

"I Have Not Been Idle"

Reverend Francis Patrick Lyons, Paulist

Ross, John Elliot
- "I have not..."
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by

J. ELLIOT ROSS, C.S.P.



"This is success. To be able at the end to kiss my mission crucifix and say I have not been idle."

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BY

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

FROM the very first days of our novitiate, Frank Lyons and I felt drawn to each other. We had both lost our mothers when we were so young (he less than a month old, and I less than two years old) that we grew up deprived of that precious heritage, the memory of a mother's love; both of us had passed the examination for a Rhodes Scholarship, but had failed to get an appointment; we had been graduated about the same time and had both taught in non-Catholic preparatory schools. We had indeed much in common, and once it was my privilege as special infirmarian, to take care of him during a serious illness, a service which he was good enough to say was an important help in enabling him to secure a measure of health.

Although after ordination we were never stationed in the same house, our friendship did not lapse. We corresponded frequently and saw each other when we could, and I may truly say I had an intimate personal knowledge of his character and opinions. So, in spite of its unworthiness, I offer this little sketch which has been checked by some of the Fathers associated with Father Lyons after ordination. He left no diary but among his effects at death was a little notebook on the spiritual life to which the reader will find many references. It was evidently kept during his novitiate, for one of the entries is "Jesus Christ my Saviour was once my present age." It is a mute testimony to the earnestness with which he studied the science of the Saints.

"I HAVE NOT BEEN IDLE"

Reverend Francis Patrick Lyons, Paulist

Father Francis Patrick Lyons, C.S.P., was born in 1884 in the little town of Hamilton, in up-State New York, where it sometimes gets to 40 degrees below zero in the winter and 110 degrees above in the summer. His father was Patrick Lyons, from Ireland, and his mother, Margaret Wall, was of Irish descent. In spite of his Celtic background, however, Father Lyons was called "Frank" by his family and friends—never "Pat."

His birthday was December 23rd, and one needs very little imagination to picture the rejoicing of his parents at the Christmas present God was giving them. Without being a "goody-goody" boy, the future priest was a sort of perpetual Christmas present, never causing the slightest anxiety about boyish escapades.

His mother died when he was only a few weeks old (January 15, 1888) and his widowed father, true to his affection for her, never remarried. Frank, his two brothers and a sister were mothered by a paternal aunt, Mrs. Catharine Ryan. Evidently she was a strong influence in Frank's life and made up, as well as anyone could, for the loss of his own mother. Years later, after she had died and he was studying to be a Paulist, he wrote these lines (published in the June, 1909, issue of *The Calendar*, Parish Monthly of the Church of St. Paul the Apostle) in tribute:

PORTANTI CRUCEM

I gaze upon your face, so clear and pure,
Though saddened by the seated cares of life,
And ask whence comes your power to endure,
Your steadfast fronting of the endless strife.

Whence comes the steeling of your heart to meet
The mocking failure after toil of years;
Dashing the cup of gladness to your feet,
And offering the chalice of your tears.

Can vinegar absolve your wounds of pain?
Has gall the grace to make you soon forget
How you have agonized so long in vain,
Wearied and wasted while the others slept?

Can there within that chalice be a wine
Changed as at Cana, by His word of might?
Upon your cross can He have graved a sign
For you to read alone, in grief, at night?

Another dominating influence in his life was his love for his sister which was not lessened by her marriage or by his becoming a Paulist, and on his deathbed his great concern was for her.

It is rather a curious coincidence that Father Lyons was called Francis, for I can remember when we were students at St. Thomas' College, the Paulist House of Studies at the Catholic University in Washington, D. C., over one of the doors between the chapel and sacristy of the nearby Apostolic Mission House—also a Paulist

foundation—was a painting of St. Francis de Sales before Pope Clement VIII, when St. Francis was awarded a doctorate of theology. Though the artist, Mr. Laurel Harris, had never seen Father Lyons, the latter looked enough like this picture to have posed for it.

And his resemblance to St. Francis was more than external. At that time each novice was given a copy of *The Introduction to a Devout Life* by St. Francis for daily spiritual reading. Whether because of this, or of his home training, or his natural disposition, Frank was a living reproduction of the spirit of St. Francis, the gentlest of saints, who simply preached what he practiced when he said "more flies are caught by molasses than by vinegar." St. Francis has been called the gentleman saint, not because he was of noble blood, but because he was so gentle and considerate in all his dealings with others. Father Lyons, even though he may never be canonized and had no title of nobility, was a saint and a gentleman after the unobtrusive pattern of St. Francis de Sales. He had the simple faith that, as Tennyson has it, is better "than Norman blood," and that faith not only made him believe unswervingly the truths of the Catholic religion he preached so effectively, but induced him to practice the all-pervading charity that made him such an outstanding gentleman. For gentlemanliness is not the following of an external code of manners, so that one uses the right fork at a formal dinner, or wears the exactly proper clothes for the occasion, but, more deeply, it is always to do to others as one would be done by. Really good manners

must be based on good morals in the exacting sense of the Golden Rule.

At the time Frank Lyons was growing up there was no Catholic school in Hamilton. He went to the local public grade and high school, to the preparatory school, Colgate Academy, and finally to the Baptist institution, Colgate University, whence he was graduated in 1905. Whether or not at that early age he felt the stirrings of a priestly vocation, his academic training in Latin, Greek and other cultural subjects admirably fitted him for pursuing his special seminary studies as a Paulist. He won a prize, for instance, in a declamation contest by his speech on St. Francis of Assisi. That he was an exceptional student is clear from the fact that whereas most college students do not learn enough French from their courses to order a meal or to take a train in Paris, Frank learned to speak French well enough to pay his expenses, by acting as interpreter for a European tour the summer after he was graduated.¹

¹ *The Salmagundi* for 1905, a student yearbook of Colgate University, has the following record of Frank's academic career, the figures in parentheses indicating the year in college:

First Dodge entrance prize (1).

First Sophomore Latin prize (2).

First Kingsford Declamation prize (2), "Selection from Lippard."

Second Baldwin Greek prize (2).

Second Lasher Essay prize (3).

College organist (2, 3, 4).

Salmagundi board (3).

Class poet (1, 2).

Class treasurer (3).

President German Club (4), "Deutscher Verein."

In addition to being a brilliant student at college, he became a musician of sufficient skill to be in charge of the music in the Paulist House of Studies. He passed the examination, based principally on Latin, Greek and mathematics, for a Rhodes scholarship, though he did not secure an appointment. He was a member of the Kappa Alpha Fraternity. In 1941 his Alma Mater conferred on him an honorary Litt.D. The University had indicated its desire to confer upon him an honorary degree of D.D. But though highly appreciating the honor, Frank was placed in the awkward position of looking a gift horse in the mouth and conveying to Dr. Cutten his fear that some Catholics would criticize him, thinking that it was inappropriate for a priest (especially one who had already received S.T.D. from Rome), to receive a theological degree from a Baptist University. Fortunately, President Cutten understood Frank's position and wrote the following gracious letter:

May 5, 1941.

DEAR MR. LYONS:

I received your letter on my return home and am sorry that we did not know of the regulations so as to have been able to work out the matter a little more successfully at the very first.

——— (*Footnote 1 continued*)

President French Club (3, 4), "Le Cercle Français."

Secretary Debate Club (3).

Rowland Oratorical speaker (4), title: "A fighting truth-teller."

"Sal" Dramatics (4).

President Thomas L. James Club (4), "A debating club."

Commencement speaker (4).

We give a limited number of degrees, according to the instructions of the Trustees, and also according to their ideas try not to give more than a certain number of each kind. Unfortunately our degrees in laws and letters are filled for this year. However, I was looking over your record as we have it in the record of our graduates, and it seems that most of your life has been employed in teaching. I consulted Dr. Jones, the chairman of the committee, and we both felt that the degree of Doctor of Pedagogy would be a most fitting one and would not conflict with any church regulations. So if this is satisfactory to you, we will change from Doctor of Divinity to Doctor of Pedagogy, and the matter will be settled. . . .

Frank was an altar boy in Hamilton, and for some years directed the choir. I do not know when he first conceived the idea of being a priest, but his thoughts were first turned to the Paulists by Father David Kennedy, C.S.P., who gave a mission in Hamilton in 1905. Knowing that Frank was to teach at the Army and Navy Preparatory School in Washington, Father Kennedy gave him a letter of introduction to the then Novice Master, Father Joseph McSorley, and after mature consideration and prayer, Frank decided to apply for admission to the Paulist novitiate. In September, 1907 (delayed slightly by an emergency appendectomy), he entered the Paulist novitiate, at that time under the direction of Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P. As Frank had already given some time to the study of scholastic philosophy, he skipped a year of work in that subject at St. Thomas’.

Though Father Lyons did more work than the average priest, he was never a strong man. In the second year of his novitiate he had such a severe nervous breakdown, caused by enlargement of the thyroid gland, that the house physician predicted he would never live to be ordained. However, he was excused from classes for a semester, took a systematic rest and was ready for ordination on May 24, 1912. Subsequently he underwent surgical treatment which was successful enough to enable him, though never robust and probably never a really well man, to reach the age of fifty-eight.

This was not the only illness he had during his novitiate. In the fall of 1910 he had to have his gall bladder removed. The following summer at the Paulist House, Rehoboth, Del., he narrowly escaped drowning. After three days of rain and a strong northeast wind, the students were eager for a swim and did not allow a vicious undertow to deter them. Father Joseph Morris and I, being from the South, had intended to take our turn serving at table that day with blackened faces. But we did not pull off the proposed stunt because half a dozen of us were nearly drowned by the undertow which made it impossible for us to get back to shore. Four were pulled back safely by the throwing of a rope that was kept handy for just such emergencies. Two, however, were carried out too far for the rope to reach them. Then Frank Lyons, who could not swim and who had never played any athletic games, thinking that with his six feet of height he could wade out far enough

to help those who were struggling to swim ashore, was carried out beyond them. Jerry Donegan, who was a good swimmer, tried his best to throw him a rope with a cork float, but failed repeatedly.

Probably Frank would have been a victim of his attempt to help others had not Father Harney, sitting in his room on the second floor of the priests' cottage nursing a sore toe, heard the noise on the beach, realized what the trouble was, rushed downstairs, across the beach, seized the rope from Donegan, and with all his clothes on swum out with it to Frank. Both were then pulled in safely, but because of the exertion and exposure Frank developed quite a severe case of pleurisy.

Many a one who may have thought Frank was too gentle would have given up under these repeated illnesses and become a chronic invalid. He showed a stamina that a professional prizefighter might envy. When he was Master of the Juniors, he was always at their service, and it was his unselfish attempt to serve them during the flu epidemic, without taking proper and reasonable precautions, that made him succumb to the same malady.

Frank's spirituality was simple and so unobtrusive that it might well have been unsuspected. From his patron, St. Francis de Sales, he quoted in his notebook on the spiritual life the principle, "Ask for nothing, refuse nothing." He never asked for anything special in the way of food or clothing or work, and he never re-

fused any assignment, or, without refusing, managed to evade it. Although Paulists are not bound by Franciscan poverty, there are probably not many Franciscans in this twentieth century America who are more economical in their personal expenditures than he was in his.

Besides the obvious ways of applying this principle, Frank put himself unstintingly at the service of others, refusing no request, no matter what the inconvenience to himself, that he could grant. It might mean losing sleep which he really needed, interrupting reading which he wanted to do, writing letters of advice which he suspected would be useless—nothing mattered. He gave himself without hesitation.

One example of his willingness to serve others was his correspondence. He grew up in the despised Victorian era when the idea prevailed that politeness required an answer to every written communication. As a consequence, he wrote literally thousands of letters, and all by longhand. He never learned to typewrite and never dictated to a stenographer. If he had not, like St. Alphonsus Liguori, made a vow not to waste any time, at least he lived as if he had made such a vow, and writing letters was one way in which he occupied spare time. When he received a letter, he used to put a check mark against each item requiring an answer, and as a consequence, his correspondent could be sure that important points would not be carelessly ignored.

During his novitiate he read Caussade's *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, and abandonment may be

ranked as another principle of his spirituality. Thus from St. Bonaventure he quoted (without giving the reference): “Religious perfection consists totally in the renunciation of our own will,” which means “Abandonment to Divine Providence” and the seeing of God’s will in every happening. In his notebook is an item (apparently his own): “True holiness consists in the mortification of the will,” which seems to imply Caussade’s principle. And along the same line he has written: “The simple practice of praising, blessing and thanking God for whatever happens (as St. John Chrysostom did) is enough to make a saint.”

From *The Life and Letters of Father Bertrand Wilberforce, O.P.*, he quotes, “I thank Thee, O God, for doing Thy own will in Thy own way, because it is Thy will.” And again: “The will of God is the great devotion.” It became second nature to him to accept without question every happening, no matter how much against the grain. Did it rain when he wanted sunshine, he made no complaint, recognizing as he did in the forces of nature another expression of the Divine Will.

What a man takes the trouble to copy from the writings of others, no less than what he writes himself, throws light on his thoughts and character. The following extracts from selections made by the subject of this sketch speak for themselves. Whether he wrote the following or copied it, is not clear from the notebook, but his friends will agree that his life was an example of one whose prayer of this sort had been put into practice:

"O my loving God! Wrest from me, SELF, in all its shapes and forms, and do not consult either my preferences or my dislikes. Love lays down no conditions or reservations, and I make none. Help me to make a beautiful Home for You in my heart, where You will ever dwell—a Home from which no one will ever dislodge You."

Whether his own or another's, Father Lyons lived the following epigram, "Remember that when you're in the right you can afford to keep your temper, and when you're in the wrong you can't afford to lose it." And it should be remembered that Frank's nerves were all the more difficult to control because of his physical condition.

Another selection, whose authorship is not given, shows how to the end he was trying to practice Causade's principle of abandonment:

Father, I do not ask
 That Thou wouldst choose some other task
 And make it mine. I pray
 But this: let every day
 Be moulded still
 By Thy own hand; my will
 Be only Thine; however deep
 I have to bend, my hand to keep
 In Thine.
 Let me not simply do, but be content,
 Sure that the little crosses each are sent
 And no mistake can ever be
 With Thine own Hand to choose for me.

One prose passage, authorship not given, so well expresses his own attitude, he might have written it himself:

STRAIGHT TO ME

All Comes Straight from God to Me, Always, Always, Always

All Comes—therefore these very things that try me so—this special cross—this peculiar difficulty—these singularly perplexing circumstances—all!

Comes Straight—no person or event intervening to divert things from their right course—but all straight from God.

From God—Who knows me thoroughly—my wants—my desires—my need of purification—His designs over me—from God my Father, and the tenderest of Fathers.

To Me—His child, weak, sensitive, frightened, able to bear so little—yet desiring to please Him, to satisfy Him, to conform my will to His, to return Him love for love.

Always, Always, Always—therefore this morning, this afternoon—in spite of circumstances which would seem to indicate that just this one thing could not have come from Him—always, always: “To them that love God all things work together unto good.”

An entry in verse form expresses just as clearly the complete submission after which he strove till the very end:

THY WILL

O Lord accomplish all;
Lay my proud heart upon Thy awful forge
And strike and strike again if this must be
Until at last I can resist no more!
Then on that quivering heart of mine
Press down the mighty seal of Thy Design!
Nor lift it, till the impress, deep and clear,
Is marked forever there,
Signed with Thy Seal—the purchase of Thy blood,
Bound to the service of the Lord, my God.

And so in the notebook of his novitiate days, and in another apparently compiled in his last months, occurs the dominant motive of his life, to do the will of God. He had the faith "of a Breton peasant's wife" coupled with an understanding of the philosophical problem involved in the relation of contingent human beings endowed with free will and the "concursum" of a necessary Being, God.

For some reason, unfortunately, Father Lyons wrote very little for publication. He finished all the requirements for the doctorate of philosophy at the Catholic University before he was ordained, except the written dissertation. Though he could write as easily and as fluently as he talked, he has, perhaps through modesty or distaste for publicity, left no books and little other published writing. It is a pity, for, as the old saying has it, *Littera scripta manent*, and a written

record of his thought is something his friends would have prized.

Father Lyons was a very fluent speaker. At a moment's notice, he could take some preacher's place and it would not be apparent to anyone in the audience that he had been called upon suddenly. But generally, this fluency was under perfect control. He never learned to drive an automobile, but he had certainly learned, in spite of his marvelous fluency, the second part of this quotation: “The first thing to learn about driving an automobile is how to stop. The same applies to making a speech.” Rarely did he exceed the time allotted to him.

Once, however, that he did run over the schedule is worth telling about because it brings out his fundamental attitude towards prayer and preaching. On a mission with a younger man, his companion noticed that Frank's sermon had been so long that if he took his customary time for saying the beads, the instruction following would have to be shortened. To his suggestion that the recitation of the beads be abbreviated, Frank's answer was: “My boy, praying on a mission is more important than preaching,” and he illustrated his conviction by taking half an hour to recite the beads—to the edification of the people, and the fulfillment of the goal he had set when he wrote in his notebook: “A priest's life becomes unnatural when he ceases to pray—I do not say to officiate, but to pray.”

His recitation of the beads in public took half an hour, his motto being, “Haste is the foe of devotion.” He took literally the injunction that one should think

about what one is saying by reciting each Our Father and Hail Mary as if one meant the words; among his aphorisms was this, "the two words, 'Our Father,' well said is a perfect act of faith, of hope and of charity." In addition, after announcing each mystery, he gave a short meditation on the event. In order to prevent the recitation becoming monotonous, he stood during the second and fourth decades, and alternated with the people in saying the first part of the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Gloria.

By a papal rescript, the obligation of saying the office ceases for a Paulist while he is giving a mission. But Frank, convinced that his preaching would be more effective because of his praying, made a practice of saying the office when on a mission. Doubtless much of his effectiveness in preaching, and especially his insight as a confessor, were due to the fact that he was a man of prayer.

Frank's fluency showed itself most strikingly in conversation, which never lagged when he was one of the company; and he always had something interesting to say. He was as much at home with the least Catholic, least schooled Tennessee "Hill-billy" as with the highest ecclesiastic, from the Pope down. In fact, when he was stationed at the Paulist House in Rome, he was *persona grata* in bringing American pilgrims and ecclesiastical students for an audience with the Pope. Because the stiffest, least sociable pastor would unbend before Frank's charm, other men enjoyed being associated with him on missions. His appeal as a conver-

sationalist came not only from the fact that his mind was a storehouse of interesting information, but chiefly because he gave each person to whom he talked his complete and undivided attention. In his universal charity, he saw in each a being of infinite worth, redeemed by the blood of Christ. If Christ thought this person worth dying for, should not he, Frank Lyons, be willing to expend a little time and effort in talking to him? Moreover, having no condescending sense of superiority, he believed that even the most ignorant, the least cultured, could teach him something—how to dig a trench, how to bear pain—something that he would be the better for mastering.

During his four years in Rome, Frank studied theology at the Collegium Angelicum, learned Italian, improved his French conversation, received his S.T.D. degree after a written and oral examination (in Latin) from the College of Prothonotaries Apostolic, taught moral theology at the Beda (the English college for late vocations to the priesthood), and, by his general *savoir faire* and courtesy captivated all American travelers who called at the Paulist church of Santa Susanna.

In 1925 Father Lyons was called back to the States to be Master of Students at St. Paul's College, Washington, and later he became a member of the Superior General's Council. It must be admitted, however, that Frank was not as successful in the College as his superiors had expected him to be. As one man who was in the studentate under him and admired him a great deal,

explained it, "Frank was never a boy himself, and he could not understand boys." But though Frank was probably more serious-minded than most children this is not entirely true. Though maintaining a high standard for himself, and preaching a high one for others, he had nothing of the outlook that thinks all pleasure is sinful. As a novice, he had written in his spiritual notebook: "Was our Lord an ascetic? Dudden (in *Hastings*) says, No: that His lesson was subordination. That Christ never taught that matrimony, etc., is wrong. Dudden seems to have misunderstood the Church. She never taught like Manichaeism that matter is evil; her lesson also is that of subordination."

Perhaps his difficulties as Master of Students came from the fact that because he was the Superior of young men studying for the Paulists he expected them to live up to the exacting standard he set himself. At any rate, he was more successful and seemed happier on the missions, at Santa Susanna, and in other work where he had different responsibilities.

From Master of Students, Frank was appointed to the mission-band at Chicago; that is, he went out alone or with other Paulists to give missions to Catholics, lectures to non-Catholics, retreats to priests and Sisters. It was work for which he was eminently fitted, and being alone on the retreats and even on many of the missions, he was able to work as hard as he wished. He never took a formal vacation for any length of time, contenting himself with a short visit home. In the summer, when parochial missions are few, he gave retreats.

In the sermon class at the Paulist House of Studies, naturally Frank wrote sermons. And by reading them over once or twice, he was able to deliver them practically word for word. But later, as a priest, he was usually too pressed for time to write his sermons, or perhaps he agreed with Monsignor Benson that the written word and the spoken word being two different media, sermons should not be written. At any rate, he spoke from an outline. Moreover, this fitted in with his style, which was direct, practically gestureless and almost conversational. There was no bombastic shouting; there were no purple patches.

For the most part, the meager sermon-notes found in his desk after his death would be useless to anyone else, but they gave him all the cues necessary for effective preaching. For example, on a half sheet with the printed letterhead, Visitation Convent, Mount de Sales, Catonsville, Md., were somewhat cryptic memoranda:

Doctor—1. Operation (Eve out of Adam).

Architect—brought order out of chaos.

Politician—Who made chaos?

"Think of poor neglected wife, rocking cradle with one foot and wiping away her tears with the other"—which (apart from the fact that to one not knowing what Frank had in mind, the application to the Sisters, if the notes were intended for them, is not entirely clear) would be quite an acrobatic feat! But we can be sure that the notes were sufficient to enable him to preach a conference that charmed and helped the Sisters.

There was nothing of the Billy Sunday type of Hell and damnation about his preaching. He appealed to his hearers' desire for Heaven rather than to their fear of Hell. That is, his attitude was positive rather than negative, and he pictured God as a loving Father instead of an avenging Judge. And because in this he was preaching with unmistakable sincerity, his sermons had an effect that a mere imitation could never have produced. His face did not shine like that of Moses descending from Sinai, but it did show that he himself had the love of God that he was preaching.

His appeal was to the intellect rather than to the emotions, and because of this some might be inclined to underrate him as a preacher. But it should be remembered that with him preaching was only part of a mission. As he once said, prayer was more important than preaching, and, as we may infer from the prominence he gave it, confession was more important than praying, or rather was a kind of prayer. He spent more time during a mission in the confessional than he did in the pulpit or on the platform. On the Monday of a week's mission he commenced hearing confessions, and for the duration of the mission he displayed unlimited patience in this trying work. In addition to his inexhaustible patience, his wisdom made some say that he had the gift of discernment of spirits. Many of our missionaries might be classed as better preachers, but few, if any, could be called more zealous confessors.

As a novice, he had written in his notebook: "God help the uncharitable priest." And charity was one of

the outstanding characteristics of his thirty-one years as a priest.

Father Lyons' sensitiveness was an asset to him as a preacher, enabling him to "feel" his audience and to know when he was reaching them. He was as sensitive as the most highly strung woman; and sensitive not only in feeling (though he did not show it) any slights or criticisms directed against himself, but also in the more unusual way of feeling instinctively what would hurt others, and in suffering with them. Such sensitiveness, however, meant that he felt acutely any slights or rudeness directed at himself. If a highly sensitive person is called "thin skinned," Father Lyons might be said to have had no skin at all, but to have had his raw flesh exposed for "daws to peck at." He meant the prayer which he said every morning when putting on the maniple for Mass: "May I be worthy to bear the maniple of weeping and sorrow, so that with exultation I may receive the reward of labor." And so he bore uncomplainingly and even cheerfully whatever slights and criticisms, misjudgments and discourtesies the day brought forth. Only God knows all that he suffered in this way, because he lived up so well to the motto he had written as a novice: "He carries his cross best who carries it with the least fuss."

Doubtless many of those who heard him preach resignation, patient acceptance of trials, sensed that he was practicing what he preached. For a successful missionary must be a mortified man, and the best mortification, in which there is no self-will or hidden pride,

is the cheerful acceptance of what God allows to happen to one.

The object of a mission for Catholics is to bring them to repent of past sins, to amend their lives for the future, and to lead them to greater spiritual heights. Father Lyons was convinced that as he had found abandonment to Divine Providence an invaluable principle in his own life, so it was the simplest and most effective spiritual principle he could get across to the audience at a mission, and one that would, if sincerely applied, remake their whole lives.

On what is called a "non-Catholic mission" (a series of lectures on religion to which non-Catholics are specially invited), Father Lyons had a horror of saying anything that might destroy the supernatural—though from a Catholic standpoint, inadequate—faith of his hearers without giving them the blessing of Catholicism. He recognized that, oftentimes, those outside the Church had, as Pius XI said, great fragments of the truth, and he did not wish to pry loose their grip on that. His desire to add to it, not to take it away, gave a distinctive complexion to his missions for non-Catholics, and made them a religious revival for Catholics as well. His purpose never was to win a mere dialectical victory over an opponent, but to bring others to the spiritual joy he himself experienced.

Some Catholics, to express it paradoxically, are too "Protestant," that is, they protest too much against the errors and mistakes of non-Catholics, instead of expounding the values of Catholicism. It is so much

easier for a speaker to be destructive rather than constructive, but Father Lyons never made this mistake. His non-Catholic missions were a ringing affirmation of the values of Catholicism, never an attack on others. That is, he lived up to the standard he had set himself as a novice when he wrote: “Being Catholics, we should not talk like Protestants, protesters. Have a *positive* faith in God, in men, in the worth of life.”

This attitude seemed to Father Lyons a corollary of the Second Commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Efficiency also seemed to demand such an approach. Obviously, an audience sensing that the speaker was trying to show them what he thought was to their religious advantage would be in a more receptive mood than an audience sensing the speaker’s attitude to be: “I am going to prove that you were wrong and foolish in believing what you have believed. Get rid of all that rubbish, and replace it with what I shall prove to you is true.”

A missionary, thought Father Lyons, cannot bring others to recognize the truth of Catholicism, until he himself shows its value in the charity of his life. And the first exhibition of charity must be in his clear desire to share spiritual values with them. Certainly, his lectures never contained any derogatory references to religions other than the Catholic. He never fell back upon that last refuge of the man who is incapable of expounding real values, sarcasm.

On a non-Catholic mission he carefully avoided what might, though pleasing to believers, be offensive

to unbelievers. Faith is a supernatural gift, and his charity forbade him to judge the guilt of anyone who lacked it. Saul, before he became St. Paul, had persecuted the first Christians, and so, to Father Lyons' way of thinking, it would have been decidedly out of place for a Paulist to upbraid anyone for "kicking against the goad."

Ultimately, of course, conversion to the true faith is due to the grace of God. But in the human instruments of that grace fairness would seem to be one of the most essential qualities, a fairness concerning other religions, and a fairness that admits the adverse facts about the Catholic Church. To overpraise anyone or anything is a sure way of arousing antagonism. For a fond mother to hold up little Johnnie of the next block as a model for her somewhat careless Tommie, will, instead of improving Tommie's manners, probably make him dislike little Johnnie.

It requires sound judgment and great tact for a missionary to admit any defects in the human side of the Catholic Church, but such open-mindedness on his part is one of the most persuasive characteristics he can exhibit. Father Lyons possessed both judgment and tact, and his fairness was one of his strong points. Many an inquirer said to himself: "Here is a man of brains, clear-minded enough to see these objections to the Catholic Church, yet unshaken in his adherence to Catholicism. Maybe I have been over-rating these objections, and there is more to the other side than I had thought." Humanly speaking, it was the open-mindedness of

Father McSorley, at that time, 1906, novice-master, that clinched Frank Lyons' interest in the Paulists. Undoubtedly, Father McSorley's essay on "Open-mindedness," published about this time in his volume called *The Sacrament of Duty*, made a lasting impression upon him.

Frank was always fair and courteous. He knew also that laughter is not logic, that ridicule is not reasoning, and rather than belittle an objection, he preferred to state it more strongly than his audience could. This evident sincerity in believing what he preached in spite of his clear realization of the objections that could be brought against it, attracted his hearers and brought many of them to the faith. In each parish where he gave a mission, a class of converts was left for further instruction, but only God knows how many others may have been influenced later by the seed sown by Father Lyons.

On Catholic missions, his strongest asset was the overwhelming conviction he created that, though he was preaching an austere ideal, he was not asking others to do anything he did not first do himself. He could not, like some men, tell a joke in the pulpit and make the humor drive home his point. This was not because he could not see a joke. His sense of humor was keen, and he could appreciate the art of others in this regard, but for himself it was forbidden ground, something beyond him. And I suppose that most of his hearers would have felt something incongruous in his attempting jokes in the pulpit.

The kind of preaching Frank liked best, perhaps, was giving retreats to priests and to Sisters. Here he had an audience for which he could not set too high a standard. They were already obligated to strive for the highest. In meditations and in conferences, and most of all in the confessional, he did his best to lead them to sanctity.

Though he never suffered from "I" trouble, it was natural that he should draw heavily upon his own experience. He had fashioned his own spirituality mainly on two principles—to do unto others as he would have others do unto him ("the great transmigratory art," as Charles Reade called it) and abandonment to Divine Providence.

Though each retreat was somewhat different from any other, they might all have been called by the slogan of the First Crusade, "God Wills It." And they were a crusade, not to recover the holy places in Palestine by force of arms, but, as St. Paul urges, to "put on the armor of God," to storm the citadels of one's own soul. Father Lyons had put it on to such good effect that he seemed impervious to the daily irritations of life. Some are naturally serene, and it is no credit to them that they are never irritated. But he was one of those who have to achieve serenity, and we have seen that he had to do so against the serious handicap of ill health.

By natural disposition he was as nervous as a race horse awaiting the signal to start. In conversation, his delicate, sensitive, artistic hands had to be always in motion, he had to emphasize what he was saying by his

facial expression, yet I never heard him answer anyone impatiently. His mind worked faster than the minds of less gifted persons, but, if the slowness of others sometimes irritated him, he kept it to himself.

In 1938 Frank was transferred to the mission band attached to Old St. Mary's, San Francisco, where he labored for two years. Then he received a letter, dated July 1, 1940, from Father Henry Stark, the Superior General, assigning him to Minneapolis, to which house he was attached when he died. Without a word of expostulation, he made the change from sunny California to the cold northland.

Taking quite literally St. Paul's saying (Heb. xiii. 14), "For we have here not a lasting city," Frank never became immovably rooted to any one spot. He could move to another at short notice. But wherever he was, his room was a model of neatness. Like his person, it reflected the orderliness of his mind, his spiritual preparedness to seek a heavenly city "that is to come" (Heb. xiii. 14). Because of these assignments to mission bands in various places, Frank preached in nearly every State of the country, in nearly every Province of Canada, and in most of the large cities on both sides of the border. His difficulty never was to secure engagements, but to find time to fill all those that came to him. Often he had that acid test of a retreat-master's success, a return engagement.

During all this busy time, Father Lyons managed to keep up his old contacts with the Christ Child Soci-

ety and was national Spiritual Director of the Convert League of the Catholic Daughters of America. Often an office of this sort is little more than a name, but Father Lyons made such an impression upon the latter organization that it will perpetuate his memory in a way he would probably have chosen if the choice had been given him—by having dedicated to him an auto chapel, the "Queen of Peace," to carry missionaries to places where there are no church buildings. Surely Father Lyons' intercession in the next world will bring a blessing upon the efforts of other Paulist missionaries in the work he loved and in doing which he literally gave his life. He has set a high standard but his memory will ever be an inspiration.

Father Lyons was an incessant reader because he had an insatiable desire for knowledge. He could start reading a book of ordinary size and tear the heart out of it in an hour. One marveled at the speed and accuracy with which he could read, and digest what he read. His intellectual life was geared to the swiftness of an automotive age. And so besides preaching enough to keep two men busy, he reviewed numerous books for Paulist publications. Frank delighted in music and art. A symphony orchestra or a visit to an art gallery was a treat for which he would at times sacrifice sleep. From his slender, sensitive hands a palmist might have deduced artistic talent and here, as in music, he had the discriminating taste of a great lover of art, even though he never had the opportunity to become himself a virtuoso.

As his preaching took him to various parts of the country, he utilized the opportunity to see what was worth while in each locality, and sometimes in a few weeks he had seen more than those who had been residents for years. The world-famous scenery of California and the Pacific Coast, the Rockies and the Yellowstone, the Adirondacks, the Appalachians were all taken in his stride as the beauties of nature exhibiting the beauty of God. His attitude was that of the Psalmist, "the heavens show forth the glory of God."

Early in 1943, when Father Lyons was giving a mission in Windsor, Ontario, he fell ill and was taken to a hospital. Twice before he had had pleurisy and this proved to be his second case of pneumonia and the poor, overworked body, that he had always driven to the utmost, was unable to throw off the illness.

Apparently, he did not realize that he was dying, and it was a rather weird thing to get a letter from him after his death had been announced by telegram, saying that he was getting better and giving details as to his next mission. It was also a testimony of his life-long courtesy in writing letters and his indomitable spurring of himself to utilize every possible moment. Louise Imogen Guiney puts into the mouth of her father, General Guiney, the poignant plea:

O give my youth, my faith, my sword,
 Choice of my heart's desire.
 A short life in the saddle, Lord;
 Not long life by the fire.

And though Father Lyons had more than a short life in the saddle, riding all over the country in a round-up of souls for the Lord, he was spared a long life of incapacity by the fire. He died in harness. Years ago he told me, "I should rather wear out than rust out"; and he had his wish. He wore out at the end in a clean, quick way after a few days' illness. He died on the Wednesday of Holy Week, just as we were about to commemorate our Lord's death—surely a beautiful time for a priest who had been born two days before Christmas. In Easter Week his body was committed to the crypt in the Paulist church at 59th Street.

Fear of not doing enough for Christ was an obsession with him. If he had any natural dread of dying, it was not because of attachment to this world or lack of faith in another, but because in his humility he did not feel that he deserved to hear the words of Christ at the end, "Well done, good and faithful servant." After his death, both in his notebook of novitiate days and on his desk were found the revealing words: "This is success. To be able at the end to kiss my mission crucifix and say I have not been idle." Without doubt, he achieved his own definition of success. "I have not been idle" might well be inscribed upon his tomb.

