

### War Padre

M. I. '43

The train was drawing into Halifax. A young soldier lad shouldered his knapsack and a khaki-clad priest put away his breviary and buttoned up his great-coat. As I closed my book, I breathed a prayer to the Divine Captain for our soldier boys and their chaplains.

Another war is on, and while statesmen, philosophers, historians, and economists discuss the "whys" and the "wherefores", and while we deplore the inevitable suffering of the great cataclysm—the loss of life, the hardships and tortures, the worry and anxiety, the moral and emotional disasters, we know that the men who are fighting for King and country are in no way released from the observance of the Ten Commandments and the obligation of fulfilling the end for which they were created. The part that the Catholic Campaign has to play in helping the soldiers to overcome the many temptations of army life is very great.

The sight of the soldier priest recalled to my mind the details of the saintly life of Reverend William Doyle, S. J. a victim of the Great War, whose biography I had read. Father Doyle was born at Melrose, Dalkey, Co. Dublin, on March 3, 1873, and was the youngest of seven children. He entered the Jesuit Novitiate of Tullabeg in 1891 and was ordained priest in 1907. He was engaged in missionary labours until 1915 and was then appointed chaplain to one of the Irish Divisions going over to France. On August 16, 1917, he was killed at Frezenburg, Belgium, while ministering to the wounded.

The message that comes to us straight from his own life, a life whose real greatness was within, is that it is in little acts that heroism is acquired and by patient perseverance and methodic effort that sanctity is won. He taught his spiritual children how to focus their idealism on the seemingly little things of life, and the day's drab details. "Of what homely stuff the garment of holiness is spun," writes his biographer.

His whole life was pivoted on love for Christ. He filled his days with prayer by an almost incredible number of ejaculations, those "darts of love" so quickly breathed and so useful in times of sickness and weariness. Indeed he became an apostle of ejaculatory prayer, in the practice



of which, however, he allowed his disciples that liberty of spirit so wisely fostered by the Church.

It is encouraging to us to note that many of the acts he offered Jesus were small in themselves, but it was precisely those acts that built up his will power to such a height that, when the hour of big-scale heroism drew nigh, it did not find him untrained to stand the test.

However, we must not forget that this man, who practised prayer and mortification even unto the holy folly of the saints so little understood in our ease-loving days, was intensely human. After his completion of theology he wrote to his sister: "I can scarcely believe that I have the long years of study, which I used to dread so much, really over. You know I was never intended by Almighty God to keep my nose buried in books all day. Climbing up chimneys or walking on my head across the roof of the house is more in my line."

As chaplain of the 48th Brigade he has left a memory and a name that will never be forgotten. He was recommended for the Victoria Cross, but this valiant soldier of Christ cared nothing for human decorations. He strove only to please the great Commander-in-Chief under whom he served.

By the men of his battalion he was idolized. Many a dying soldier on the bloody field flashed a last look of loving recognition as the fearless padre braved the whistling machine gun bullets to give his boy a last few words of hope.

He was killed by a shell on August 16, 1917, and one can hardly help thinking that his death was God's answer to his lifelong prayer for martyrdom. Somewhere near the Cross Roads of Frezenberg, where he lies buried, the chaplain and many of the men of the 48th Brigade are waiting together for the Great Reveille.



Errors like straws, upon the surface flow;  
He who would search for pearls must dive below.

—Dryden.

—————

Avoid excess in everything.

—Socrates.