this distinction, but was glad inasmuch as it gave pleasure to his father, to whom he thus wrote on 4 January.

"I am sorry these rewards are given to chaplains, for surely he would be a poor specimen of the Lord's anointed who would do his work for such a thing. Seeing they are going, I must say I am really glad because I know it will give pleasure to an 'old soldier' at home, who ought long ago to have had all the medals and distinctions ever conferred."

From a few of his letters dispatched about this time we can fill in some details and conditions of his life during the winter of 1916-17. The cold was intense. Father Doyle's references thereto are suggestive and eloquent:

"Jan. 27th Cold!"

"Jan. 28th Colder!!"

"Jan. 29th More Colder!!!"

"Jan. 30th !!!!!!"

Once he apologizes for not writing, saying he could not hold a pencil in his fingers.

"Before I have finished dressing in the mornings, not a very long process," he says, "the water in which I had washed is frozen again. One has to be very careful, too, of one's feet, keeping them well rubbed with whale oil, otherwise you would soon find yourself unable to walk, with half a dozen frozen toes. A dugout is not the warmest of spots at present, but even if I felt inclined to growl, I should be ashamed to do so, seeing what the poor men are suffering in the trenches."

As a matter of fact, for over a fortnight, the temperature was many degrees below zero. During this time, it took five or six hour's hard labor to dig a grave.

"I think the limit was reached," writes Fr, Doyle, "when the wine froze in the chalice at Mass and a lamp had to be procured to melt it before going on with the Consecration. I am thinking it will take fifty lamps to thaw out the poor chaplain!"

The diet was hardly less trying than the weather. He lived chiefly on bread, bully-beef, and tea. This last concoction was rather sickening.

"Don't ask me where the water comes from," he says, "for I certainly am not anxious to learn. The men hold that, if you boil water, you need not bother about its source, or how many dead beasties it has washed on its journey. I have had tea of the most wonderful shades of brown and black. Yet, barring the taste at times, I am not a whit the worse for this mysterious beverage."

"My poor orderly," he remarked earlier (on 31 July 1916), "has nearly emptied the well (of course leaving the six dead Germans behind) in his efforts to make enough tea."

The bully-beef was bad enough, but the dietary-specialists' substitute was worse.

"Pork-and-Beans," he writes on 16 January 1917, "is quite a standing joke at the front, though not a pleasant one. A committee of food experts, having discovered that lentil beans contain one and a half times more nourishment and flesh-forming properties than a corresponding weight of meat, promptly decided that, from time to time, Tommy should be fed on this delicious product. They thereupon, I am sure, sat down to a roast leg of mutton, to show that, if they were experts, they were by no means faddists. The method of procedure is this: Fill a can with a pound of small beans, on top place a piece of fat not larger than a shilling, seal up carefully, and wrap in a colored label on which is printed (and so must be true) the startling intelligence that 'five beans are of more value than a piece of meat.' Then, allow a pig to rub his sides against the packing case, and *voila*, you have a sustaining dinner ration of Pork and Beans! The first time you sit down to this repast, you experience the most frightful temptation to vainglory and pride, as being the equal of the ancient hermits. Then, you feel 'orrible' empty. So, even granting that a tin of beans is of greater value than a rib of beef, we are all ready to vote, and vote solid every time, for the old-fashioned steak."

WW I – GOING OVER THE TOP

"I did not get my work finished till rather late tonight," he notes under the date 4 January, "and, as I had to turn out again shortly, it was not worthwhile turning in. Some of my men were to make a raid on the enemy trenches in the early hours of the morning. This is dangerous work and often results in heavy casualties, so I make it a point to go round the line and give each man Absolution before he 'goes over the top.' It is a hard, anxious time and a big strain waiting for the word to be given, and I know it is a comfort to them to see the priest come round and a cheery word bucks them up. All went well with the raid. We should have had more prisoners, only a hot-blooded Irishman is a dangerous customer when he gets behind a bayonet and wants to let daylight through everybody. I got back to my bunk at six and slept like a top till seven. Not too long, you will say; but if you come out here, you will find all the old-fashioned ideas about food and sleep and wet clothes and the rest of it rapidly vanishing. It is wonderful what you can do with a cup of tea and one hour's sleep in the twenty-four."

Not all his ministry, of course, involved such risks or privations. Before starting a spell in the trenches Father Doyle used to endeavor to get as many men as possible to Confession on the previous evening and then to Mass and Holy Communion in the morning. As one battalion was some miles from the other, this meant an early start and ride or walk, through rain, slush, and snow, or later, over hard-frozen ground.

"I have celebrated Mass in some strange places and under extraordinary conditions," he wrote earlier from the trenches on 28 December, "but somehow I was more than usually impressed this morning. The men had gathered in what was once a small convent. For, with all their faults and their devil-may-care recklessness, they love the Mass and regret when they cannot come. It was a poor miserable place, cold and wet, and the only light came from two small candles. Yet, they knelt there and prayed as only our Irish poor can pray, with a fervor and faith that would touch the heart of any unbeliever. They are as shy as children and men of few words, but I know they are grateful when one tries to be kind to them and they warmly appreciate all that is done for their soul's interest."

While in the trenches, Father Doyle was not allowed to have Mass for his men, owing to the danger of having many gathered together near the firing line. So, each morning he went back to where the reserve company was stationed, about a twenty minute walk; which gave those who were free a chance to come often to Holy Communion.

On February 2, however, he was able to offer the Holy Sacrifice in the trenches, as his chapel was in a dugout capable of holding ten or a dozen.

"But as my congregation numbered forty-six," he says, "the vacant space was small. How they all managed to squeeze in, I cannot say. There was no question of kneeling down. The men simply stood silently and reverently round the little improvised altar of ammunition boxes, 'glad,' as one of them quaintly expressed it, 'to have a say in it.' Surely our Lord must have been glad also, for every one of the forty-six received Holy Communion, and went back to his post happy at heart and strengthened to face the hardships of these days and nights of cold."

What a difference the Real Presence made in the ministrations and influence of a Catholic chaplain! His Irish lads had a simple strong faith and a reverence for the priest. That same afternoon (2 February) as Father Doyle was coming back from his round of the front-line trench, he found it necessary to get under cover as shelling began. So, he crawled into a hole in which six men were already crouching. No one could have been more welcome.

"Come in, Father," cried one, "we're safe now, anyhow."

On another similar occasion the remark was made, “Isn’t the priest of God with us, what more do you want?”

The poor fellows fancied that Father Doyle was invulnerable. No wonder, when they saw him coolly sauntering around amid shells and splinters. He was always near to cheer them up when they were depressed or nervous and to minister to them when they were wounded. Here is a description of a “sick-call” in the early hours of 13 January 1917.

“Two men badly wounded in the firing line, Sir.”

“I was fast asleep, snuggly tucked up in my blankets, dreaming a pleasant dream of something hot. One always dreams of lovely hot things at night in the trenches—sitting at a warm fire at home, or huge piles of food and drink, but always steaming hot. ‘You will need to be quick, Father, to find them alive.’ By this time, I had grasped the fact that someone was calling me, that some poor dying man needed help, or perhaps a soul was in danger. In a few seconds, I had pulled on my big boots—I knew I should want them in the mud and wet—jumped into my waterproof, and darted down the trench.”

“It was just 2 a.m., bitterly cold and snowing hard. God help the poor fellows holding the tumbled-in ditch that is called the front line, standing there wet and more than frozen hour after hour. More than all, God help and strengthen the victims of this war—the wounded soldier, with his torn and bleeding body lying out in this awful biting cold, praying for the help that seems so slow in coming.”

“The first part of my journey was easy enough, except that the snow made it difficult to keep one’s feet; and I began to realize that one cannot run as easily at forty-four as one could at twenty-four. All went well until I reached a certain part of the trench, which rejoices in the attractive name of Suicide Corner, from the fact that the Germans have a machine gun trained on it and, at intervals during the night, pump a shower of lead on the spot in the hope of knocking out some chance passer-by. It was just my luck that, as I came near this place, I heard the rat-tat-tat of the beastly gun and the whizz of the pawing bullets. It was not a pleasant prospect to run the gauntlet and skip through the bullets. But, what priest would hesitate for a second, with two dying men at the end of the trench? I ducked my head and ‘chivvied’ down that trench. (I do not know what this word means, but I believe it implies terrific speed and breathless excitement.)”

“In the dark and at that distance, I was quite invisible to the German gunner. I think the Old Boy himself was turning the handle that night. Luckily for me, he was out of practice; the cold, I suppose, upset his aim. As I ran in the stillness of the night, on my left I could hear the grinding rat-tat-tat of the machine gun (sounding for all the

world as if a hundred German carpenters were driving nails into my coffin), while overhead crack-crack whizz-whizz went the bullets, tearing after one another for fear they would be late. It was a novel experience to have a whole machine gun all to myself. It is a pleasure I am not particularly anxious to repeat. At the same time, I do not think I was really in very great danger as, judging by the sound, the leaden shower was going too high."

"The guns make all movement by night very unpleasant. All night, both sides have any number of them firing from time to time at fixed points. For example, cross-roads, dumps, light railways—everywhere in fact where men are likely to be. Yet, in spite of the fact that each fires about ten thousand rounds each night and bullets are flying about like mosquitoes, it is very rare indeed that anyone is hit, with weeks at a time passing without a casualty and scarcely ever if one takes ordinary precautions."

"The first man was *in extremis* when I reached him. I did all I could for him, and commended his soul to the merciful God, as he had only a few moments to live. Then I hurried on to find the other wounded boy. A journey along the firing line in the day-time is not an easy matter, but in the darkness of the night it baffles description. From time to time, a star-shell gave me light and I made good progress, only to end in blackness and a pool (or a shell-hole) full of mud and water."

"I found the dying lad—he was not much more—so tightly jammed into a corner of the trench that it was almost impossible to get him out. Both legs were smashed, one in two or three places, so his chances of life were small, and there were other injuries as well. What a harrowing picture that scene would have made. A splendid young soldier, married only a month they told me, lying there, pale and motionless in the mud and water with the life crushed out of him by a cruel shell. The stretcher bearers hard at work binding up, as well as they may, his broken limbs; round about a group of silent Tommies looking on and wondering when will their turn come. Peace for a moment seems to have taken possession of the battlefield. There was not a sound save the deep boom of some far-off gun and the stifled moans of the dying boy, while, as if anxious to hide the scene, nature drops her soft mantle of snow on the living and dead alike."

"Then, while every head is bared, come the solemn words of Absolution, '*Ego te absolvo*, I absolve thee from thy sins. Depart Christian soul, and may the Lord Jesus Christ receive thee with a smiling and benign countenance. Amen.' Oh! surely the gentle Savior did receive with open arms the brave lad who had laid down his life for Him and, as I turned away, I

felt happy in the thought that his soul was already safe in that land where 'God will wipe away all sorrow from our eyes, for weeping and mourning shall be no more.' "

Early in March 1917, Father Doyle secured another ten days' leave and was able to pay a short visit—his last—to Ireland. An incident of this visit is recorded by a Scholastic of the Province of Sicily, who was studying at Rathfarnham Castle where Father Doyle stopped while in Ireland.

"I shall never forget the last time I saw Father Willie. It was the morning he was returning to the Front after his last leave home. We Juniors at the Castle had gathered in the hall to give him a rousing send-off. As he had not yet come down, I slipped into the chapel for a visit. There I found him. He was in uniform, standing at the altar, and knocking at the Tabernacle door most gently. It was his loving farewell to his Eucharistic Lord. I was greatly moved and edified at his simplicity and at his love for Jesus."

On his return to the Front, Father Doyle chronicles for his father the demise of his famous dugout.

"My dear little dugout in the trenches has vanished. It did not fall gloriously in battle, pierced through with a shell or blown sky-high by a cunningly driven mine shaft. It did not even crumble away slowly, worn out by old age and labors like its venerable owner. It was ignominiously laid low by a common pick and shovel. I loved my tiny sand-bag hut, even though the roof was wondrous low and you had almost to put your legs outside the door if you wanted to stretch them. It would have given about as much protection as a cardboard box, had a shell hit it directly. But, once inside I felt quite 'comfy,' even when falling trumps made its poor sides quiver and shake again. Many a time, during the long hard winter, have I crept in out of the bitter cold with a sigh of relief, happy in the thought that the snow at least could not reach me there."

"However, by an unlucky chance, this house on the hill stood apparently in the direct line of fire of a German battery. They landed four shells in front of the 'hall-door,' fortunately dropping them over the sand-bag wall in front, which saved the homestead considerably. They bashed in the trench a foot behind the house. Twice they smashed the trench a few yards in front and one biggish shell cut clean in two our beautiful tree (which spread its arms over the room) tearing the back out of the patient dugout. As the tree was a good eight inches or more in diameter, it was just as well it got the first smack."

"Shortly afterwards, the General came along. Seeing the state of affairs, the General told the Padre to get him gone out of the danger zone. I am sorry to say, the disobedient Padre did not do this. The General then gave orders for the house to be

pulled down, even though he had to admit that not a penny of rent was due. I felt there was little use in my trying to prove to the General that his fears were quite unfounded and that there was absolutely no danger. I do not mind telling you the cause of my security. I have a first-class guardian angel, which is not to be wondered at since you and darling Mother baptized me Gabriel. Whoever he is, he is a real decent chap and has done his work well. When the shelling begins, I send him out to sit on top of the roof. He does not like it a bit, but he goes all the same and then takes it out of me. Sometimes I hear him give a whistle, or whatever angels do in that way, and he shouts down, 'Look out, Bill, there's a big one coming.' I know he only does that to frighten me, to try to get the wind up, as they say. So I shout back, 'Go to heaven!'—for I suppose you cannot send a respectable angel any place else—and we remain the best of friends. He is the best back stop I ever met, but then he has the advantage of a big pair of wings to swish off the nasty dangerous ones to a safe distance. I am sorry to say he has lost his job now, for the morning I came out of the trenches the homestead was laid low. But I have promised to take him on again and to give him plenty to do before the summer is over!"

He was only a week back in the trenches after his short trip home, when the 48th Brigade received welcome orders to move to the rear for a rest. The rest, however, seems to have consisted chiefly of extra drill, apparently, preparation for the coming offensive.

"We left Belgium," he writes, "on the Saturday before Palm Sunday (i.e., 31 March), a glorious morning, dry under foot, with brilliant sunshine. The Brigade of four regiments made a gallant show, each headed by its band of pipers and followed by the transport, etc. We were the first to move off and so came in for an extra share of greetings from the villagers who turned out to see us pass, as fine a lot of sturdy lads as you could wish to gaze on, not to mention the gallant chaplain."

"Our march for the first day was not a very long one (something about 20 miles) but, as every pace took us further and further from the trenches, the march was a labor of love. At midday, a halt was called for dinner, which had been cooking slowly in the traveling kitchens that accompanied us. In a few minutes, every man was sitting by the roadside negotiating a big supply of hot meat and potatoes with a substantial chunk of bread. We poor officers were left to hunt for ourselves, a hunt that did not promise well at first, as the people in the *estaminets* were anything but friendly and said they had nothing to give us to eat. The reason, I discovered later, was that some British officers had gone away without paying their bill, a not uncommon thing, I am sorry to say.

Eventually, with the help of a little palaver and my bad French, our party secured some excellent bread and butter, coffee, and a basket of fresh eggs. On again after an hour's rest."

"Marching with a heavy rifle and full kit is no joke, hence our pace is slow. I often wonder how the poor men stick it, and stick it they do, most of them at least till I have seen them drop senseless by the road from sheer exhaustion. As a rule, they are left there to follow the column as best they can, for if falling out meant a lift, not many of the regiment would reach their destination on foot. To make matters worse, we had to tramp along over the rough paved roads, which must be an invention of the Old Boy to torture people. At first the road feels like this: mmmmm; then after ten miles: eeeeeee; till at last you are positive that they have paved the way with spikes instead of stones, something in this fashion: AAAAAAA. My poor feet!"

"At last the town we were bound for came in sight, and hopes of a good rest were high, when word came along that we were not to stay in that haven of peace and plenty but trudge on another three miles. The camel is supposed to be a patient animal, but Tommy can give him points any day. Our lodging was a mutilated country farmhouse, dirty and uncomfortable. The less said about it the better, but everyone was too tired to care much even though we officers, snoring on the floor, felt inclined to envy the sardines in their comfortable box."

"It was impossible to have Mass for the men in the morning, even though it was Palm Sunday, as there was much work to be done and we had to be off early. I got away to the little village and offered up the Holy Sacrifice for them, emptied a coffee-pot, and fell into my place as the regiment marched off. That was a hard day. We were all stiff and sore for want of previous exercise, and, in addition, were well scourged by sleet, rain, and snow, though at times the sun did its best to brighten things up a bit. Our luck turned when we reached our night halting place, a good-sized town with comfortable billets. A big party of my men were quartered in the public ball-room, which contained an automatic organ. The last I saw of them was a score of 'couples' waltzing round quite gaily, without a sign of having the best part of a forty-mile march to their credit."

"Monday saw us early afoot. Nothing of great interest, except that the country was becoming more hilly and prettier, the stones harder, and our feet and shoulders sorer. Quite a longing for the repose of the trenches was springing up in many a heart. That evening ended our tramp, and here we have been ever since and are to remain for some time longer, much to our joy. Probably, we shall return to the same place we came from, but no one really knows our future movements."

"Here" was a little village in the Pas de Calais called Nordausques, on the right (east) of the main Saint-Omer-Calais road, about ten miles from each of these places. During this fortnight, away from the sound of the guns, Father Doyle had a very busy time. So indeed had the men.

"The morning," he says, "is given up to various exercises, one of which is the storming of a dummy German trench to the accompaniment of fearful blood-curdling yells, enough to terrify the bravest enemy. The afternoon is spent at football and athletic sports, so the men are having a good, if strenuous time. So is the poor padre. My two regiments are quartered in two villages some miles apart, with the four companies of each regiment in different hamlets. To make things more inconvenient still, the two platoons of each company, thirty-two in all, are distributed in as many farmhouses. You can imagine I have no easy task to get round to see all my men, which I am anxious to do, so as to make sure that every man, if possible, gets to his Easter Duty. I have Mass every morning for them with many Communions daily, seventy today in one church; and then in the evening, having finished Devotions in one village and heard the men's Confessions, I ride over to the other for Rosary and Benediction, with more Confessions. In addition to this, there are many stray units scattered about in various places, machine-gunners, trench-mortar battery men, etc., who, along with the instruction of converts, prevent me from feeling time hanging on my hands."

This brief sojourn in the Pas de Calais enabled Father Doyle to celebrate Holy Week and Easter fittingly, and thus to offer the men emotions superior to those involved in rehearsals for future bloodshed.

"On Spy Wednesday evening," he recounts, "after Benediction, I told the men I wanted nine volunteers to watch an hour during the following night before the Altar of Repose. I had barely finished speaking when the whole church made a rush up to the altar rails and was keenly disappointed when I told them I could only take the first nine, though I could have had thirty an hour if I wanted them. I was touched by the poor fellows' generosity, for they had just finished a long, hard day's work with more before them. I got the nine men to bring their blankets into the little sacristy and, while one watched, the others slept. Surely our Lord must have been pleased with His Guard of Honor, and will bless them as only He can."

"Easter Sunday," he continues, "was quite a red-letter day in the annals of the town. The regiment turned out in full strength, headed by the pipers, and crowded the sanctuary, every inch of the church, and out beyond. I had eight stalwart sergeants standing guard with fixed bayonets round the altar. At the Consecration and also at the Communion of the Mass, the

buglers sounded the Royal Salute that is only given to Monarchs. At the command, the guard presented arms and, in our poor humble way, we tried to do honor to the Almighty King of Kings on the day of His glorious triumph. I must not forget to add that the lassies and maidens did us the honor of coming to sing during Mass, casting many an envious glance (so rumor says) down on the handsome and devoted Irish lads praying below."

No wonder Father Doyle wrote a little later, "The faith and fervor of our Irish lads have made a great impression everywhere. I was once quite delighted to hear the Curé rubbing it in to his congregation, drawing a contrast between them and the Irish soldiers much to the disadvantage of the former."

On Easter Sunday the good Curé received tangible proof of Irish faith, for his collection bag contained a very unprecedented number of silver coins and five-franc notes.

The quiet if strenuous interlude amid the hills and pine-woods of the Pas de Calais came to an end all too soon. Low Sunday saw the men once more on their traditional march, to the tune of cold pelting rain. That night a halt was made close to Saint Omer, which gave Father Doyle an opportunity to visit the twelfth-century Church and the old Jesuit College from which Stonyhurst was founded. The final stage of the journey was very trying. The men "had to face the cobble-stones at six in the morning, with a hurricane of rain and sleet that slashed like a whip," and arrived near Locre after tramping for eight hours without a morsel of food. Once more, life in and out of the trenches began.

"We have not had such a quiet time for the past fifteen months," records Father Doyle thankfully.

During the first fortnight of May the entire 48th Brigade—consisting of 2nd, 8th, and 9th R. Dublin Fusiliers and 6-7th Irish Rifles—was out of the trenches. The 2nd and 8th Dublins were in Locre and the 9th was at Clare Camp less than two miles west of Locre. The Rifles were at Kemmel, three miles east of Locre.

Father Doyle thus secured a few free days and, as he tells his father, decided "to make a little excursion and to pay a visit to the dear good nuns at Amettes, who were so kind to me on my first arrival in France. It was a trifle of some eighty kilometers (about fifty miles) of a journey. But, the weather being glorious—dry and not too hot—I thought little of it as I mounted my bicycle and started to trundle my twenty-odd stone along the roads of France."

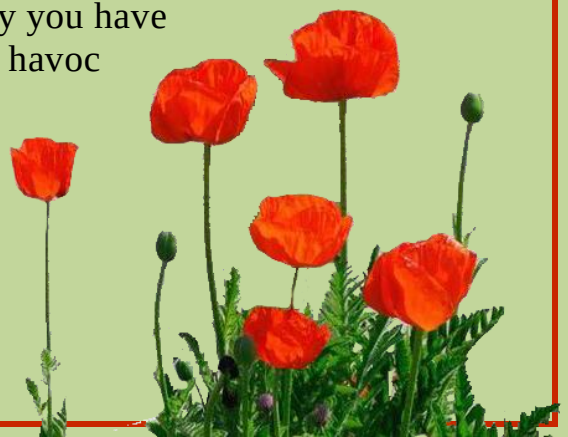
"I reached the convent late in the evening, after a most enjoyable and restful ride through the country, away from the din and roar of war. The Sister who opened the

door looked at me in a dazed, frightened sort of way. 'I remember you perfectly, Father,' she said, 'but I think I had better let Mother know first.' Then she vanished like a flash, leaving me rather mystified. In a few moments, Mother and all her chicks came swarming in 'Mais, mon Père, you are dead! We saw in the paper that you were killed by a shell—Pere Doyle, S.J., n'est-ce-pas? I told her about Father Denis Doyle, S.J., who, God rest his soul, has got me so many Masses and prayers by mistake. Thereupon we all fell upon each other's necks. The convent larder was next emptied and, for a dead man, I did remarkably well, ending with a glorious sleep. I spent most of the next day wandering round the country with a visit to the home and shrine of the 'beggarman saint,' Benedict Joseph Labre. I often think he must be nearly mad with envy watching us in the trenches, surrounded, walked on, and sat upon by his 'pets.' Yet, from the same pets, deliver us, O Lord, as speedily as may be this coming hot weather!"

"On my way home I took in Noeux-les-Mines and heard the whole story of his Church and our Lady's statue from the Curé—who, by the way, looked very uncomfortable and made a grab for the holy water when I appeared from the dead." Before we left the Loos district, our Divisional Commander, General Hickie, suggested that all ranks should subscribe towards a memorial of our stay there and a monument to the memory of the men who had fallen in action. This was to take the form of a life-size statue of our Lady of Victories, to be carved in white marble by the best Paris sculptor and erected in the Church of Noeux-les-Mines, where the Divisional Headquarters were, with the names of the fallen inscribed on the pedestal. We are all to receive a small book containing a photo of the statue, the names of the subscribers, etc., which will be a pleasing memento of the 16th Irish Division."

"On Passion Sunday the men arrived with the box, and asked the Curé where he wished our Lady of Victories to be erected. As it was only a quarter of an hour before High Mass, he told them to come back later. Then he turned into his own garden, a few yards away, to finish his Office. The Mass servers were playing outside the Church that at the moment was empty—the sacristan having finished his preparations had just left—when a 15-inch shell fired from a German naval gun crashed through the wall and exploded in the sanctuary. As a rule, shells burst on impact; but this, being an armor piercing shell, came through the wall like paper and exploded inside with results impossible to describe."

"When I went into the ruin, I exclaimed, 'M. le Curé, surely you have had fifty shells in here!' 'No,' he answered, 'only one; the havoc you see is the work of a single shot.' Not a trace remains of the beautiful altar, where I so often offered the Holy Sacrifice. The carved stalls, the altar-rails, and benches



and chairs are smashed into splinters and the roof and parts of the walls are stripped of plaster. I have never seen such a scene of destruction. The explanation says that the explosion took place inside the Church and the liberated gases rushed round like ten thousand mad animals, rending and tearing all they met, seeking an exit. The building is nearly as large as Kingstown Church but, from end to end, it is a perfect ruin. Pictures, statues, organ, all are gone; the door of the sacristy was blown in and the vestments torn to ribbons, and not a particle remains of the beautiful stained glass that filled the twenty large windows."

"There is just one ray of comfort in this sad destruction: not a life was lost. Ten minutes later, the Church would have been crowded with civilians and soldiers and probably few of them would have been touched with bits of shell, but not a soul would have been left alive by the shock. I have seen men on the battlefield, sometimes a row at a time, standing or leaning against a trench, untouched by bullet or shrapnel, killed simply by the force of an exploding shell. You can picture the result in a strong enclosed building."

"Here, as in so many other places, God again showed His power in a wonderful way. Quite near the altar stood a magnificent Calvary. One arm of the Crucified is torn off, but otherwise neither the figure nor the cross is injured. Poor Saint John got badly smashed up and Saint Mary Magdalen has a bullet through her heart, the very thing she would have asked for. Yet, our Blessed Lady, with the exception of a slight scratch on one hand, 'stands by the cross,' absolutely untouched in the midst of all the havoc and ruin. The shell fell in the sanctuary, blowing the altar to bits. After much searching and digging among the debris, the tabernacle was found whole and entire; inside, the ciborium was standing upright, not even the cover having been knocked off, and the Consecrated Particles in perfect order, though the tabernacle must have been blown to the ceiling."

Father Doyle was soon back in Belgium among his men, who were enjoying their respite from the trenches. The two chaplains, Father Browne and Father Doyle, availed themselves of this interval to organize Month of May devotions for the men. Every evening, they had rosary, hymns, short sermons on the titles of our Lady's Litany, and Benediction, followed by more hymns. The "boys" liked to hear their own voices.

"One result of the devotions," writes Father Doyle, "has been the conversion of the only really black sheep in the regiment, a man very many years away from his duty, a hard, morose character, upon whom I had many times failed to make any impression. I saw it was useless to argue with him so, at the beginning of the month, I handed him over to the Blessed Virgin as a hopeless case with which she alone could deal. Last evening I met him and thought I would try once more to make him see the awful

danger he was running of losing his soul. It was all no use, the devil had his prey too tightly held to shake off like that. Then, a thought struck me, 'Look here,' I said, 'this is the month of May. You surely won't refuse our Blessed Lady.' The poor fellow fell on his knees and there and then made his confession. I gave him Holy Communion and now he is a changed man, as happy as a lark."

Long before the titles of our Lady's Litany were exhausted, it was time to return to the trenches. At the conclusion of such a respite, the chaplain used to give General Absolution. In a letter written to his father, about this time, Father Doyle thus describes and comments on the touching scene.

"We reap a good harvest with confessions every day, at any time the men care to come, but there are many who for one reason or another cannot get away. Hence, before going into the trenches, which nearly always means death for some poor fellows, we give them a General Absolution. I do not think there can be a more touching or soul-inspiring sight than to see a whole regiment go down on their knees to hear the wave of prayer go up to Heaven, as hundreds of voices repeat the Act of Contrition in unison, 'My God, I am heartily sorry that I have ever offended You.' There is an earnestness and depth of feeling in their voices that tells of real sorrow, even if one did not see the tears gather in the eyes of more than one brave man. And then, the deep, reverent silence as the priest raises his hand over the bowed heads and pronounces the words of forgiveness. Human nature is ever human nature, and even Irish soldiers commit sins. You can picture the feelings of any priest standing before that kneeling throng, knowing that by the power of God his words have washed every soul pure and white. I love to picture the foul garments of sin falling from every man there at the words of Absolution. I love to watch the look of peace and happiness on the men's faces as they lift their rifles and fall into rank, ready for anything, even 'to meet the divil himself,' as my friend of long ago shouted out as he marched by me. Don't you agree with me that the consolations and real joys of my life far outweigh the hard things and privations, even if there were no 'little nest-egg' being laid up in a better and happier world?"

It is when we read such an extract that we most clearly realize the inner power that sustained Father Doyle amid "the hard things and privations," that were far more irksome and painful to him than to someone less idealistic or sensitive. He was brave and untiring, not because he found life congenial, but because he found it so hard. His interests were concentrated on his mission to be "another Christ." This was the ideal in whose consuming fire all other ideals were fused.

"I can say with all truth," he wrote, "I have never spent a happier year. For though I have occasionally felt as if the limit of endurance were reached, I have never lost my good spirits, which have helped me over many a rough road."

He needed all his courage. What a life it was! They went from extremes of heat to unimagined depths of cold, from many days of water above, below, and everywhere to burning sun and parching thirst. There were long tramps by day, with pack and equipment growing heavier each hour, till one became a mass of sweat and mud; nights without sleep, burying the dead, or stumbling along trenches to minister to the dying; nights too, made hideous by bursting shells or the still more terrible warning of approaching poison-gas. Our thoughts go back to Paul of Tarsus, whose life was spent 'in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, . . . in labor and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness.' (II Cor. xi. 26.) Yet, as Father Doyle pointed out, these physical sufferings were light in comparison with that constant sense of insecurity and suspense, the strain of never really being out of danger for miles behind the front, the oppressive feeling of waiting for the stroke of an uplifted sword.

"Pain and privation," he writes, "are only momentary, they quickly pass and become even delightfully sweet, if only borne in the spirit with which many of my grand boys take these things."

"Shure, Father, it's not worth talking about; after all, is it not well to have some little thing to suffer for God and His Blessed Mother?"

"But the craven fear that at times clutches the heart and the involuntary shrinking and dread of human nature at danger and even death are things that cannot be expressed in words. An officer, who had gone through a good deal himself, recently said to me, 'I never realized before what our Lord must have suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane when He began to fear and grow sorrowful.' Yet His grace is always there to help one when most needed, and though the life is hard and trying at times, I have never ceased to thank Him for the privilege (I can call it nothing else) of sharing in this glorious work."

In a letter written to his father on 25 July, he invites him to come in spirit with him on a visit to the trenches. He is thus led to describe a typical incident of his "glorious work," that must have been as consoling to the father as it was to the son.

"There is a party coming towards us down the trench," he writes, "and they have the right of way. We must squeeze into a corner to let them pass. A poor wounded fellow lies on a stretcher with death already stamped on his face. The bearers lay their burden gently down—these rough men have the tender hearts of a woman for the wounded—reverently uncover their heads and withdraw a little as the priest

kneels behind the dying man's head. A glance at the identity-disc on his wrist, stamped with his name, regiment, and religion, shows that he is a Catholic—for there are few men, no matter what their belief, who do not carry a rosary or a Catholic medal round their necks. I wonder what the non-Catholic Padres think of this fearful increase of Idolatry! 'Ah, Father, is that you? Thanks be to God for His goodness in sending you. My heart was sore to die without the priest. Father'—the voice was weak and came in gasps—'Father, oh, I am glad now, I always tried to live a good life, it makes death so easy.' The Rites of the Church were quickly administered, though it was hard to find a sound spot on that poor smashed face for the Holy Oils, and my hands were covered with his blood. The moaning stopped. I have noticed that a score of times, as if the very touch of the anointing brought relief. I pressed the crucifix to his lips as he murmured after me, 'My Jesus, mercy.' As I gave him the Last Blessing, his head fell back and the loving arms of Jesus were pressing to His Sacred Heart the soul of another of His friends, who I trust will not forget, amid the joys of Heaven, him who was sent across his path to help him in his last moments."

"It is little things like this that help one over the hard days and sweeten a life that has little in it naturally attractive. If you had come up the trench with me twelve months ago on the morning of the gas attack and watched that same scene repeated hour after hour, I think you would have thanked God for the big share you have in the salvation of so many souls."

We are able to narrate one or two incidents of "this glorious work" which occurred during this period.

"The enemy for once did me a good turn," he writes on 22 May. "I had arranged to hear the men's confessions shortly before he opened fire, and a couple of well-directed shells helped my work immensely by putting the fear of God into the hearts of a few careless boys who might not have troubled about coming near me otherwise. I wonder were the Sacraments ever administered under stranger circumstances? Picture my little dugout (none too big at any time) packed with men who had dashed in for shelter from the splinters and shrapnel coming down like hail. In one corner is kneeling a poor fellow recently joined—who has not 'knelt to the priest,' as the men quaintly say, for many a day—trying to make his Confession. I make short work of that, for a shower of clay and stones falling at the door is a gentle hint that the 'crumps' are getting uncomfortably near, and I want to give him Absolution in case an unwelcome visitor should walk in. Then, while the ground outside rocks and seems to split with the crash of shells, I give them all Holy Communion, say a short prayer, and perform the wonderful feat of packing a few more into our sardine-tin of a house."

"As soon as I got the chance, I slipped round to see how many casualties there were, for I thought not a mouse could survive the bombardment. Thank God, no one was killed or even badly hit, and the firing having ceased, we could breathe again. I was walking up the trench from the dressing-station when I suddenly heard the scream of another shell. . . . It was then I realized my good fortune. There are two ways to my dugout, and naturally, I choose the shorter. This time, without any special reason, I went by the longer way. It was well I did, for the shell pitched in the other trench, and probably would have caught me nicely as I went by. Instead of that, it wreaked its vengeance on my unfortunate orderly, who was close by in his dugout. It sent him spinning on his head but otherwise did not injure him. I found another string of men awaiting my return to get Confession and Holy Communion. In fact, I had quite a busy evening, thanks once more to Fritz's High Explosive, which has a wonderful persuasive effect of its own. I am wondering how many pounds of H.E. I shall require when giving my next retreat!"

Before describing another of Father Doyle's exploits in rendering spiritual aid to a raiding party, we shall give his description of a raid.

"As you might like to know," he tells his father on 29 May, "how the game of raiding your neighbor is played, a sort of novelty for your next garden-party, I shall give you a few particulars. You dig two trenches about a hundred yards apart and fill one with the enemy who are well provided with hand bombs, machine guns, etc. Some night when you think they won't expect your coming, a party of your men climb over the top of their parapet and start to crawl *á la* Red Indian towards the foe. It is exciting work, for star shells are going up every few minutes and lighting up No Man's Land, during which time your men lie on their faces motionless, probably cursing the inventor of said star shells and praying for black darkness. It is part of the game that, if the enemy sees you, they promptly paste you with bombs (which hurt) or give you a shower-bath of leaden bullets. For this reason, when the game is played at garden-parties, it is recommended to place husbands in one trench and wives in the other and to oppose P.P.'s or Reverend Mothers to their curates and communities. In this way, accuracy of aim is wonderfully improved and the casualties become delightfully high, which (in these days) is a desideratum when supper hour arrives."

"Having reached a certain distance, the raiders wait for the artillery barrage to open. That is a sight never to be forgotten. At a fixed moment, every gun opens fire simultaneously with a crash that shakes the heavens and for five minutes the enemy's trench is from end to end a line of fire lit up by the hundreds of bursting shells. Then the barrage lifts like a curtain to the second trench to keep back reinforcements, while the attackers dash through the cut barbed wire over into the trench, sometimes to meet with a stout opposition in spite of the awful shelling, sometimes only finding the

bleeding remains of what was once a brave man. Dugouts are bombed if their occupants won't come out, papers and maps secured, prisoners captured if possible—to be questioned later for information that seems to be freely and foolishly given. Then, the raiders, carrying their own dead and wounded, get back as quickly as they can to their own lines for, by this time, the enemy artillery has opened fire and things are lively."

He then proceeds to describe an adventure of his in which, he thinks, "there was really little danger."

"A few nights ago," he writes, "I had been along the front line as usual to give the men a General Absolution that they are almost as anxious to receive for the comfort it will be for their friends at home, should they fall, as for themselves. I was coming down to the advanced dressing-station, when I learned that a small party had 'gone over the top' on our right, though I had been told the raid was only from the left. When I got to the spot, I found they had all gone and were lying well out in No Man's Land. It was a case of Mahomet and the mountain once more. The poor 'mountain' could not come back, though they were longing to, but the prophet could go out, could he not? So, Mahomet rolled over the top of the sandbags into a friendly shell-hole and started to crawl on his hands and knees and stomach towards the German trenches. Mahomet, being only a prophet, was allowed to use bad language, of which privilege he availed himself to the full, so report goes, for the ground was covered with bits of broken barbed wire, shell splinters, nettles, etc., etc., and the poor prophet on his penitential pilgrimage left behind him much honest sweat and not a few drops of blood."

"That was a strange scene! A group of men lying on their faces, waiting for certain death to come to some of them, whispering a fervent act of contrition, and God's priest, feeling mighty uncomfortable and wishing he were safely in bed a thousand miles away, raising his hand in Absolution over the prostrate figures. One boy, some little distance off, thinking the Absolution had not reached him, knelt bolt upright, and made an act of contrition you could have heard in Berlin, nearly giving the whole show away and drawing the enemy's fire."

There was really little danger, as shell-holes were plentiful, but not a little consolation when I buried the dead the next day to think that none of them had died without Absolution. I was more afraid getting back into our own trenches, for sentries, seeing a man coming from the direction of No Man's Land, object to nocturnal visitors and do not bother much asking questions."

The next night (24 May) another raid was made, and Father Doyle recounts how he was able to help a poor prisoner.

"One German prisoner, badly wounded in the leg, was brought in," he writes. "He knew only a few words of English, but spoke French fluently. I try to do all I can for the unfortunate prisoners, as sometimes not much sympathy is shown them and they have evidently been drilled into believing that we promptly roast and eat them alive. I gave him a drink, made him as comfortable as possible, and then, seeing a rosary in his pocket, asked him was he a Catholic. 'I am a Catholic priest,' I said, 'and you need not have any fear.' 'Ah, monsieur, he replied, 'vous êtres un vrai prêtre' (you are a true priest). He gave me his home address in Germany and asked me to write to his parents."

"Poor father and mother will be uneasy," he said, as his eyes filled with tears. "O mon Dieu, how I am suffering, but I offer it all up to You." I hope to get a letter through by means of the Swiss Red Cross, which will be a comfort to his anxious parents, who seem good pious souls."

One other quotation will give a further little illustration of Father Doyle's ministry while his men were in reserve. Early on the morning of Sunday, 3 June, they were relieved, after a rather strenuous time of sixteen days in the front-line, more than usually trying for want of sleep. As Mass for the men was not till midday, Father Doyle had "planned a glorious soak in the convent, an unblushing gluttonous feast of blankets, for the poor old tired 'oss.' "

Through some misunderstanding, his orderly did not turn up with his horse, so he had to trudge back with his heavy pack. On reaching his billet at 2 a.m., he found the door of his room locked. "I had not the heart to wake up the poor nuns," he says; "and after all when one is fast asleep, is not a hard plank just as soft as a feather bed? You see I am becoming a bit of a philosopher!"

"The next morning," he continues, "I had Mass in a field close to the camp. I wish you could have seen the men as they knelt in a hollow square round the improvised altar, brilliant sunshine overhead and the soft green of spring about them. They looked so happy, poor lads, as I went down one line and up the other, giving them the Bread of the Strong. I could not help thinking of another scene long ago when our Lord made the multitude sit down on the grass and fed them miraculously with the seven loaves. Before I got to the end of my 700 Communions, I felt wondrous pity for the twelve Apostles, for they must have been jolly tired also."

"At present I am living in the camp that is further back even than the convent, out in the green fields of country, most peaceful and restful. I have a little tent to myself, but have Rosary, Mass, Confessions, etc., out in the open. The men have absolutely

no human respect, and kneel in rows waiting for their turn ‘to scrape,’ as if they were in church at home, paying no heed to the endless stream of traffic. I am sure non-Catholics must wonder what on earth we are at.”

“To save you unnecessary anxiety,” Father Doyle wrote to his father on 11 June, “I told you in my last note that we were again on the march, which was quite true, but the march was not backwards but towards the enemy. When I wrote we were on the eve on one of the biggest battles of the war, details of which you will have read in the morning papers.”

In another confidential letter of the same date (11 June), however, he was more communicative.

“I have not told them at home,” he wrote, “and do not want them to know, but we have had a terrible time for the last three weeks, constant and increasing shelling, with many wonderful escapes. We are on the eve of a tremendous battle and the danger will be very great. Sometimes I think God wishes the actual sacrifice of my life—the offering of it was made long ago. If so, that almost useless life will be given most joyfully. I feel wonderful peace and confidence in leaving myself absolutely in God’s hands. I know it would not be right, but I would like never to take shelter from bursting-shells and up to a few days ago, till ordered by the Colonel, I never wore a steel helmet. I want to give myself absolutely to Him to do with me as He pleases, to strike or kill me, as He wishes, trying to go along bravely and truthfully, looking up into His loving Face, for surely He knows best. On the other hand I have the conviction, growing stronger every day, that nothing serious will befall me; a wound would be joy, ‘to shed one’s blood for Jesus,’ when I would gladly empty my veins for Him. Otherwise, why would He impress so strongly on my mind that this ‘novitiate’ out here is only the preparation for my real life’s work? Why does He put so many schemes and plans into my mind? Why has He mapped out several little books, one of which will do great good, I believe, because every word will be His? Then, the possibilities of the Holy Childhood have gripped me, and His little perishing souls, 10,000 a day, seem ever to be pleading for sight of Jesus! Yet, I have laid even the desire to do these things at His Feet and I strive might and main to have no will but His, for this pleases Him most. I am very calm and trustful in face of the awful storm so soon to burst. But could it be otherwise, when He is ever with me, and when I know that should I fall, it will only be into His arms of love?”

Father Doyle atoned for his previous reticence by sending his father, immediately after the battle, a rather long account of his own experiences during the few weeks prior to the attack of 7 June, as well as during the actual engagement.

"For months past, preparations on a gigantic scale were being made for the coming attack, every detail of which the Germans knew. For some reason or other, they left us in comparative peace for a long time, and then suddenly started to shell us day and night."

"We had just gone into the line for our eight days, and a lively week it was. How we escaped uninjured from the rain of shells that fell round about us, I do not know. The men had practically no shelter, as their dugouts would scarcely keep out a respectable fat bullet, not to speak of a nine or twelve-inch shell (this is the diameter of the shell-base, not its length). The men used to run to me for protection like so many big children with a confidence (that I was far from feeling) that the 'priest' was a far better protection than yards of reinforced concrete. I have come back to my little home more than once in the early hours of the morning to find it packed with two-legged smoking 'sardines.' They are always quite happy and content, in spite of Fritz's crumps, and I am greeted with the remark, 'We were just saying, Father, that this is a lucky dugout and it is well for us that we have your Reverence with us.' God bless them for their simple faith and trust in Him, for I feel I owe it to my brave boys that we were not blown sky-high twenty times. In fact, the 'Padre's Dugout' was quite a standing joke among the officers, who used to come after a strafe to see how much of it was left."

"Our next eight days in support were even worse, as the Germans had brought up more guns and used them freely. Our Headquarters was a good-sized house, which had never been touched since the war began, being well screened by a wood behind. We were in the middle of dinner the first evening, when in quick succession half a dozen shells burst close around. It was only later on we learned the reason for this unexpected attack. One of the officers, in spite of strict orders to the contrary, had gone on a raid with a map in his pocket on which he had marked various positions, our H.Q. among others. He was captured and 'the fat was in the fire.' Owing to someone's carelessness, no provision had been made for protection against bombardment. We had to stand in the open with our backs against a brick wall, watching the shells pitching right and left and in front, wondering when would our turn come."

"Three or four times each night, at a couple of hours' interval, the torture began afresh, just as one was dozing off to sleep, sending men and officers flying for safety to the 'shady side' of the house. Shelling in the open or in a trench is not so pleasant, but this was horrible for we knew the guns were searching for the spot so obligingly

marked on our map. One morning at about 2 a.m., I had gone down the road to look after some men when two shells smashed into the roof of the house I had left, killing five of our staff, and nearly knocking out the Colonel and two other officers. We got shelter in another Mess only to find that this was a marked spot, too, though the aim was not so accurate."

"All during this time, our guns were keeping up the bombardment of the Wytschaete Village and Ridge, which the 16th Irish Division was to storm. I think I am accurate in saying that not for ten minutes at any time during these sixteen days did the roar of our guns cease. At times, one or two batteries would keep the ball rolling, and then with a majestic crash every gun, from the rasping field-piece up to the giant fifteen-inch howitzer, would answer the call of battle, till not only the walls of the ruined houses shook and swayed, but the very ground quivered. You may fancy the amount of rest and sleep we got during that period, seeing that we lived in front of the cannon, many of them only a few yards away, while the Germans with clock-work regularity pelted us with shells from behind. If you want to know what a real headache is like, or to experience the pleasure of every nerve in your body jumping about like so many mad cats, take the shilling, and spend a week or two near the next position we hope to capture."

"All things come to an end, and at last we finished our sixteen days' Limbo (Purgatory is not near enough to Hell!) and marched back to the rest camp with tongues, to vary the metaphor, hanging out for sleep. That night, a villainous enemy airman dropped bombs close to our tents and, the following day, the guns shelled us, far back as we were. We must be a bad lot, for 'there is no rest for the wicked,' they say. For once, my heart stood still with fear, not so much for myself as for the poor men. There we were on the side of a hill, four regiments crowded together, our only protection the canvas walls of our tents, with big shells creeping nearer and nearer."

"Orders had been given to scatter, but it takes time to disperse some 4,000 men. One well-aimed shell would play havoc in such a crowd. Forgive me for mentioning this little incident. I want to do so in gratitude, to bring out the wonderful love and tenderness of our Divine Lord for His own Irish soldiers, not to claim the smallest credit for myself. I had brought the Ciborium to my tent after Mass, as the men were coming to Confession and Holy Communion all the day. Human beings could not help us then, but He, who stilled the tempest, could do so easily. There was only time for one earnest 'Lord, save my poor boys,' before I rushed out into the open, for at any moment the camp might be a shambles full of dead and dying. As I did, a shell landed a few feet behind an officer, sending him spinning, but he jumped up unhurt. A moment more, down came a second, right into

the middle of a group of men, and, miracle of miracles, failed to explode. A third burst so close to another party I was sure half were killed, though I must confess, never before had I ever seen dead men run so fast. And so it went on, first on one side, then on another, but at the end of the half-hour's bombardment, not a single man of the four regiments had been hit, even slightly."

"The chances of a good night's rest were at an end, for we had to turn out to sleep, as best we could, under the hedges and trees of the surrounding country. It was a big loss to the men, as once the attack (which was due in three days) began, there was little chance of closing an eye. We priests say a prayer at the end of our Office asking the Lord to grant *noctem quietam* (a peaceful night). I never fully appreciated this prayer till now and have said it more than once lately with heart-felt earnestness."

"These few days were busy ones for us, Father Browne and myself. The men knew they were preparing for death and availed themselves fully of the opportunities we were able to give them. Fortunately, the weather was gloriously fine, so there was no difficulty about Mass in the open. There was a general cleaning up and polishing of souls (some of them not too shiny) and a General Communion on two days for all the men and officers, with the usual rosary and prayers each evening. We were consoled because we felt the men had done their best and the future might be safely left in the hands of the great and merciful Judge."

"I fancy the feelings of most of us were the same: awe, not a little fear, and a big longing to have it all over. We knew the seriousness of the task before us, for Wytschaete Hill, the key of the whole position, was regarded, even by the General Staff, as almost impregnable. The German boast was that it would never be taken. Without detracting one bit from the dash and bravery of our Irish lads, which won unstinted praise from everyone—'The best show I have seen since I came to France,' said Sir D. Haig—full credit must be given to the artillery for pounding the defenses to dust, without which our troops would still be on this side of the 300 foot hill instead of a couple of miles on the other side. Everyone felt the losses would be severe, if not colossal. As we sat on our hill and gazed beyond into the valley crammed with roaring guns, and watched the shells bursting in hundreds, we knew the moment was near for us to march down into that hell of fire and smoke. It was small wonder if many a stout heart quaked and thoughts flew to dear ones at home, whom one hardly hoped to see again."

"There were many little touching incidents during these days. One especially I shall not easily forget. When the men had left the field after the evening devotions, I noticed a group of three young boys, brothers, I think, all kneeling saying another rosary. They knew it was probably their last meeting on earth and they seemed to cling to one another for mutual comfort and strength. They instinctively turned to the

Blessed Mother to help them in their hour of need. There they knelt as if they were alone and unobserved, their hands clasped and faces turned towards heaven, with such a look of beseeching earnestness that the Mother of Mercy surely must have heard their prayers. "Holy Mary, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

In a subsequent letter (25 July) Father Doyle refers to some of the talks that he gave to his men during these days.

"Before the last big battle," he writes, "I gave the men a few talks about Heaven, where I hope many of them are now. I have the satisfaction of knowing that what I said helped the poor fellows a good deal and made them face the coming dangers with a stouter heart. The man of whom I told you last year, who said he 'did not care a d... for all the b. . . . German shells (please excuse the language), because he was with the priest that morning,' expressed in a forcible manner what many others felt—that when all is said and done, a man's religion is his biggest (and only true) consolation and the source of real courage. I reminded them of the saying of the Blessed Cure d' Ars, 'When we get to Heaven and see all the happiness that is to be ours forever, we shall wonder why we wanted to remain even one day on earth.' God hides these things from our eyes, for if we saw now the things God has prepared for those that love Him,' life on earth would be absolutely unlivable, and so, I said, the man who falls in the charge is not the loser but immensely the gainer, is not the unlucky one but the fortunate and blessed. You should have seen how the poor chaps drank in every word, for rough and ignorant as they are, they are full of Faith; though I fear their conception of an ideal Heaven, for some at least, would be a place of unlimited drinks and no closing time. There was a broad smile when I told them so!"

"On Wednesday night, 6 June," continues Father Doyle, "we moved off, so as to be in position for the attack at 3:10 a.m. on Thursday morning, the Feast of Corpus Christi. I got to the little temporary chapel at the rear of our trenches soon after twelve, and tried to get a few moments' sleep before beginning Mass at one, a hopeless task, you may imagine, as the guns had gone raging mad. I could not help thinking would this be my last Mass, though I really never had any doubt the good God would continue to protect me in the future as He had done in the past. I was quite content to leave myself in His hands, since He knows what is best for us all."

It was 11.50 when Father Browne and Father Doyle reached the little sandbag chapel they used when holding the line. There they lay down for an hour's rest on two stretchers borrowed from the huge pile waiting nearby for the morrow's bloody work.

Leaving their aide lying fast asleep through sheer exhaustion, the two chaplains got up at 1 a.m. and prepared the altar. Father Doyle said Mass first and was served by Father Browne, who, not having yet made his Last Vows, renewed his Vows at the Mass, as he always did at home on Corpus Christi. It was surely a weird and solemn Renovation. While Father Browne unvested after his own Mass and packed up, Father Doyle and his aide (now awake) prepared breakfast. At 2:30, the two chaplains put on their battle kit and made for their respective aid posts. Up near the front line, along the hedgerows, the battalions of the 48th Brigade were massed in support position. Their task was not to attack, but to follow up and consolidate and, should the need arise, to help the leading brigades.

"As I walked up to my post at the advanced dressing-station," says Father Doyle, "I prayed for that peace of a perfect trust that seems to be so pleasing to our Lord."

And he repeated to himself the verses of a little leaflet that a friend had sent to him when he first became chaplain:

Oh! for the peace of a perfect trust,
My loving God, in Thee,
Unwavering faith that never doubts,
Thou choosest best for me.

In this spirit, in which he had so often schooled himself during his years of spiritual struggle, he waited for the coming crash of battle.

"It wanted half an hour," he continues, "to zero time—the phrase used for the moment of attack. The guns had ceased firing to give their crews a breathing space before the storm of battle broke. At least for a moment, there was peace on earth and a calm that was almost more trying than the previous roar to us, who knew what was coming. A prisoner told us that the enemy knew we were about to attack, but did not expect it for another couple of days. I pictured to myself our men, row upon row, waiting in the darkness for the word to charge and, on the other side, the Germans in their trenches and dugouts, little thinking that seventeen huge mines were laid under their feet, needing only a spark to blow them into eternity. The tension of waiting was terrific, the strain almost unbearable. One felt inclined to scream out and send them warning. All I could do was to stand on top of the trench and give them Absolution, trusting to God's mercy to speed it so far."

"Even now I can scarcely think of the scene that followed without trembling with horror. Punctually to the second at 3:10 a.m., there was a deep-mined roar. The ground in front of where I stood rose up, as if some giant had wakened from his sleep and was bursting his way through the earth's crust. Then I saw seventeen huge columns of smoke and flames shoot hundreds of feet into the air, while masses of

clay and stones, tons in weight, were hurled about like pebbles. I never before realized what an earthquake was like, for not only did the ground quiver and shake, but actually rocked backwards and forwards, so I kept on my feet with difficulty."

"Before the debris of the mines had begun to fall to earth, the 'wild Irish' were over the top of the trenches and on the enemy, though it seemed certain they must be killed to a man by the falling avalanche of clay. Even a stolid English Colonel standing nearby was moved to enthusiasm: 'My God!' he said, 'what soldiers! They fear neither man nor devil!' Why should they? They had made their peace with God, He had given them His own Sacred Body to eat that morning, and they were going out now to face death, as only Irish Catholic lads can do, confident of victory and cheered by the thought that the reward of Heaven was theirs. Nothing could stop such a rush, and so fast was the advance that the leading files actually ran into the barrage of our own guns, and had to retire."

"Meanwhile hell itself seemed to have been let loose. With the roar of the mines came the deafening crash of our guns, hundreds of them. This much I can say: never before, even in this war, have so many batteries, especially of heavy pieces, been concentrated on one objective. H ow the Germans were able to put up the resistance they did was a marvel to everybody, for our shells fell like hailstones. In a few moments, they took up the challenge, and soon things on our side became warm and lively."

"In a short time, the wounded began to come in along with 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.' After all, are they not children of the same loving Savior who said, 'Whatever you do to one of these My least 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. 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."

"My men did not go over in the first wave. They were held in reserve to move up as soon as the first objective was taken, hold the position, and resist any counter-attack. Most of them were waiting behind a thick sandbag wall not far from the advanced dressing-station where I was, which enabled me to keep an eye upon them."

"The shells were coming over thick and fast now and, at last, what I expected and feared, happened. A big 'crump' hit the wall fair and square, blew three men into the field 50 yards away, and buried others who were in a small

dugout. For a moment I hesitated, for the horrible sight fairly knocked the starch out of me and a couple more 'crumps' did not help to restore my courage."

"I climbed over the trench and ran across the open, as abject a coward as ever walked on two legs, till I reached the three dying men. Then, the 'perfect trust' came back to me and I felt no fear. A few seconds sufficed to absolve and anoint my poor boys, and I jumped to my feet, only to go down on my face faster than I got up, as an express train from Berlin roared by."

"The five buried men were calling for help, but the others standing around seemed paralyzed with fear, all save one sergeant whose language was worthy of the occasion and rose to a noble height of sublimity. He was working like a Trojan, tearing the sandbags aside, and welcomed my help with a mingled blessing and curse. The others joined in with pick and shovel, digging and pulling, till the sweat streamed from our faces and the blood from our hands, but we got three of the buried men out alive. The other two had been killed by the explosion."

"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 shellfire. 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 are 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 was 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 the next morning, I had taken the precaution of bringing several Consecrated Particles with me, so 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 that 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, bleeding bodies of those

for whom He had 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 for all His love and goodness."

"I shall make no attempt to describe the battlefield. Thank God, our casualties were extraordinarily light, but every yard of ground had been pitched by a shell. This made getting about very laborious, sliding down one crater and climbing up the next, and increased the difficulty of finding the wounded."

"Providence 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. In the distance, I saw 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' work are: the sweltering heat, a devouring thirst that comes from the excitement of battle, physical weakness from want of food, and a weariness and foot-soreness that I trust will pay a little at least of Saint Peter's heavy score against me."

"Friday was a repetition of the previous day. In a shell-hole, I made a glorious breakfast of a piece of chocolate, a couple of biscuits picked up on the ground (I wiped the clay off first as the Belgians may want it again), and washed the lot down with a draught of water from my bottle. I am certain you did not enjoy your bacon and eggs one-half as much as I did my 'hard tack' and chocolate. Later on, I came in for a cup of tea—without milk, which really spoils good tea—so I did not do so badly."

"Fighting was over for the moment, as we were hard at work bringing up the guns to support the infantry in their advanced positions. Nothing of very great interest happened during the next two days and I had only one fairly narrow escape from an eight-inch shell, which got so terrified at the sight of a Jesuit in khaki that it exploded. I threw my 'tin hat,' as the Tommies call the helmet, on the ground and tried to crawl under it, evidently without complete success, judging by the clods of earth that came whacking on my back till I was pretty well black and blue. Brother Fritz certainly hammered some breath out of me, but failed miserably to damp my good spirits, or diminish my trust in the Sacred Heart."

Early on Sunday morning, the exhausted battalions were relieved. After the battle, the men marched back by easy stages to the rear for a few weeks of rest and training—the only rest that was allowed to the 18th Division in the two years and three months that it was in the field.

"After the battle," writes Father Doyle on 26 June, "we marched back to the rear by easy stages. We spent the rest of the week billeted in farmhouses, the weather being ideal if on the hot side, and the peaceful country seeming a paradise after the din of battle. It was only when the strain was taken off that we realized how utterly tired we were. Yet, rest had come at last and we took it night and day. Then, just as we were settling down to enjoy a long well earned repose, urgent orders reached us to return at once to the trenches. I shall not easily forget that day's march (Sunday, 17 June). The heat was terrific and the road long and hilly. The men stuck it magnificently, in fact too much so, for several of them fainted from exhaustion and all were fairly done up by the time camp was reached. That night at 1 a.m., word was received that the order was cancelled and we were to return to the place we had come from. Someone had blundered, or perhaps it had dawned upon the minds of those in power that the endurance of even Irish soldiers has a limit."

"We spent the next few days marching back further and further to the rear. We are now settled down in quite a nice part of France, very comfortable in fine farmhouses. Best of all, here we stay for some weeks at least, resting and training. It is delightfully peaceful and quiet and if the weather did give us a good drenching on the march, it is now on its best behavior—plenty of sun with a cool breeze."

"My present habitation," he writes a month later, "is a tiny room in an equally tiny cottage. The only big thing in it (barring the fleas) being the bed which occupies nine-tenths of the space. A beautiful dung-heap under my window sends me alternately odoriferous whiffs and savage mosquitoes. One can cheerfully put up with these small inconveniences instead of German shot and shell."

"Our week of special training contained nothing of interest except my two battalions were again very far apart and much scattered. However, I did not object to this, as riding about the country in this beautiful weather was quite enjoyable, and I could arrange my own hours as I pleased."

"An amusing incident took place the first morning we arrived. One old French lady was horrified, on looking out her window, to see a column of soldiers in extended order advancing calmly through her field of oats. Arming herself with a stout stick, she rushed out and started to wallop the leading files, declaring that they might trample on her but not on her precious corn. Hearing a noise behind her, Madame turned round, only to see six huge tanks advancing up the hill, literally making hay of

her cornfield. With a scream of rage, the old lady made for the tanks, waving her stick and defying them to come further at their peril. It was only when two of them made for her (in fun) that she realized the battle was a one-sided affair and retreated to her fort. The English Government had warned the people that this ground would be needed for maneuvers, had given them full compensation, and told them if they sow their crops, it would be at their own risk. However, like true French people, they wanted to get the money and the corn as well."

At this time, everyone was talking of unknown things being planned for a "Hush Army" somewhere in the dunes and there was great excitement. One day, Father Doyle chanced upon a fresh unsoiled copy of the Daily Mail for a Friday in October 1914. It described the German capture of Roulers. A glance at the scare headings on its front page suggested to him a hoax on the mess of the 2nd Dublins. Next day, a Friday (probably 20 July) he managed to get into the mess before the others. He substituted the old copy and abstracted the new one, which he proceeded to read while waiting the turn of events. The first to come in was Major Smithwick who, seeing the heading, called out, "They've begun the big advance. Roulers is captured."

At once there was great excitement and all crowded round to get a peep at the stirring news. After some moments, there were puzzled exclamations.

"Why, it's the Germans who have taken Roulers. That's not Friday's paper."

"Yes, it is."

Then the fraud was ascertained and its author was discovered behind the authentic paper. That was Father Doyle's last practical joke.

During this interval, Father Doyle also preached his last sermon. The new Bishop of Arras, Boulogne, and Saint Omer, Monsignor Julien, was to make his formal entry into Saint Omer on Saturday, 14 July, and to be present the next day at the conclusion of the Novena to our Lady of Miracles. Through the instrumentality of Father Browne and with the ready compliance of General Hickie, it was arranged that there should be a church parade in honor of the Bishop on Sunday, 15 July. About 2,500 men came down. Father Browne said Mass and Father Doyle preached. The ceremony, which was most impressive and successful, has fortunately been described in a letter of Father Browne's written on 22 July from Saint Martin au Laert.

"I arrived at the Cathedral about 11 o'clock (says Father Browne) and was in despair to find that the Pontifical High Mass was not yet finished. Our people are so punctual and the French have no regard for timetables, so I was sure there

would be confusion and delay when our 2,000 Catholics would begin to arrive. But, it was not to be. Quietly and wonderfully quickly, the Mass ended and the people went out to watch the Bishop go back in procession to his house close by. I was relieved to see that neither he nor any of the priests unvested. Then, Father Doyle and I had to try to clear away the hundred or so people who came wandering in for the last Mass, which was to be ours for the day. 'Donnez place, s'il vous plait, aux soldats qui wont arriver.' ('Make room, please, for the soldiers who are coming, I went round saying to everyone.') They moved from the great aisle and got into the side-chapels, leaving the transepts and aisles free. Many refused to do this, when, with pious exaggeration, I said, 'Presque 3,000 soldats irlandais wont arriver tout a I'heure' ('About 3,000 Irish soldiers are just coming.') And lo! they were coming!

Through all the various doors they came, the 9th Dublins marching in by the great western door, the 8th Dublins through the beautiful southern door through which Saint Louis was the first to pass just 700 years ago, and the 2nd Dublins coming into the northern aisle and making their way up to the northern transept. Rank after rank the men poured in until the vast nave was one solid mass of khaki with the red caps of General Hickie and his staff and the Brigadiers in front. Then, up the long nave at a quick clanking march came the Guard of Honor. Every button of its men, every badge, shone and shone again. Their belts were scrubbed till not even the strictest inspection could reveal the slightest stain and their fixed bayonets only wanted the sun to show how they could flash. Up they came and, with magnificent precision, took their places on either side of the altar. I was just leaving the sacristy to begin Mass when I saw the Bishop's procession arriving. He had promised to come only after the sermon, but here he was at the beginning of the ceremony, making everything complete.

Of course, I saw nothing, being engaged in saying Mass, but those who did, said it was a wonderful sight. The beautiful altar, standing at the crossing of the transepts and backed by the long arches of the apse and choir, was, for the feast, surrounded by a lofty throne bearing the statue of our Lady of Miracles. The sides were banked up high with palms. Then, the Guard of Honor was standing rigidly in two lines on either side with the Bishop in his beautiful purple robes on his throne. From the pulpit, Father Doyle directed the singing of the hymns and, after the Gospel, he preached. I knew he could preach, but I had hardly expected that anyone could speak as he spoke then. First, he referred to the Bishop's coming, and very, very tactfully, spoke of the terrible circumstances of the time. Next, he went on to speak of our Lady and the Shrine to which we had come. Gradually the story was unfolded. He spoke wonderfully of the coming of the Old Irish Brigade in their wanderings over the Low Countries. It was here that he touched daringly, but ever so cleverly, on Ireland's part in the war. Fighting for Ireland and not fighting for Ireland, or rather

fighting for Ireland through another. Then he passed on to Daniel O'Connell's time as a schoolboy at Saint Omer and his visit to the Shrine. It certainly was very eloquent. Everyone spoke most highly of it afterwards. The men, in particular, were delighted."

"After the sermon, Mass went on. At the Sanctus, I heard the subdued order, 'Guard of Honor, 'shun!' There was a click as rifles and feet came to position together. Then, the Bishop came from his throne to kneel before the Altar and twelve little boys in scarlet soutanes with scarlet sashes over their lace surplices, appeared with lighted torches and knelt behind his Lordship. At the second bell, came the command, 'Guard of Honor, slope rifles!' Then, as I bent over the Host, I heard, 'Present arms!' There was the quick click, click, click, and silence, till, as I genuflected, from the organ gallery rang out the loud clear notes of the buglers sounding the General's Salute."

At the end of the Mass, the Bishop in a neat little speech thanked the men for the great honor they had paid him. He was especially struck, he said, by the fact that most of them had marched a long way (some nearly ten kilometers) to attend, and he asked those of his flock who were present to learn a lesson from the grand spirit and deep faith of the Irish soldiers.

"With all my heart," said the Bishop, "I am going to give my blessing to you, officers and men of the British Army, children of our sister-nation, Catholic Ireland. May God, by a just compensation for sacrifices accepted in common, bring to an end the interior conflicts that rend the nations. If legitimate aspirations still remain of the Irish people to be satisfied, I bless your hopes and ask of God their realization."

The ceremony concluded by a march past, with bands playing in front of the Episcopal Palace. The Bishop stood on the steps of his house, beaming as he replied to the "eyes right" of each company as it passed him.

"The whole thing," remarks Father Doyle, "made a great impression. People could not help contrasting the respect and honor shown by the British Army with the narrow-minded persecution of the French Government."

This last sermon of Father Doyle will serve as final proof—if such were needed—that the man, whose inner life has been portrayed in previous chapters, was no awkward recluse or unpractical pietist. He was full of lovable human qualities. Especially conspicuous was his unselfish thoughtfulness, which always seemed so natural, so intertwined with playful spontaneity, that one came to take it for granted. He had a wonderful influence over others and won human hearts because he had learnt the Master's secret of drawing all

to himself. He could, as we have just seen, preach persuasively when occasion demanded; but his real sermon was his own life. And from that pulpit, he spoke alike to Protestants and Catholics.

"A few days before Father Willie's death," records Father Browne, S. J., "the Adjutant of the 9th Dublin Fusiliers, a Protestant, said to me, 'What is it makes Father Doyle so different to the rest of your priests? Your R. C. Padres are streets above our fellows, but Father Doyle is as far above the rest of you as you are above them.' On another occasion, Brigadier General Ramsay remarked to me what an extraordinary man Father Doyle was: "He seems to belong to another world!' "

"For fifteen months," writes Dr. C. Buchanan on 9 September 1917, "Father Doyle and I worked together out here, generally sharing the same dugouts and billets, so we became fast friends, I acting as medical officer to his first battalion. I often envied him his coolness and courage in the face of danger. For this alone, his men would have loved him, but he had other sterling qualities that all recognized only too well. He was beloved and respected, not only by those of his own faith but also equally by Protestants, to which denomination I belong. We loved him for his broad-mindedness. To illustrate this, Poor Captain Eaton, before going into action last September, asked Father Doyle to do what was needful for him if anything happened to him, as he should feel happier if he had a friend to bury him. Captain Eaton was one of many whom Father Doyle and I placed in their last resting-place with a few simple prayers. He seldom, if ever, preached, but he set us a shining example of a Christian life."

A similar testimony is eloquently conveyed in a little incident recorded by Father Doyle in a letter he wrote to his father on 25 July 1917. He wrote the letter while seated on a comfortable roadside bank under a leafy hedge, listening, during this intermezzo from the dreadful drama of war, to the nightingales singing in the Bois du Rossignol nearby.

"While I was writing," he says, "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 have all a great liking for you.' 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 even soldiers are human beings and have feelings like anyone else."

There lies the secret of Father Doyle's popularity—his Christ-like democracy. With him, there was neither Jew nor Gentile, neither officer nor private; all were men, human beings, souls for whom Christ died. Every man was equally precious to him; beneath every mud-begrimed unkempt figure, he discerned a human personality. He would risk ten lives, if he had them, to bring help and comfort to a dying soldier no matter who he was. Once he rushed up to a wounded Ulsterman and knelt beside him.

"Ah, Father," said the man, "I don't belong to your Church."

"No," replied Father Doyle, "but you belong to my God."

To Father Doyle all were brothers in need of his ministry.

THE OLD ARMCHAIR

"We shall have desperate fighting soon," wrote Father Doyle in a private letter dated 25 July, "but I have not the least fear. On the contrary, I have great joy in the thought that I shall be able to make a real offering of my poor life to God, even if He does not think that poor life worth taking."

To avoid causing anxiety, he said nothing to his father about the impending battle until the first phase was over. On 12 and 14 August, he sent home in his last two letters a long diary that describes the events that occurred up to that time.

30 JULY

"For the past week, we have been moving steadily up to the Front once more to face the hardships and horrors of another big push, which reports say is to be the biggest effort since the War began. The bloodstained Ypres battlefield is to be the center of the fight, with our left-wing running down to the Belgian coast from which it is hoped to drive the enemy and, perhaps, force him to turn and, thus, fall back very far."

"The preparations are on a colossal scale and the mass of men and guns enormous. 'Success is certain.' our Generals tell us, but I cannot help wondering what are the plans of the Great Leader and what the result will be when He has issued His orders. This much is certain: the fight will be a desperate one for our foe is not only brave but also clever and cunning, as we have learned to our cost."

"Mass in the open this morning under a drizzling rain was a trying if edifying experience. Colonel, officers, and men knelt on the wet grass with the water trickling off them, while a happy if somewhat damp chaplain moved from rank to rank giving every man Holy Communion. Poor fellows, with all their faults, God must love them dearly for their simple faith and love of their religion and for the confident way they turn to Him for help in the hour of trial."

"One of my converts, received into the Church last night, made his First Holy Communion this morning under circumstances he will not easily forget. I see in the paper that 13,000 soldiers and officers have become Catholics since the War began, but I should say this number is much below the mark. Ireland's missionaries, the light-hearted lads who shoulder a rifle and swing along the muddy roads have taught many a man more religion by their silent example than he ever dreamed of before."

"Many a time, one's heart grows sick to think how few will ever see home and country again, for their pluck and daring have marked them down for the positions that only the Celtic dash can take—an honor, no doubt, but it means slaughter as well."

"We moved off at 10 p.m., a welcome hour in one way, as it means marching in the cool of the night instead of sweating under a blazing sun. Still, when one has put in a long day of hard work, and legs and body are pretty well tired out already, the prospect of a stiff march is not too pleasant."

31 JULY

"It was 1:30 a.m. when our first halting-place was reached and, as we march again at three, little time was wasted getting to sleep. It was the morning of July 31, the Feast of Saint Ignatius, a day dear to every Jesuit, but doubly so to the soldier-sons of the soldier-saint. Was it to be Mass or sleep? Nature said sleep, but grace won the day and, while the weary soldiers slumbered, the Adorable Sacrifice was offered for them, that God would bless them in the coming fight and, if it were His Holy Will, bring them safely through it. Mass and thanksgiving over, a few precious moments of rest on the floor of the hut, and we have fallen into line once more."

"As we do, the dark clouds are lit up with red and golden flashes of light, the earth quivers with the simultaneous crash of thousands of guns, and in imagination we can picture the miles of our trenches springing to life as the living stream of men pours over the top—the Third Battle of Ypres has begun."

"Men's hearts beat faster and nerves seem to stretch and vibrate like harp-strings as we march steadily on, ever nearer and nearer towards the raging fight, on past battery after battery of huge guns and howitzers belching forth shells that ten men could scarcely lift, on past the growing streams of motor ambulances, each with its sad burden of broken bodies, the first drops of that torrent of wounded that will pour along the road. I fancy not a few were wondering how long would it be till they were carried past in the same way or was this the last march they would ever make till the final Roll Call on the Great Review Day?"

"We were to be held in reserve for the opening stages of the battle, so we lay all day (the 31st) in the open fields, ready to march at a moment's notice should things go badly at the Front. Bit by bit news of the fight came trickling in. The Jocks (15th Scottish Division) in front of us had taken the first and second objective with little opposition and were pushing on to

their final goal. All was going well. The steady stream of prisoners showed that, for once, Dame Rumor was not playing false. Our spirits rose rapidly in spite of the falling rain, for word reached us that we were to return to the camp for the night, as our services would not be required. Then the sun of good news began to set, and ugly rumors to float about."

"The wily German was at his tricks again. Knowing all his artillery positions were noted by our airmen and 'registered' for shelling, he had withdrawn his guns to new positions, leaving one behind to keep up a rapid fire and so deceive our gunners."

"Whether it was the 'impetuous Celtic dash' that won the ground, or part of the German strategy, the enemy center gave way while the wings held firm. This trick has been played so often and so successfully, one would imagine we should not have been caught napping again. Yet, the temptation for victorious troops to rush into an opening is almost too strong to be resisted, and probably the real state of affairs on the wings was not known. The Scotties reached their objective, only to find they were the center of a murderous fire from three sides. Having beaten off repeated counter-attacks of the 'demoralized enemy,' were obliged to retire some distance. So far, the Germans had not done too badly."

"It was nearly eight o'clock and our dinner was simmering in the pot with a tempting odor, when the fatal telegram came. 'The battalion will move forward in support at once.' I was quite prepared for this little change of plans, having experienced such surprises before, and had taken the precaution of laying in a solid lunch early in the day. I did not hear a single growl from anyone, though it meant we had to set out for another march hungry and dinnerless with the prospect of passing a second night without sleep. When I give my next nuns' retreat, I shall try the experiment of a few supperless and bedless nights on them, just to see what they would say and to compare notes with the soldiers. The only disadvantage would be that I should be inundated with applications to give similar retreats in other convents, everyone being so delighted with the experiment, especially the good Mother Bursar, who would simply coin money!"

"On the road once more in strict fighting kit—the clothes we stood in, a rain-coat, and a stout heart. It was a miserable night with a cold wind driving the drizzling rain into our faces and the ground underfoot being rapidly churned into a quagmire of slush and mud. I hope the Recording Angel will not be afraid of the weather and will not get as tired of counting the steps as I did. Ten thousand and one, ten thousand and two—a bit monotonous at best."

"The road was a sight never to be forgotten. On one side marched our column in close formation on the other galloped by an endless line of ammunition wagons, extra

guns hurrying up to the Front, and motor lorries packed with stores of all kinds. Between the two, flowed the returning stream of empties and ambulance after ambulance filled with wounded and dying."

"In silence, save for the never-ceasing roar of the guns and the rumble of cart-wheels, we marched on through the city of the dead, Ypres, not a little anxious, for a shower of shells might come at any minute. Ruin and desolation, desolation and ruin, is the only description I can give of a spot once the pride and glory of Belgium. The hand of war has fallen heavy on the city of Ypres. Scarce a stone remains of the glorious Cathedral and equally famous Cloth Hall. The churches, a dozen of them, are piles of rubbish. Gone are the convents, the hospitals, and public buildings. Though many of the inhabitants are still there, their bodies lie buried in the ruins of their homes and the smell of rotting corpses poisons the air. I have seen strange sights in the last two years, but this was the worst of all. Out again by the opposite gate of this stricken spot, that people say was not undeserving of God's chastisement, across the moat and along the road pitted all over with half-filled-in shell-holes. Broken carts and dead horses, with human bodies too, if one looked, lie on all sides, but one is too weary to think of anything except how many more miles must be covered."

WW I – YPRES CLOTH HALL

WW I – YPRES CHURCH

"We have a welcome halt at last, with, perhaps, an hour or more delay. The men were already stretched by the side of the road and I was not slow to follow their example. I used to wonder how anyone could sleep lying in mud or water, but at that moment the place one slept, as far as I was concerned, did not matter two straws. A thorn-bush, the bed of a stream, anywhere would do to satisfy the longing for even a few moments' slumber after nearly two days and nights of marching without sleep. I picked out a soft spot on the ruins of a home, lay down with a sigh of relief, and then, for all I cared, all the

King's guns and the Kaiser's combined might roar till they were hoarse and all the rain in the heavens might fall, as it was falling then, I was too tired and happy to bother."

"I was chuckling over the disappearance of the officer in front of me into a friendly trench from which he emerged if possible a little more muddy than he was, when I felt my two legs shoot from under me and I vanished down the sides of a shell-hole that I had not noticed. As I am not making a confession of my whole life, I shall not tell you what I said, but it was something different from the exclamation of the pious old gentleman who used to miss the golf ball."

"The Headquarters Staff found shelter in an old mineshaft. It was dark, foul-smelling, and dripping water that promised soon to flood us out. Still, it was some protection from the downpour outside and I slept like a top for some hours in a dry corner sitting on a coil of wire."

1 AUGUST

"Morning brought a leaden sky, more rain, and no breakfast! Our cook with the rations had got lost during the night, so there was nothing for it but to tighten one's belt and bless the man who invented eating. But, He who feeds the birds of the air did not mutter 'Tut, tut' every time he forgets us. Therefore, by midday we were sitting before a steaming tin of tea, bully beef, and biscuits, a banquet fit to set before an emperor after a nearly twenty-four hour fast. Not for a moment during the whole of the day did the merciless rain cease. The men, soaked to the skin and beyond it, were standing up to their knees in a river of mud and water, and, like ourselves, were unable to get any hot food till the afternoon. Our only consolation was that the trenches were not shelled and we had no casualties. Someone must have had compassion on our plight, for, when night fell, a new Brigade came in to relieve us, much to our surprise and joy. We moved back to the camp we had left the previous night, one of the hardest marches I ever put in, but cheered at the thought of a rest. Once again, we got through Ypres without a shell, though they fell before and after our passing. Good luck was on our side for once."

Here they remained for a couple of days, and it was during this interval that Father Doyle wrote the above little chronicle. He resumed it on the morning of Sunday, 12 August.

"Dearest Father," he began, "when I finished writing the last line I could not help asking myself should I ever continue this little narrative of my adventures and experiences, for we were under marching-orders to make our way that night to the

Front Line, a series of shell-holes in the ground which we won from the enemy. To hold this, we knew would be no easy task, but I little thought of what lay before me, of the thousand and one dangers I was to pass through unscathed, or of the hardship and suffering that were to be crowded into the next few days."

"It is Sunday morning, August 12. We have just got back to camp after (for me at least) six days and seven continuous nights on the battlefield. There was no chance last night of a moment's rest and you may imagine there was little sleep the previous nights either, sitting on a box with one's feet in 12 inches of water."

For the past forty-eight hours, we have lived, eaten, and slept in a flooded dugout, which one left at the peril of his life, so you may fancy what relief it was to change one's sodden muddy clothes.

"Tired as I am, I cannot rest till I try to give you some account of what has happened, for I know you must be on the look-out for news of your boy, and also because my heart is bursting to tell you of God's love and protection, never so manifest as during this week."

"He has shielded me from almost countless dangers with more than the tender care of an earthly mother. What I have to say sounds in parts almost like a fairytale and, if He has tried my endurance, once at least almost to breaking-point, it was only to fill me with joy at the thought that I was deemed worthy to suffer (a little) for Him."

"I shall give you as simply as I can the principal events of these exciting days as I jotted them down in my notebook."

Before resuming the diary, it is necessary to remark that, after the death of Father Knapp (31 July), Father Browne was appointed chaplain to the 2nd Irish Guards. Hence, from 2 August till his death, Father Doyle had the four battalions to look after, as no other priest had come to the 48th Brigade. A certain priest had indeed been appointed as Father Browne's successor by Father Rawlinson. By some error, the order was brought to a namesake, who, on arriving at Poperinghe and discovering the mistake, absolutely refused to have anything to do with the battle. This will explain why Father Doyle had such hard work and why he would not allow himself any rest or relief. On 15 August, Father Browne wrote to his brother (Rev. W. F. Browne, C.C.).

"Father Doyle is a marvel. You may talk of heroes and saints—they are hardly in it! I went back the other day to see the old Dubs., as I heard they were having, we'll say, a taste of the War."

"No one has been yet appointed to my place, and Father Doyle has done double work. So unpleasant were the

conditions that the men had to be relieved frequently. Father Doyle had no one to relieve him, so he stuck to the mud and the shells, the gas and the terror. Day after day, he stuck it out."

"I met the Adjutant of one of my two battalions, who previously had only known Father Doyle by sight. His first greeting to me was—'Little Father Doyle (they all call him that, more in affection than anything else) deserves the V.C. more than any man that ever wore it. We cannot get him away from the line while the men are there, he is with his own and he is with us. The men could not stick it half so well if he weren't there. If we give him an orderly, he sends the man back, he wears no tin hat, and he is always so cheery.' "

"Another officer, also a Protestant, said, 'Father Doyle never rests. Night and day, he is with us. He finds a dying or dead man, does all, comes back smiling, makes a little cross, goes out to bury him, and then begins all over again.' "

Father Browne added, "I needn't say that, through all this, the conditions of ground and air and discomfort surpass anything that I ever dreamt of in the worst days of the Somme."

We can now provide the last fragments of Father Doyle's diary.

5 AUGUST

"All day I have been busy hearing the men's confessions, and giving batch after batch of Holy Communion. A consolation surely to see them crowding to the Sacraments, but a sad one too, because I know for many of them it is the last Absolution they will ever receive, and the next time they meet our Blessed Lord will be when they see Him face to face in Heaven."

And here, a week later, Father Doyle interrupts his narrative by a spontaneous outburst of grief for the loss of those whom he loved as "his own children."

"My poor brave boys!" he exclaims. "They are lying now out on the battlefield; some in a little grave dug and blessed by their chaplain, who loves them all as if they were his own children; others stiff and stark with staring eyes, hidden in a shell-hole where they had crept to die; while perhaps in some far-off thatched cabin an anxious mother sits listening for the well-known step and voice that will never gladden her ear again. Do you wonder in spite of the joy that fills my heart that many a time the tears gather in my eyes, as I think of those who are gone?"

"As the men stand lined up on Parade, I go from company to company giving a General Absolution that I know is a big comfort to them. Then, I shoulder my pack and make for the train that this time is to carry us part of our journey."

"Top end for Blighty, boys, bottom end Berlin," I tell them as they clamber in, for they like a cheery word. 'If you're for Jerryland, Father, we're with you too,' shouts one big giant, his shout is greeted with a roar of approval, and Berlin wins the day hands down."

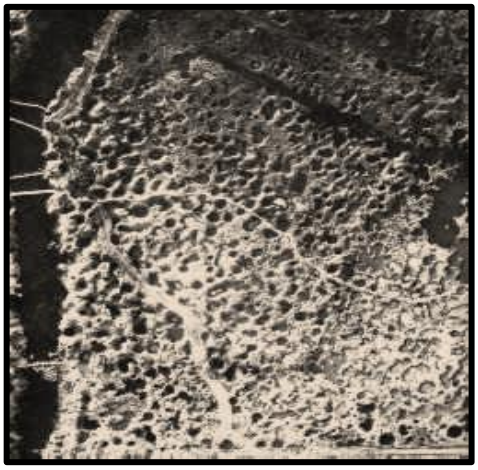
"Though we are in fighting-kit, there is no small load to carry. The load includes a haversack containing little necessary things and three days' rations, which consist of tinned corned beef, hard biscuits, tea and sugar, with usually some solidified methylated spirit for boiling water when a fire cannot be lighted; two full water-bottles; a couple of gas helmets, the new one weighing nine pounds, but guaranteed to keep out the smell of the Old Boy himself; then a waterproof trench-coat; and, in addition, my Mass-kit strapped on my back, on the off-chance that some days at least I may be able to offer the Holy Sacrifice on the spot where so many men have fallen. My orderly should carry this, but I prefer to leave him behind when we go into action, to which he does not object. On a roasting hot day, tramping along a dusty road or scrambling up and down shell-holes, the extra weight tells. But then, I think of my Angel Guardian, counting my steps, and the pack grows light and easy!"

"As I marched through Ypres at the head of the column, an officer ran across the road and stopped me. 'Are you a Catholic priest?' he asked, 'I should like to go to Confession.' There and then, by the side of the road while the men marched by, he made his peace with God, and went his way. It was a trivial incident, but it brought home vividly to me what a priest was, and the wondrous power given him by God. All the time, we were pushing on steadily towards our goal across the battlefield of the previous week. Five days of almost continuous rain had made the torn ground worse than any ploughed field, but none seemed to care as so far not a shot had fallen near."

"We were congratulating ourselves on our good luck, when suddenly the storm burst. Away along the front trenches, we saw the SOS signal shoot into the air, two red and two green rockets, telling the artillery behind of an attack and calling for support. There was little need to send any signal as the enemy's guns had opened fire with a crash and, in a moment pandemonium, in fact, fifty of them were set loose. I can but describe the din by asking you to start together fifty first-class thunderstorms, though even then the swish and scream, the deafening crash of the shells, would be wanting."

"On we hurried in the hope of reaching cover that was close at hand, when right before us the enemy started to put down a heavy barrage, literally a curtain of shells, to prevent reinforcements coming up. There was no getting through that alive, and, to make matters worse, the barrage was creeping nearer and nearer (only fifty yards away) while shell-fragments hummed uncomfortably close. Old shell-holes there were in abundance, but every one of them was brimful of water, and one would only float on top. Here was a fix!"

"Yet somehow, I felt that though the boat seemed in a bad way, the Master was watching even while He seemed to sleep, and that help would surely come. In the darkness, I stumbled across a huge shell-hole crater, recently made, as it was not yet filled with water. We rolled into it and lay on our faces, while the tempest howled around and angry shells hissed overhead and burst on every side. For a few moments, I shivered with fear, for we were now right in the middle of the barrage and the danger was very great, but my courage came back when I remembered how easily He who had raised the tempest saved His Apostles from it, and I never doubted He would do the same for us. Not a man was touched, though one had his rifle smashed to bits."



WW I
SHELL HOLES ON THE BANKS OF THE YSER
(AERIAL VIEW)

"We reached Headquarters, a strong block-house made of concrete and iron rails, a masterpiece of German cleverness. From time to time, all during the night, the enemy gunners kept firing at our shelter, having the range to a nicety. Scores exploded within a few feet of it, shaking us till our bones rattled; a few went smash against the walls and roof; and one burst at the entrance, nearly blowing us over, but doing no harm, thanks to the scientific construction of the passage. I tried to get a few winks of sleep on a stool as there was no room to lie down with sixteen men in the small hut. And I came to the conclusion that so far we had not done badly, and there was every promise of an exciting time."

6 AUGUST

"The following morning, though the Colonel and other officers pressed me very much to remain with them on the grounds that I would be more comfortable, I felt that I could do better work at the advanced dressing-station, or rather aid-post. I went there

and joined the doctor. It was a providential step and saved me from being the victim of an extraordinary accident. The following night a shell again burst at the entrance to the blockhouse, as it had done our first night there. This time, the shell exploded several boxes of Verey lights or rockets that had been left at the door. A mass of flame and dense smoke rushed into the dugout, severely burning some and almost suffocating all the officers and men, fifteen in number, with poisonous fumes before they made their escape. Had I been there, I should have shared the same fate, so you can imagine what I felt as I saw all my friends carried off to hospital, possibly to suffer ill effects for life, while I by the merest chance was left behind well and strong to carry on God's work. I am afraid you will think me ungrateful, but more than once I almost regretted my escape, so great has been the strain of these past days now happily over."

"For once, getting out of bed (save the mark) was an easy, in fact, delightful task, for I was stiff and sore from my night's rest. My first task was to look round and see what the possibilities were for Mass. As all the dugouts were occupied if not destroyed or flooded, I was delighted to discover a tiny ammunition store that I speedily converted into a chapel, building an altar with the boxes. The fact that it barely held myself did not signify, as I had no server and had to be both priest and acolyte. In a way, I was not so sorry I could not stand up, as I was able for once to offer the Holy Sacrifice on my knees."

"It is strange that out here a desire I have long cherished should be gratified, viz., to be able to celebrate alone, taking as much time as I wished without inconveniencing anyone. I read long ago in the Acts of the Martyrs of a captive priest, chained to the floor of the Coliseum, offering up the Mass on the altar of his own bare breast. Apart from that, Mass that morning must have been a strange one in the eyes of God's angels, yet I trust not unacceptable to Him."

WW I
ADVANCED DRESSING STATION

Returning to the dressing-station, I refreshed the inner man in preparation for a hard day's work. You may be curious to know what an aid-post is like. Get out of your mind all ideas of a clean hospital ward, for our first-aid dressing station is any place, as near as possible to the fighting-line, which will afford a little shelter. It could be a cellar, a coal-hole, sometimes even a shell-hole. Here, the wounded, who

have been roughly bandaged on the field, are brought by the stretcher-bearers to be dressed by the doctor. Our aid-post was a rough tin shed built beside a concrete dugout that we christened the Pig-sty. You could just crawl in on hands and knees to the solitary chamber that served as a dressing-room, recreation-hall, sleeping-apartment, and anything else for which you cared to use it. One could not very well sit up, much less stand in our chateau, but you could stretch your legs and get a snooze if the German shells and the wounded men let you. On the floor were some wood-shavings, kept well moistened in damp weather by a steady drip from the ceiling and which gave cover to a host of curious little creatures, all most friendly and affectionate. There was room for three, but, as a rule, we slept six or seven officers side by side. I had the post of honor next the wall, which had the double advantage of keeping me cool and damp, and of offering a stout resistance if anyone wanted to pinch more space, not an easy task, you may well conclude."

"When not occupied with the wounded, I spent a good part of the day wandering round the battlefield with a spade to bury stray dead. Though there was not very much infantry fighting owing to the state of the ground, not for a moment during the week did the artillery duel cease, reaching at times a pitch of unimaginable intensity. I have been through some hot stuff at Loos, and the Somme was warm enough for most of us, but neither of them could compare to the fierceness of the German fire here. For example, we once counted fifty shells, big chaps too, whizzing over our little nest in sixty seconds, not counting those that burst close by. In fact, you became so accustomed to it all that you ceased to bother about them, unless some battery started strafing your particular position, when you began to feel a keen personal interest in every newcomer. I have walked about for hours at a time getting through my work, with 'crumps' of all sizes bursting in dozens on every side. More than once my heart has nearly jumped out of my mouth from sudden terror, but not once during all those days have I had what I could call a narrow escape, but always a strange confident feeling of trust and security in the all-powerful protection of our Blessed Lord. You will see before the end that my trust was not misplaced. All the same, I am not foolhardy nor do I expose myself to danger unnecessarily, the coward is too strong in me for that. But when duty calls, I know I can count on the help of One who has never failed me yet."

7 AUGUST

"No Mass this morning, thanks, I suppose, to the kindly attention of the evil one. I reached my chapel of the previous morning, only to find that a big 9.5-inch shell had

landed on the top of it during the day. I went away, feeling very grateful I had not been inside at the time, but had to abandon all thought of Mass as no shelter could be found from the heavy rain."

"The Battalion went out today for a three day rest, but I remained behind. Father Browne has gone back to the Irish Guards. He is a tremendous loss, not only to myself personally, but to the whole Brigade where he did magnificent work and made a host of friends. So, I was left alone. Another chaplain was appointed but, for reasons best known to himself, he did not take over his battalion and let them go into the fight alone. There was nothing for it but to remain on and do his work, and glad I was I did so, for many a man went down that night, the majority of whom I was able to anoint."

"Word reached me about midnight that a party of men had been caught by shell-fire nearly a mile away. I dashed off in the darkness, this time hugging my helmet as the enemy was firing gas shells. A moment's pause to absolve a couple of dying men, and then I reached the group of smashed and bleeding bodies, most of them still breathing. The first thing I saw almost unnerved me; a young soldier lying on his back, his hands and face a mass of blue phosphorous flame, smoking horribly in the darkness. He was the first victim I had seen of the new gas the Germans are using, a fresh horror in this awful war. The poor lad recognized me. I anointed him on a little spot of unburnt flesh, not a little nervously (as the place was reeking with gas), gave him a drink, which he begged for so earnestly, and then hastened to the others."

"Back again to the aid-post for stretchers and help to carry in the wounded, while all the time the shells are coming down like hail. Good God! How can any human thing live in this? As I hurry back, I hear that two men have been hit twenty yards away. I am with them in a moment, splashing through mud and water. A quick absolution and the last rites of the Church. A flash from a gun shows me that the poor boy in my arms is my own servant, or rather one who took the place of my orderly while he was away, a wonderfully good and pious lad."

"By the time we reached the first party, all were dead, most of them with charred hands and faces. One man with a pulverized leg was still living. I saw him off to hospital, made as comfortable as could be, but I could not help thinking of his torture as the stretcher jolted over the rough ground, and up and down the shell-holes."

"Little rest that night, for the Germans simply pelted us with gas shells of every description, which, however, thanks to our new helmets, did no harm. Fritz is an expert in gas torture. He has long treated us to weeping shells, and many an unrepentant tear I have shed. Now he has some stuff that tickles your

throat and nose like red pepper and makes you sneeze like a soda water bottle; a gas that burns your hands and face, a beast of a thing that gives you all the delights of a rough sea voyage; hence you can have quite a lively time if you wish to."

8 AUGUST

"There is little to record during the next couple of days except the discovery of a new cathedral and the happiness of daily Mass. This time I was not quite so well off as I could not kneel upright and my feet were in the water that helped to keep the fires of devotion from growing too warm. Having carefully removed an ancient German leg, I managed to rest by sitting on the ground, a new rubric I had to introduce also at the Communion, as otherwise I could not have emptied the chalice. I feel that when I get home again I shall be absolutely miserable because everything will be so clean and dry and comfortable. Perhaps some kind friend will pour a bucket or two of water over my bed occasionally to keep me in good spirits."

"When night fell, I made my way up to the part of the line that could not be approached in daylight, to bury an officer and some men. A couple of grimy, unwashed figures emerged from the bowels of the earth to help me, but first knelt down and asked for Absolution. They then leisurely set to work to fill in the grave. 'Hurry up, boys,' I said, 'I don't want to have to bury you as well,' for the spot was a hot one. They both stopped working much to my disgust, for I was just longing to get away. 'Be gobs, Father,' replied one, 'I haven't the devil a bit of fear in me now after the holy Absolution.' 'Nor I,' chimed in the other, 'I am as happy as a king.' The poor Padre, who had been keeping his eye on a row of 'trumps' that were coming unpleasantly near, felt anything but happy. However, there was nothing for it but to stick it out as the men were in a pious mood. He escaped at last, grateful that he was not asked to say the rosary."

10 AUGUST

"A sad morning as casualties were heavy and many men came in dreadfully wounded. One man was the bravest I ever met. He was in dreadful agony, for both legs had been blown off at the knee. Never a complaint fell from his lips, even while they dressed his wounds and he tried to make light of his injuries. 'Thank God, Father,' he said, 'I am able to stick it out to the end. Is it not all for little Belgium?' The Extreme Unction, as I have noticed time and again, eased his bodily pain. 'I am much better now and easier, God bless you,' he said, as I left him to attend a dying

man. He opened his eyes as I knelt beside him. "Ah, Father Doyle, Father Doyle," he whispered faintly, and then motioned me to bend lower as if he had some message to give. As I did so, he put his two arms round my neck and kissed me. It was all the poor fellow could do to show his gratitude that he had not been left to die alone, and that he would have the consolation of receiving the Last Sacraments before he went to God. Sitting a little way off I saw a hideous bleeding object, a man with his face smashed by a shell, with one if not both eyes torn out. He raised his head as I spoke. 'Is that the priest? Thank God, I am all right now.' I took his blood-covered hands in mine as I searched his face for some whole spot on which to anoint him. I think I know better now why Pilate said, "Behold the Man" when he showed Our Lord to the people."

"In the afternoon, while going about my rounds, I was forced to take shelter in the dugout of a young officer belonging to another regiment. For nearly two hours, I was a prisoner, and discovered he was a Catholic from Dublin and had been married just a month. Was this a chance visit, or did God send me there to prepare him for death, for I had not long left the spot when a shell burst and killed him? I carried his body out the next day and buried him in a shell-hole. Once again, I blessed that protecting Hand that had shielded me from his fate."

"That night we moved headquarters and aid-post to a more advanced position, a strong concrete emplacement but a splendid target for the German gunners. For the forty-eight hours we were there, they hammered us almost constantly day and night till I thought our last hour had come. There we lived with a foot, some times more, of water on the floor, pretty well soaked through, for it was raining hard at times. Sleep was almost impossible—fifty shells a minute made some noise—and to venture out without necessity was foolishness. We were well provided with tinned food and a spirit lamp to make hot tea, so we were not too badly off. We rather enjoyed hearing the German shells hopping off the roof or bursting on the walls of their own strong fort."

11 AUGUST

"Close beside us, I had found the remains of a dugout that had been blown in the previous day and three men had been killed. I made up my mind to offer up Mass there for the repose of their souls. In any case, I did not know a better 'ole to go to.' To this little act of charity, I attribute the saving of my life later on in the day. I had barely fitted up my altar when a couple of shells burst overhead, sending the clay tumbling down. For a

moment I felt very tempted not to continue as the place was far from safe. Later, I was glad I went on, for the Holy Souls certainly came to my aid as I did to theirs."

"I had finished breakfast and had ventured a bit down the trench to find a spot to bury some bodies left lying there. I had reached a sheltered corner, when I heard the scream of a shell coming towards me rapidly and, judging by the sound, straight for the spot where I stood. Instinctively, I crouched down, and well I did so, for the shell whizzed past my head—I felt my hair blown about by the hot air—and burst in front of me with a deafening crash. It seemed to me as if a heavy wooden hammer had hit me on the top of the head and I reeled like a drunken man, my ears ringing with the explosion. For a moment I stood wondering how many pieces of shrapnel had hit me or how many legs and arms I had left. I then dashed through the thick smoke to save myself being buried alive by the shower of falling clay that was rapidly covering me. I hardly know how I reached the dugout, for I was speechless and so badly shaken that it was only by a tremendous effort I was able to prevent myself from collapsing utterly as I had seen so many do from shell-shock. Then a strange thing happened. Something seemed to whisper in my ear, one of those sudden thoughts that flash through the mind. 'Did not that shell come from the hand of God? He willed it should be so. Is it not a proof that He can protect you no matter what the danger?' "

"The thought that it was all God's doing acted like a tonic. My nerves calmed down and shortly after I was out again to see if I could meet another iron friend. As a matter of fact, I wanted to see exactly what had happened, for the report of a high-explosive shell is so terrific that one is apt to exaggerate distances. An officer recently assured me he was only one foot from a bursting shell, when in reality he was a good 40 yards away. You may perhaps find it hard to believe, as I do myself, what I saw. I had been standing by a trellis work of thin sticks. By stretching out my hand, I could touch the screen, and the shell fell smashing the woodwork! My escape last year at Loos was wonderful, but then I was some yards away, and partly protected by a bend in the trench. Here the shell fell, I might say, at my very feet. There was no bank, no protection except the wall of your good prayers and the protecting arm of God."

"That night we were relieved, or rather it was early morning, 4:30 a.m., when the last company marched out. I went with them so I might leave no casualties behind. We hurried over the open as fast as we could, floundering in the thick mud, tripping over wire in the darkness, and, I hope, some of the lay members cursing the German gunners for disturbing us by—an odd shot. We had nearly reached the road, not knowing it was a marked spot, when, like a hurricane, a shower of shells came smashing down upon us. We were fairly caught, and, for once, I almost lost hope of getting through in safety. For five minutes or more, we pushed on in desperation.

We could not stop to take shelter for dawn was breaking, and we would have been seen by the enemy. Right and left in front and behind, some far away, many very close, the shells kept falling. Crash! One pitched in the middle of the line, wounding five men, none of them seriously. Surely, God is good to us, for it seems impossible that a single man will escape unhurt. Then, when the end seemed at hand, our batteries opened fire with a roar to support an attack that was beginning. The German guns ceased like magic, or turned their attention elsewhere, and we scrambled on to the road and reached home without further loss."

This was the end of Father Doyle's diary. There followed just this last message to his father, so pathetic in the light of his death the next day.

"I have told you all my escapes, dearest father, because I think what I have written will give you the same confidence that I feel, that my old armchair 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 day's 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, dearest, Father, your loving son, Willie. 14/8/17."

Before this letter had reached home, the great Leave Day had come for Willie Doyle. He was called Home to his "old armchair" in heaven!

The descriptions given in this booklet of Father Doyle's superhuman exertions and hairbreadth escapes, made it abundantly clear that only by some continuous miracle could he hope to survive another such advance. It came the next day when once more the Irish troops were moved up through and beyond Ypres to the front line running from Saint Julien to the Roulers railway south of Frezenberg. Every insignificant rise in the undulating Flemish farmlands in front of them was crowned by a German post. There were several strong "pill-boxes" (concrete blockhouses) and, in the middle of the line of attack, a spur (Hill 35) dominated every approach. It was these redoubts—especially Borry Farm Redoubt with its sixty expert gunners—that frustrated all attempts of the Irish when, at dawn on Wednesday, 15 August, they made their attack. Moreover, no supporting waves came up, for no living beings could get through the transverse fire of the German machine-guns. So, when the German counter-attack was launched in the afternoon, the Rifles, the Dublins, and the Inniskillings had to retire, taking with them what wounded they could. Many groups were surrounded and cut off or had to fight their way back in the night.

Father Doyle was speeding all day hither and thither over the battlefield like an angel of mercy. His words of Absolution were the last words heard on earth by many

an Irish lad that day. The stooping figure of priest and father, seen through blinding blood, filled the glance of many in their agony. Perhaps once more some speechless youth ebbing out his life's blood kissed his beloved padre or by a silent handshake bade farewell to the father of his soul.

"Ah, Father Doyle, Father Doyle."

"Is that the priest? Thank God, I am all right now."

"Ah, Father, is that you? Thanks be to God for His goodness in sending you. My heart was sore to die without the priest." . . .

All the little stories come back to us as we try to reconstruct that last great day of priestly ministry and sacrifice. We shall never know here on earth, for, towards the evening of that heroic day, Father Doyle died a martyr of charity. The great dream that had haunted him for a lifetime had come true. He had shed his blood while working for Christ.

"Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends"(John 15.13). We do know details of Father Doyle's death. When, on 15 August, the fighting became desperate and retirement inevitable, all noncombatants, including the doctor and chaplain, received orders to retire. Father Doyle did not retire (how could he when he was wanted so badly?) but continued to go round ministering to the wounded. About 3 p.m., he came to the Regimental Aid Post that was in charge of a Corporal Raitt, the doctor having retired according to orders. With Father Doyle was Private McInespie who was acting as his "runner." Whilst in the Aid Post, word came that a wounded officer of the Dublins was lying in an exposed position. Father Doyle left the Aid Post at once, crawled out to the wounded man, and ministered to him. Then he proceeded to half-drag, half-carry the wounded man to a safer place. McInespie, who had followed, came up after a while and helped him with his burden. They got to a pill-box, out of which came two officers who stood around. The wounded officer was still alive, and Father Doyle asked McInespie to get some water to give him a drink. McInespie had gone a little way and, as the shelling began to grow heavier, the chaplain and the two officers were moving towards the pill-box, carrying the wounded man. Suddenly, a shell dropped close by, killing Father Doyle and the two officers instantaneously and hurling McInespie to the ground. When McInespie recovered sufficiently, he struggled to his feet. Seeing that his companions, and presumably the wounded officer, were dead, he staggered back to the Aid Post, gasped out, "Father Doyle is dead," and collapsed.

The above details were first learned from a letter dictated to a Sergeant O'Brien by McInespie when in hospital suffering from the effects of the shell explosion that killed Father Doyle. After the war, McInespie came to Dublin and was interviewed.

His story was practically the same story he told while in hospital. Corporal Raitt also came to Ireland. He, too, was interviewed and substantially bore out Mclnespie's account. It was also asserted that some retiring Dublins, coming across the body of Father Doyle, gave it a hasty burial. No trace of such a grave has been found.

Mr. T. Cain, B.A., Head Master of Coleridge Street School, Hove, writes (26 October 1945): "The official Life of Father Doyle states that his body was never recovered. This is only partially true. On the morning of 16 August 1917, I was on machine-gun duty in a trench east of Wieltje near the road that forks to the right of Saint Julien. I was with the 36th (Ulster) Division, whose troops had gone over the top that morning in an attack that failed. During the course of the morning, four big Irish lads—Dublins, I believe—came along the trench, carrying a stretcher. The trench was knee deep in mud and water and carrying was difficult, so it is not surprising when they stopped to rest. I noticed then that they were weeping. With Kipling and the "beloved Colonel" in mind, I asked if the Colonel had been wounded. They replied that he had not, but that Father Doyle had been killed while attending the wounded in No Man's Land, and they were taking the body back for burial. One of them added bitterly that there was no need for him to have been killed at all, since he could do nothing for the lads out there as they were all probably dead. I was greatly struck by the fact that these men had risked their lives in searching for and removing a corpse under heavy fire from the shells and were now taking a great deal of trouble to give it burial. My companion, a Protestant, was also much impressed and remarked on the affection showed for a chaplain by Catholics. After a while, the bearers passed on, left the trench, and got on to a nearby road. Almost immediately, a heavy barrage was dropped on the area. It is my opinion that the four men were killed by a direct hit on the road."

It seems likely, therefore, that the remains of him, who often risked his life to bury friend and foe, lie commingled with those of countless unnamed companions beneath the plains of Ypres. Is not such a fate the consummation of his martyrdom?

"Entice the wild beasts to become my tomb, and to leave no trace of my body," writes Ignatius of Antioch to the Romans, "so that falling asleep, I may be a burden to no-one. Then shall I really be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will not even see my body."

Mr. Cain's letter raises an interesting point; namely, the date of Father Doyle's death. Up to this, the accepted date has been 16 August. General Hickie, commanding the 16th Division, in a letter to Father Doyle's father, states that Father Doyle was killed

on 16 August. Mr. Cain says it was on the morning of 16 August that the Dublins came along carrying Father Doyle's body.

Finally, Mr. Michael Hartney, Kilnagrange, Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford, writing under date, 12 November 1945, says, "Mr. Cain is correct in stating that Father Doyle was killed on 16 August. I was on the eastern slope of Frezenberg Ridge during the greater part of that day with the Irish Rifles, one of the battalions of which Father Doyle was chaplain. Early that morning word reached our HQ to the effect that the troops to our right were retiring. The Colonel sent an officer to investigate. On his return a few hours later, this officer, a non-Catholic, said to me, 'Hartney, I'm afraid your chaplain, Father Doyle, has been killed.' He then added that he had seen Father Doyle's dead body with others near a pill-box."

The accounts given by Mr. Cain and Mr. Hartney seem to indicate that Father Doyle was killed on 16 August and to confirm the accepted opinion of the date of his death. If their account is correct, however, Father Doyle must have been killed between midnight and the early hours of 16 August, since he was found dead on the morning of that same day. Now, both Corporal Raitt, who saw and spoke to Father Doyle shortly before his death, and McInespie, Father Doyle's runner, who saw him killed, assert that he met his death during the afternoon between three and five o'clock. Their evidence is borne out by Christopher Flynn, Delgany, Co. Wicklow. His testimony is the more valuable since before giving his account he had never heard or read the story of Father Doyle's death, and so was not influenced by other accounts.

Christopher Flynn was a stretcher-bearer in the 8th Dublins and was present at the attack made in August along the line from Saint Julien to Frezenberg. According to Flynn, the 8th Dublins attacked at dawn on 14 or 15 August—he is certain it was one of these days, but not certain which of them. For most of the morning, Father Doyle was with Flynn, helping him with the wounded and absolving and anointing those near death. After some hours, Father Doyle left Flynn and moved away up the line. Towards evening, the shelling became so heavy that Flynn and a man named Morrissey had to take shelter in a dugout. While they were going there, Flynn saw Father Doyle and two officers moving towards a German pill-box some three or four hundred yards away. As he looked, a shell burst nearby, and Father Doyle and the two officers fell. As the shelling began to get heavier, Flynn and his companion withdrew further back. They made no attempt to go to Father Doyle and the fallen officers. This happened in the evening of the day of the attack between 4 and 6 p.m. It might have been a little earlier, Flynn admits. But he is quite positive that Father Doyle was killed in the evening and on the day the attack was made; namely, 14 or 15 August.

From these various accounts, the events in connection with Father Doyle's death may be recorded, with almost certainty, as follows:

The 8th Dublins attacked at daybreak on 15 August. Father Doyle was killed the evening of that day. His dead body was seen on the morning of 16 August by an officer of the Irish Rifles sent to investigate. Later in the morning, four of the Dublins, searching for the body, found it and brought it along for burial as described by Mr. Cain.

Thus, did "Darling Mother Mary," on the feast of her Assumption, fulfill her part of the compact made with her loyal soldier twenty-four years before—and once more in blood!

MILITARY TRIBUTES

It will not be inappropriate here to find a place for some military tributes to the soldier son and soldier saint.

"All through the worst hours an Irish padre went about among the dead and dying, giving Absolution to his boys. Once he came back to headquarters, but he would not take a bite of food or stay, though his friends urged him. He went back to the field to minister to those who were glad to see him, bending over them in their last agony. Four men were killed by shellfire as he knelt beside them, and he was not touched—not touched until his own turn came. A shell burst close by, and the padre fell dead." (Sir Philip Gibbs in the Daily Chronicle and the Daily Telegraph; also in his book, From Bapaume to Paschendale 1917, p. 254).

"The Orangemen will not forget a certain Roman Catholic chaplain who lies in a soldier's grave in that sinister plain beyond Ypres. He went forward and back over the battlefield with bullets whining about him, seeking out the dying and kneeling in the mud beside them to give them Absolution, walking with death with a smile on his face, watched by his men with reverence and a kind of awe until a shell burst near him, and he was killed. His familiar figure was seen and welcomed by hundreds of Irishmen who lay in that bloody place. Each time he came back across the field, he was begged to remain in comparative safety. Smiling, he shook his head and went again into the storm. He had been with his boys at Ginchy and through other times of stress, and he would not desert them in their agony. They remember him as a saint—they speak his name with tears." (Percival Phillips in the Daily Express and also the Morning Post, 22 August 1917).

"Two instances, especially, should be recorded. The first, that of an officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps attached to the Leinsters, who spent five hours in circumstances of the greatest danger tending the wounded, and behaving in all ways with consummate heroism. The second, that of a Roman Catholic chaplain who went up with the men, sustained and cheered them to the last, till he was killed." (The Time, 8, 22nd August 1917).

"No account, however fragmentary, of the 8th (Dublins) would be complete," writes Frank M. Laird in Personal Experiences of the Great War, "without remembering our R. C. Padre, Father Doyle, a Dublin Jesuit. His name was known and loved throughout the whole Division for unexampled bravery and equal kindliness. When shells dropped round, ordinary mortals took cover or an opposite direction. Father Doyle headed toward them to see if he was wanted. One morning in the line, I was standing watching the communication trench a short way down getting a very nasty shelling. In a few minutes, Father Doyle arrived smiling, having just come through it in his usual visit to the front line, without his tin hat, which he could not be induced to wear. His gentlemanly manner, with his quiet humor and cheery conversation, all made him a very pleasant man to meet at any time and most of all in a bad time."

"Is it any wonder that he was welcome in every mess, that the men worshipped the ground he trod on, and that he was worth several officers in any hot spot where endurance was tested to its height?"

"If I had gone through one thousandth part of what Father Doyle did," said Captain Healy (8th Dublins), "or if I had run a hundredth part of the risks he ran, I should have been dead long ago. Whenever there was danger, there was Father Doyle, and wherever Father Doyle was, there was danger. When I saw him coming towards me, I told him to go away as I knew the enemy would shell the place at once! When shells were raining on us, he used to wander about from dugout to dugout as if he was taking a walk for the good of his health. If a man was hit, you would think he knew it by instinct. He was with the wounded man before anyone else. It didn't matter where the man was lying, out he went to him."

"He was one of the finest fellows I ever met," wrote Lt.Col. H. R. Stirke (commanding the 8th Dublins), "utterly fearless, always with a cheery word on his lips, and ever ready to go out and attend the wounded and dying under the heaviest fire. He was genuinely loved by everybody and thoroughly deserved the unstinted praise he got from all ranks for his rare pluck and devotion to duty."

"Father Doyle," said another Colonel who knew him intimately, "felt fear deeply. He had a highly-strung nervous system and a vivid imagination that visualized danger fully and 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, and not in the company of cheering, sustaining comrades. Father Doyle had no word of command, but his conscience and his sense of duty. He had no violent emotions to blind him to danger. Usually, he had no comrade to bear him company save grim Death, who walked very close to him at times. It may sound a paradox, but it is perfect truth: Father Doyle was the biggest coward in the 16th Division and the bravest man in the British Army!"

"An even more striking description was given by one of his men, who declared emphatically that Father Doyle was *"the bloodiest bravest man in the War!"*

"Father Doyle was one of the best priests I have ever met," wrote General Hickie, commanding the 16th Division, "and one of the bravest men to have fought or worked out here. He did his duty and more than his duty, most nobly, and has left a memory and a name behind him that will never be forgotten. On the day of his death, 16 August, he had worked in the front line and even in front of that line and appeared to know no fatigue—he never knew fear. I can say without boasting that this is a Division of brave men yet, even among these, Father Doyle stood out. He was loved and reverenced by all. His gallantry, self-sacrifice, and devotion to duty were all so well known and recognized. I think that his was the most wonderful character that I have ever known."

"Father Doyle was recommended for the Victoria Cross by his Commanding Officer, by his Brigadier, and by myself. Superior Authority, however, has not granted it, and as no other posthumous reward is given, his name will, I believe, be mentioned in the Commander-in-Chief's Dispatch."

Though Father Doyle cared nothing for human decorations—it was another Commander-in-Chief under Whom he served—it seems right to chronicle this judgment of others and to record the fact that, besides winning the Military Cross, he was recommended for the D.S.O. at Wytschaete and the V.C. at Frezenberg. Even before the Frezenberg action, he was reputed by many to have earned the V.C. Thus, Lieutenant Galvin, writing home on 14 August 1917, says, "If ever a man earned the V.C. in this war, it is Father Doyle. He is simply splendid. He comes up every night under heavy shell-fire, burying the dead, binding the wounded, and cheering the men."

"Everybody says Father Doyle has earned the V.C. many times over," writes a Sergeant of the Dublin Fusiliers in a letter to his mother, "and I can vouch for this myself from what I have seen him do many a time."

“Father Doyle deserves the V.C. more than any man who ever won it,” said the Adjutant of Father Browne’s two Battalions.

The refusal of Superior Authority to recognize conspicuous bravery attested to by men of several regiments, by Father Doyle’s brother-officers, by his Commanding Officer, by his Brigadier, and by the General of his Division, aroused widespread astonishment and disgust.

A fellow-chaplain in The Month (1921) voiced the sentiments of every man when he wrote, “I cannot refrain here from expressing my opinion that among the many glaring inconsistencies that disfigured the award of honors, none was more remarkable than the refusal of the V.C. to this chaplain, who merited it as truly as any one of those—all honor to them—who received it; and not once alone, but twenty times. One hardly knows what to think.”

In its own way, the following generous appreciation by a Belfast Orangeman is rather unique. It was published in the Glasgow Weekly News of 1 September 1917.

“Father Doyle was a good deal among us. We couldn’t possibly agree with his religious opinions, but we simply worshipped him for other things. He didn’t know the meaning of fear, and he didn’t know what bigotry was. He was as ready to risk his life to take a drop of water to a wounded Ulsterman as to assist men of his own faith and regiment. If he risked his life in looking after Ulster Protestant soldiers once, he did it a hundred times in the last few days. The Ulstermen felt his loss more keenly than anybody, and none were readier to show their marks of respect to the dead hero-priest than were our Ulster Presbyterians. Father Doyle was a true Christian in every sense of the word and a credit to any religious faith. He never tried to get things easy. He was always sharing the risks of the men and had to be kept in restraint by the staff officers for his own protection. Many a time have I seen him walk beside a stretcher trying to console a wounded man with bullets flying around him and shells bursting every few yards.”

An even more convincing testimony was borne by a Fusilier who happened to be home in Dublin on leave at the time of Father Doyle’s death. Meeting a friend who told him the news, he kept repeating incredulously: “He’s not dead. He couldn’t be killed!” When at last he was shown a paper describing the padre’s death, the poor fellow knelt down on the pavement and began to pray. Then to the crowd that gathered round him he recounted how, when he was lying wounded in an exposed position and expecting every moment to be killed by a shell, Father Doyle had crept out to him and carried him to a place of safety.

A similarly spontaneous tribute was paid to Father Doyle's memory by a burglar, presumably an ex-soldier, who broke into Mr. Doyle's house in Dalkey at midnight in January 1922. He made the poor old man get up and unlock all the drawers. In ransacking a drawer, he came across a mortuary card of Father Doyle.

"Who's that?" he asked excitedly.

"That's my son, Father Willie Doyle, who gave his life for the soldiers in Flanders," answered Mr. Doyle.

"That was a holy priest," replied the robber, "he saved many souls."

Whereupon he took the card, kissed it, put it in his pocket, and left without taking anything else!

Father Browne, who had been with Father Doyle in Clongowes and Belvedere, who had, above all, been so intimately associated with Father Doyle in their joint mission to the 48th Brigade, expressed his grief and his esteem in a letter, written on 20 August, from which the following passage is quoted.

"All during these last months, he was my greatest help, and to his saintly advice, and still more to his saintly example, I owe everything I felt and did. With him, as with others of us, his bravery was no mere physical show-off. He was afraid and felt fear deeply, how deeply few can realize. Yet, the last word said of him to me by the Adjutant of the Royal Irish Rifles in answer to my question, 'I hope you are taking care of Father Doyle?' was, 'He is as fond of the shells as ever.' His one idea was to do God's work with the men, to make them saints. How he worked and how he prayed for this! Fine weather and foul he was always thinking of them and what he could do for them. In the cold winter, he would not use the stove I bought for our dugout. He scoffed at the idea as making it 'stuffy' and that was when the thermometer was fifteen to twenty degrees below zero, the coldest ever known in living memory here! How he loathed it all, the life and everything it implied! And yet nobody suspected it. God's Will was his law. And to all who remonstrated, 'Must I not be about the Lord's business?' was his laughing answer in act and deed, and not merely in word. May he rest in peace—it seems superfluous to pray for him."

There once more we have Father Doyle's unmistakable portrait, those characteristic traits familiar now to us who in these pages have read his inner life: the just-concealed cross, the unsuspected loathing, the fear so pleasantly disguised, the selfless work and incessant prayer, the loving trustfulness in God's Will. And as we come to the close of this life-story, all its incidents are gathered up in memory to blend into a final cadence—the novice's

blood-sealed covenant, the consuming love and zeal, the hidden reparation, the vigils and scourgings, the pond at Rathfarnham, the nettles at Delgany, the mud and blood of West Flanders and the Somme. Nothing befitted such a life like the leaving of it.

"Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?" he would have gently asked us, had we, prudent ones, expostulated with him that day for being foolhardy. His Father's business, not bloodshed, hate, and strife, but mercy, brotherhood, and reconciliation. He might, of course, have stayed behind in Ypres or Saint Julien. He could, had he wished, have kept out of danger. Perchance some said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." They were right. "For whoever wishes to save his life, will lose it, and whoever for My sake loses his life, will save it. What does it avail a man if, after gaining the whole world, he has lost or forfeited himself ?" "For My sake"—"I tell you, as often as you did it for one of these My brothers, however lowly, you did it for Me." Beyond and besides the great legion of faithful ordinary workers, there is need of a handful of heroes, men who save others because they cannot save themselves. Nicely calculated prudence could not survive without some of the foolishness of the Cross. The death of a hero or a martyr is a higher achievement than mere continuance of physical life.

"Lord, if it be Thou," cried impetuous Peter, "bid me come to Thee upon the waters." Christ said "Come" to foolish Peter, while the prudent apostles remained in the boat. Surely, as Father Doyle on that August morning looked out upon those undulating Flemish fields where shell-barrage and bullet-blasts laid low the advancing waves of brave men, surely he heard the Master's voice bidding him come to Him upon the waters. And he came; with his greathearted faith, he never doubted.

"I am not foolhardy nor do I expose myself to danger unnecessarily, the coward is too strong in me for that; but when duty calls I know I can count on the help of One who has never failed me yet."

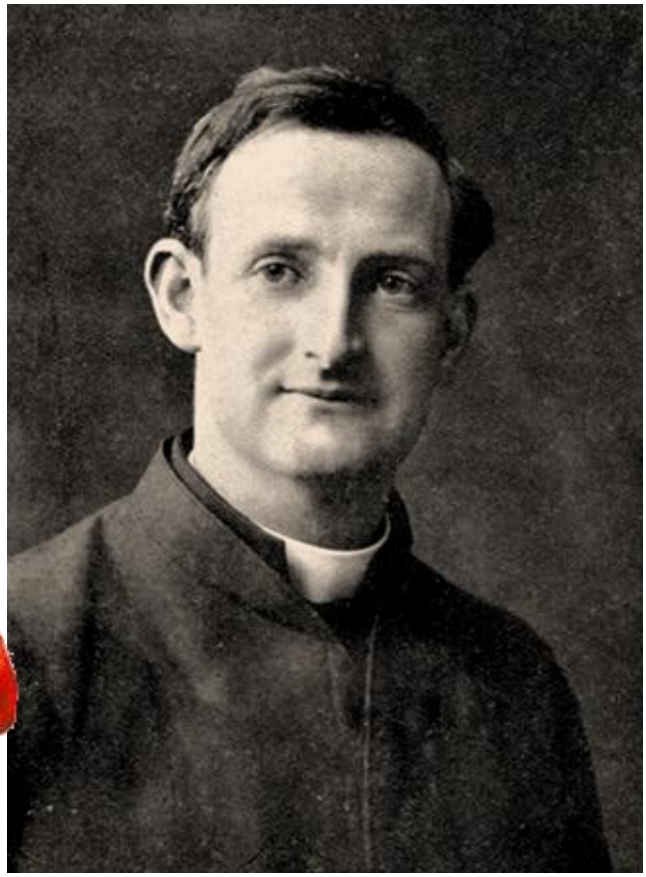
How could he resist? Out yonder, in Verlorenhoek and Frezenberg and along the Hannebeke stream, the smashed and bleeding bodies of his poor fellows were lying.

"My poor brave boys! They are lying now out on the battlefield. Some are in a little grave dug and blessed by their chaplain, who loves them all as if they were his own children. Others stiff and stark with staring eyes, are hidden in a shell-hole, where they had crept to die. Sadly, in some far-off thatched cabin perhaps an anxious mother sits listening for the well-known step and voice that will never gladden her ear again."

Having loved his “poor brave boys” in this world, and eased their passage to the next, he loved them to the end. He did not desert them in their day of defeat without dishonor. And so, somewhere near the Cross Roads of Frezenberg, where he lies buried with them, the chaplain and men of the 48th Brigade are waiting together for the great Reveille.

WW I
FLANDERS FIELDS

POPPIES IN FLANDERS FIELDS



Father William Joseph Gabriel Doyle, S.J.
Born March 3, 1873
Died August 16, 1917

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