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"Letter from Ireland"

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"LETTER FROM IRELAND"

is the first in a series of correspondence which our Editors hope to present regularly from foreign lands. A group of corresponding editors has been contacted to supply news and information thought to be of interest to our readers. We are happy to begin the new year with this Irish contribution.

In the South of Ireland approximately 90 per cent of the doctors are Catholic. During their student days they take full courses of lectures in medical ethics, sociology and psychology in the light of Catholic teaching. In practice, major moral problems are dealt with according to the moral law. Whilst doctors engage in many activities of the Apostolate no great need is felt for membership of a Catholic Medico-Ethical Society. In consequence, the Irish Guild of St. Luke, Ss. Cosmas and Damian has a membership of about 250, or 15 per cent of all Catholic doctors. *The Catholic Medical Quarterly* of the English Guild is read.

Professional problems are cared for by the Irish Medical Association and the newly-organized Irish Medical Union; the latter came into being to improve relations with the Health Ministry and to negotiate. Much controversy has occurred in recent years over full-time appointments and the wording of contracts. Professional secrets seemed unprotected; case records could be made available to State officials without permission of the doctor and his patient. However, this is but one facet of a deeper problem. The slow acceptance of modern ideas in Social Medicine coupled with the great fear of doctors that loss of income and independence would follow a State Health Service are at the root of the trouble. This country which gives absolutely free or partly free medical service to nearly 80 per cent of the populace, depending on income (if they so wish), is moving steadily towards a full-scale Health Service.

The defects in the British system are only too apparent to the non-committed doctor in this country; moreover the cost per person in this sparsely populated country will be very high.

Much publicity has recently been given to the high proportion of young Irish girls amongst the unmarried mothers in England. Many of these became pregnant in Ireland and emigrated to a country where care is free and where their shame could be hidden. They are mostly ill-equipped by their education to face the challenge of living in a "non-Catholic environment. Many of their babies are placed in non-Catholic institutions and many mothers go on the streets. The Irish clergy are actively trying to persuade these girls to return home for confinement; for a more charitable attitude is rapidly growing in Ireland. Legal adoption is now possible and treatment of these girls is much more humane. Priests and doctors have become more active in promoting sex-education and pre-marriage guidance as part of an overall plan to curb these tragic happenings which are but a part of the emigration picture. Happily, living standards are improving rapidly as a consequence of an improved economy, leading to a great reduction of the new diaspora.

No newsletter written at this time in Ireland could fail to pay tribute to the late John Fitzgerald Kennedy, whose untimely death was felt as a personal loss by all Irishmen. *May he rest in peace.*

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