

NOTES

Old Irish Doctors

In ancient Erin a king or great chief had his own medical attendant who was also free to practise outside the court if he wished. A special house with a free tract of land, exempt from rent and taxes, were set apart for the doctor, and the Brehon Laws laid down strict regulations about fees and attendances. Doctors were held in high honor, but they were also subject to close supervision. If, through carelessness or lack of skill, one failed to cure a patient he might be brought before a Brehon or judge, and if found guilty would be condemned to pay as much as if he actually inflicted the wound with his own hand. Medicine often ran in families, and the O'Heikys, the O'Shields, the O'Lees, and the O'Casidys produced famous doctors in bygone ages, and indeed they do to-day. Each medical family kept a book which was handed down from father to son, so that a medical tradition obtained in the family, and the men of one generation benefited by the experience of those who had gone before them.

A Doctor's Advice

Here is a preface written in one of those old books by an Irish doctor who died nearly six centuries ago: "May the good God have mercy on us all. I have here collected practical rules of medicine from several works for the honor of God, for the benefit of the Irish people, for the instruction of my pupils, and for the love of my friends and of my kindred. I have translated many of them into Gaelic from Latin books, containing the lore of the great leeches of Greece and Rome. These are sweet and profitable things which have been often tested by us and by our instructors. I pray God to bless those doctors who will use this book, and I lay it as an injunction on their souls, that they extract knowledge from it not by any means sparingly, and that they do not neglect the practical rules herein contained. More especially I charge them that they do their duty devotedly in cases where they receive no payment on account of the poverty of their patients."

Let every physician, before he begins his treatment, offer up a secret prayer for the sick person, and implore the heavenly Father, the Physician and Balm-giver of all mankind, to prosper the work he is entering upon, and to save himself and his patient from failure.

Irish Medical Practice

The Irish doctors were famous even on the Continent of Europe. Van Helmont, a Brussels physician, praises the Irish doctors and thus described them:

"In the household of every great lord in Ireland there is a physician who has a tract of land for his support and who is appointed to his post, not on account of the great amount of learning he brings away in his head from college, but because he is able to cure diseases. His knowledge of the healing art is derived from books left him by his forefathers, which describe very accurately the marks and signs by which the various diseases are known, and lay down the proper remedies for each. These remedies (which are mostly herbs) are all produced in that country. Accordingly the Irish people are much better managed in sickness than the Italians who have a physician in every village."

Avec du Grec on a toujours raison—a big Greek name often conceals ignorance. The Irish doctors did not borrow mystifying names from Latin or Greek. Gaelic was good enough for them. And in this sensible procedure they were imitated later by the Germans who wisely call a telephone a *Fernsprecher* and a bicycle a *Wagen*.

Cruel Kindness

The phrase "cruel kindness" may be an oxymoron but it expresses well enough what we mean. For kindness can be cruel—can even be hurtful. A weak man will love a friend; an occasion will arise for him speaking which entails a little pain; rather than inflict directly the little pain the weak kind man remains silent and his friend suffers. That is certainly one way in which kindness can be cruel. For another, take the case of a mother who is too fond—we do not say who loves too much—her daughter to reprove her when necessary. The mother is silent; she spares her child a little pain; and through the cruel kindness of that silence a great harm follows. Cases might be multiplied indefinitely. The world is full of cruel kindness of this sort. There is not one of us who does not at some time or other experience it for ourselves. And the reason of it all is simply because there are very few true friends in the world. A true friend will know the time for speaking and the time for silence; he will not be weak when he ought to be strong; he will say the word that ought to be said when the time comes, even if the saying should—as it sometimes does—mean the loss of his friend's good will for a time. A man or woman ought to have a good friend, day and night, for a true friend; and it seems to us that we ought to pray to be delivered from the other sort—the fair-weather friends who smile and smile with hearts within them that serve the purpose of pumping blood through their veins.

Speak the Word

Father Garesche tells us that the following incident occurred one day in a street-car: A man was heard saying to another in an angry voice which drowned the rattle of wheels and the hum of traffic: "You knew the firm was going under and let me go ahead with the deal. You knew I was in for losing, and you were on the right side and you did not say a word. You cur! That may be your idea of friendship, but it isn't mine; don't talk to me again." Here is another little story told by the same writer. I remember still the regretful pathos with which a dear old gentleman, who in the thoughtlessness of youth had entered into associations which kept him from his religious duties, told me of the strange silence which every one kept towards him on that one subject of which he had most need to hear. "There was So-and-so, a good Catholic, and a firm friend of mine, but he never said the word. And there was Father N—, many a time I laughed and chatted with him, but he never said the word. And there's X, and Y, and Z—Ah! and now that I'm back in the Church of God it seems to me I've lost the most of my life." All, too, because no one said the word. We have all experienced it; we have very likely been guilty ourselves. The fundamental reason is our cowardice. To put it another way, we are afraid to say what we know we ought to say and we prefer sinning against charity to saying a thing that we find hard to say. That is the explanation: we are cowards, we are not true friends; we are not trying to follow Christ, for if we were we would ask ourselves what He would do, and we would go and do it no matter at what cost. Next to the grace of God there is nothing on earth more precious than a true friend, and indeed, we venture to say that such a friend is a grace from God. Are there not worse maxims than that of the old verse: *Be true to your word, to your work and your friend?*

SINN FEIN LEADER IN ENGLAND

Mr. Art. O'Brien is chiefly responsible for the successful organisation of Sinn Fein in England. He might be called the Irish Ambassador in London, but, indeed, the British Government has, on occasions, given him more attention than it gives to the average ambassador. He is a native of London, and has been president of the Irish Self-Determination League in London since it was founded. Prior to that time he organised and kept in vigorous life Sinn Fein branches in the metropolis, and in leading English provincial cities. He is well known to British, Irish, American and Australian, and is struck by his personality and his tireless energy.

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