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Catholic Physicians' Guilds

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DOCTOR THOMAS A. DOOLEY

1927 - 1961

On the night of Wednesday, January 18, from Memorial Hospital in New York, the soul of Doctor Thomas A. Dooley returned to God.

Before this inadequate tribute of ours is ever read, there will have been spoken and written many an epitaph of this heroic doctor of the Laos jungles. Regrettably, some of these professed encomia will have emerged from nothing more perceptive than banal emotionalism. For Dr. Dooley's extraordinary fulfillment of an extraordinary vocation can all too easily be so glamorized beneath a veneer of hollow sentimentality as to obliterate all essential significance. We would prefer, in deference to the true stature of this spiritual giant among Christ's physicians, to join the more thoughtful in a profounder appreciation of genuine values.

Of Dr. Dooley in life much was asked by a provident God Whose disposition of His human creatures is more often than not mysterious. By Dr. Dooley, with God's beneficent grace, much was most generously offered in response. The sanctity he thereby achieved can for the moment be accurately assessed only in the court of heaven. But for us there remain — and for long, we trust — the inspirational memory of his phenomenal place in that vocation, common to us all, which is the faithful fulfillment of God's will.

To the majority of our doctors the challenge to spiritual perfection is far more prosaic, though not one iota less provocative or momentous. To do lovingly the will of God in all such ordinary things as He has equipped and invited one to do; to see Christ suffering in even the "least" of all patients; to be the truly Christian father of a truly Christian family; to recognize and to cope courageously with one's own Laos in whatever circumstances of time and place its challenge may arise; to be on earth Christ wherever Christ has called and shown the way — this is sanctity as ordinarily proposed and often achieved, unheralded perhaps except in the love of His Sacred Heart. But for what other approbation ultimately do we live and work and pray?

As far as can be humanly estimated, Dr. Dooley did exquisitely well all that God called him extraordinarily to do. To professional talent and holy daring and blessedly contrived opportunity was added God's exceptional grace. The combined result is, and for long will be, a hallowed legend of which Catholic physicians may be humbly proud.

But pride in another's accomplishments, unless it provokes to salutary emulation, is a sterile sort of thing. Unless the precious legend of an heroic Dr. Dooley serves also as the personal credo of his professional confreres who mourn his loss, this physician-apostle of Christ will have realized only his personal sanctification, plus the eternal gratitude of those on whom he lavished his professional skill and Christlike love. As those closest to him know, Dr. Dooley hoped and prayed and strove (and perhaps died?) for more. Either the accomplishment of that "more" is the holy ambition of our Catholic physicians, or else we as Catholics have no right even to comment on the demise of a Dr. Dooley.

That his noble soul may now rest eternally in peace is a prayer that may be voiced so confidently as it will be often by those who have recognized in Dr. Dooley an "alter Christus."