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Letter from Ireland

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Letter from Ireland.

Ease of travel has not only taken the sting from emigration, but also our sense of small island remoteness, making us more quickly aware of the deficiencies in our preparation of young people to live away from their homeland. The standard of general education of our emigrant working-class has been too low, and knowing that the flow continues unabated, we are making great efforts to improve. We also realise that our system of higher education is not only expensive per capita but also, because of a growing number of students, we will soon be short of housing space for them. A special Government Commission has been studying these and similar problems for nearly six years. Its report, recently published, shows many points of interest to doctors.

Our National University of four constituent colleges and Trinity College, Dublin give many similar courses for degrees. This results in much overlapping, which is uneconomical in a country with such a small population. All these institutions have plans for expansion which must be co-ordinated. Some of the changes envisaged by this very representative Commission include (1) the formation of new pass degree colleges; (2) staff student ratio of 1-12 instead of 1-20, as it is now; (3) a greater emphasis

on research in all departments, with 50% of the teachers' time allotted to this; (4) the existing Schools of Medicine to continue to give undergraduate training to a satisfactory standard, with one school to develop medical studies to the highest level; (5) more direct financial aid to students, more room for foreign students, and greater recognition to be given to student representative bodies. The Commission did not face the problem of Trinity College, Dublin (founded by Queen Elizabeth I, 375 years ago as a sister college to Oxford), which has 2000 students. Trinity has a high proportion of foreign students and is forbidden to Catholics except by special permission of the Archbishop, because of its non-Catholic ethics. Logically this expanding College should work in collaboration with the largest branch of the National University (University College, Dublin), which latter expects a population of 8,000 in the near future. In the past few days the Government announced a decision to establish a University of Dublin with formal relationship between these two colleges, declaring the new university to be multi-denominational. This brave plan to cut across the knots of history has been given approval by both bodies.

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In a recently widely-publicised Court case in this country the psychiatrist stated that the defendant suffered from diminished responsibility and required about a year's psychiatric treatment. The judge in reply said that this man would be far better off to go to confession every week and face up to his responsibilities. Also saying, "The priest is the best psychiatrist." I quote this to show you the attitude which exists in a country which has the highest proportion of mental beds in Europe (7.3 per thousand). It is fair to say that we are very short of geriatric units and even geriatric beds: in consequence, many difficult old people find themselves in mental hospitals, for the want of a better place to go. Also, the mental hospital population includes a great proportion of mentally handicapped children. Nearly all of these cases are living in institutions built a century ago and quite unsuited to modern medical practice.

A recent report by a Commission of Inquiry on Mental Health, similar to the Education Commission, envisages many improvements such as one might expect, but great emphasis is laid on the following: (1) Greater efforts must be made to produce a more sympathetic attitude in the general public. (2) The establishment of special 50 bed units for short term psychiatric patients, attached to or close to general hos-

pitals. (3) An increasing number of psychiatric workers of all grades. (4) Setting up advisory bodies and voluntary organizations to aid the mentally ill. (5) Integrating psychiatry and general medicine and giving the ordinary general practitioner a larger role in mental health. (6) A greater emphasis on research in the hope of reducing the number of long-standing cases by 50%.

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The Irish Guild of St. Luke, Ss. Cosmas & Damian is anxiously watching the outcome of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill before the British Parliament. This attitude stems not only from the moral aspect but also from our natural worry for our Catholic nurses, who comprise a high proportion of the staffs of English hospitals; e.g. a great increase in the number of abortions performed would involve theatre staff in difficult personal decisions about the advisability of staying in such a post. Whilst we are not directly involved, the North of Ireland is part of Great Britain and our branch of the Guild there has made formal protest.

We wish every success to Expo '67.

ROBERT F. O'DONOGHUE
Master General Irish Guild
of St. Luke, Ss. Cosmas &
Damian

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