THE PROBLEM OF THE DUBLIN VOLUNTARY HOSPITALS.*

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My first duty is to thank the Council of this Section for inviting me—an amateur in their specialty—to accept nomination to the chair of the Section, and the Fellows of the Academy for assenting to my election. Though ignorant of the technical side of public health work—I do not even possess a diploma on the subject—I hope that my interest in the health of the country is no less than that of those whose special work is to conserve that health, and I ask you to let my zeal make excuses for my lack of technical knowledge as your President.

It would be wrong to pass to the special subject of my address to-night without throwing a passing glance at certain happenings in the past twelve months which one hopes may bear rich fruit for our country in the future. A little over twelve months ago Mr. Thomas Hennessy read before this Section an illuminating paper on Medical Reform in Ireland. Arising out of the discussion thereon the Section passed a resolution requesting the General Council of the Academy to consider the matter and take such action as it thought fit. The General Council sought the aid of the Royal College of Physicians, which, in its turn, called to its counsels the other medical corporations and organizations in Ireland. As a result a deputation representing all the medical corporations and associations of the country had an interview with the Chief Secretary on the 26th March last. A case was made for the necessity of medical reform in Ireland, and a sketch was drawn of the lines such reform should, in the opinion of the deputation, follow. I believe I am right in saying that the arguments of the deputation had their influence in induc-

*The Presidential Address read before the Section of State Medicine, Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland, on Friday, February 6th, 1920.
ing the Chief Secretary to add to the Ministry of Health Bill then before Parliament an empowering clause concerning Ireland. This clause not only constituted the Chief Secretary Minister of Health for Ireland, but also set up an Irish Public Health Council to advise him as to the exercise of his powers and duties under the Act. The Council is now, we understand, almost ready to submit its first report. It has announced many of its recommendations of which the most important so far is, perhaps, the advice to establish in lieu of the present poor law medical service of the country and the other public medical services a unified Irish medical service with entry by competitive examination, prospect of promotion, and pension rights. Such a service, if established and administered in generous mood, will be an untold boon to the whole country, and not merely to our profession. Judging from this example, we may be encouraged to hope that the Council in its advice to the Minister of Health will frame a scheme at once radical, far-reaching, and statesmanlike. If such reform should bear fruit, this Section will be able to congratulate itself that it had some share in the planting or nurture of the seed.

The problem of the maintenance and efficiency of the voluntary hospitals had attracted the attention of most of us for many years past, though not as forcibly as its importance demanded.

During the past two years, however, the condition of the hospitals is no longer merely precarious, but is critical, and at the several institutions in which we are interested we have all been engaged in considering not how the hospitals can be rendered efficient but how their very existence may be safeguarded. The problem is not merely medical; it is one of great importance to the welfare of the community. I hope that a free and untrammelled discussion in such a meeting as this—representative as it is of the professional workers of every class in the several hospitals of Dublin—may, if it does not enable us to see the entire stretch of the road we should take