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Letter from England

W. B.J. Pemberton

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Letter from England...

The most salient feature of English medicine at the moment is the seething discontent exhibited by its general practitioners. Overworked and underpaid, they are reduced to a state of penury that is fast driving them to revolt. As this letter is being written, some 500 doctors are meeting in London to prepare their case for a review of their claim for increased remuneration and better terms of service. At the beck and call of any on his list, the G.P. is paid 23/- a year to look after a person for one year and that is gross. When he deducts expenses and pays tax, he has considerably less. To exist at all comfortably one needs to have at least 2000 patients and one is permitted over 3500, which means work that frequently leads to coronary thrombosis in comparatively young men. To give an example of the absurdities to which doctors are subjected, a doctor recently answered a night emergency call from a woman patient only to find that she had run out of contraceptive pills and wanted more. This led to a question in Parliament early this month when the Minister of Health said that a doctor is not obliged to answer calls late at night from women who have run out of birth-control pills. Is it mere coincidence that on medical record cards the space formerly designated "Christian Name" has been changed to "Forename"? Yes, after 16 years, G.P.s are learning bitterly the price of selling their freedom, albeit most of them had no choice in 1948. The specialists who have much more freedom and who are given merit awards for outstanding work are not complaining so much, but there is some evidence of deterioration in the standards of diagnosis and work compared to that before the Act.

At the annual general meeting of

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the Catholic Doctors' Guild the Chaplain, supporting the Church's ban on the contraceptive pill, made an impassioned appeal to its members to refuse demands by patients for it and to face a mass desertion of patients rather than give massive scandal. He closed his sermon with these words: "Giving glory to God is not necessarily exempt from sweat and blood and tears or free from hardship, pain and trouble." Notwithstanding, many Catholic doctors still write asking for definite instruction in the matter and seem to think that the Vatican Council will have second thoughts on the matter. They seem to hope for wider acceptance of Dr. John Rock's views on "the pill" as expressed in *The Time Has Come*.*

The first annual Symposium of the Guild or National Congress of Catholic Doctors in England will be held in Stonyhurst College in April. The subjects for discussion:

The Catholic Doctor and the Contraceptive Pill

The Catholic Doctor in His Professional Life

The Catholic Doctor and the Church

The Guild and the Medical Missions

The scene of the Congress is of great Catholic historic interest, for Stonyhurst's foundation goes back to Elizabethan days—1592—when penal laws prohibiting Catholic education at home prompted Father Robert Parsons, S.J. to establish a Catholic college at St. Omer, across the English Channel. For those interested, *Education Under Penalty* by A. C. F. Beals (Athlone Press: University of London) tells the full story.

W. B. J. Pemberton, M.A., M.D., D.P.H.
50 Grange Road, London, S.E. 1
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*Since writing this, Pope Paul VI has directed compliance with present teaching of the Church in the matter. W.B.J.P.