

Dr. JOSEPH KIDD.

Joseph Kidd was born in Limerick in 1824, the seventeenth of twenty children and seventh son. His grandfather practiced law in Limerick and had seven sons. Of his seventh, Joseph was also the seventh and went on to have seven sons himself, this being counted most lucky in Ireland. Joseph's mother came of the Celtic Irish stock and followed the Quaker faith before her marriage. She never relinquished the beautiful and simple dress of that community. Could she have had an inkling of the healer her seventh son would become, as she lifted the corner of the tablecloth one evening to show her husband a tiny boy who had crept under the table to rub her weary feet in secret? He had overheard a direction from the doctor, and his heart was heavy with a child's intuition of impending loss. Joseph's father came of the harder stock descending from the Cromwellian settlers, and this union of bloods made for a curious combination of the practical with the dreamer in the family.

Many of the children died young, but the household in Limerick must usually have numbered a round dozen or so. Joseph's father, being so much a younger son, had no chance to follow the law with his father. He went into business as a corn-broker on a wharf near the famous Treaty Bridge over the Shannon. Processions of farmers would bring their corn to sell to him, which he would ship overseas to England or up the river and the canal to Dublin. Joseph's father, unlike his predecessors in the corn trade, never made a modest fortune, partly because the export, as well as the Irish home trade were damaged by a measure calculated to assist the West Indian planters ordering to use sugar instead of corn in both Irish and British whisky distilleries. He was not greatly helped by the fact that his eldest son, who had become his partner while further babies were still being born, had no taste whatever for such mundane things as trade. The business gradually declined as the years went on; the deterioration of the harbourage at Limerick and eventually the advent of railways were destined to deal a death blow to those old leisurely ways of trading. Nevertheless, Joseph's brother managed to keep the firm alive up to the 1840s.

The family lived in a rather tumble-down Georgian house on King Harry's Mall, whose windows looked out on a canal flowing into the Shannon. Limerick at that time, consisted entirely of such or earlier houses. Into the cellars of the house, the water from the river flowed

at high tides, and the four youngest children were never so happy as when sailing their shoes as boats upon this private ocean. At length, one of Joseph's shoes sailed forth to join the parental ships upon the Shannon. Money was becoming ever scarcer in the business, and alarmed at the prospect of owing up, Joseph found an old buckle shoe cast off by his father and walked around for a long time in this oddly assorted footwear, tying on the large shoe with a piece of string. In this same cellar, another great treat used to take place. Above Joseph in age, came Anne who had a remarkable gift for story-telling. Only in the dark setting of the cellar did she feel able to do justice to the tale of Bluebeard with suitable local colour, sending her younger brothers and sisters shrieking with terror upstairs, but never failing to demand repeat performances.

(Further anecdotes: Taking butter to school in an egg-shell, using up the precious tea and replacing the tea-leaves in the caddy once they had been dried out over the fire, purchase and use of potatoes). Apples were sold at the astonishing price of twenty brown russets for a halfpenny. Joseph was a great hand at mathematics, and did a thriving trade in apples, for he worked out his less gifted schoolfellows' sum at a fixed rate of a halfpenny a sum.

Joseph's first school was the dame's school, where he was taught to catch rats and mice and practically nothing more. Having exhausted the resources of this academy, he then went on to a remarkable school kept by a worthy Quaker, John Tyrell Bailey. At this school, he obtained a very thorough classical and mathematical education, and the Quaker clearly infused a very real desire for learning in such of his scholars as cared to profit by his teaching. Joseph would quote the classics, as though they held magic for him, to the end of his life. After he left school and was learning the rudiments of medicine with an apothecary in Limerick, he read all the books of Euclid for pleasure while walking out arm-in-arm with his father of an evening; the old man having become very deaf and afraid to face the mild traffic of those days alone. The finishing touches to Joseph's schooling were provided by a Roman Catholic school kept by two brothers O'Keefe, where Joseph had to teach the Protestant Catechism to the only other non-Catholic, whose mother insisted that 'the Romans' should supply the extra.

As youth succeeded childhood, the social horizon enlarged. Another large and more prosperous Limerick family, the Mackerns, owned a beautiful house named 'Rose Lawn', the garden sloping down to the

banks of the Shannon. There was famous salmon fishing in these waters, and boat-loads of Kidds and Mackerns would take to the water armed with fishing tackle and musical instruments. Two of the Mackern sisters had splendid voices and were known for their beauty as the 'Red Rose' and the 'White Rose' of Limerick. While their brothers and friends plied their rods, the Roses sang arias from Handel to the salmon. Two Mackerns eventually married Kidds, although neither of the 'Roses'.

The outstanding event of the year for Joseph was however the annual summer holiday at Kilkee, to where they traveled down the Shannon Estuary by boat and then some miles over land in a farmer's wagon spread with clean straw to sit upon. At Kilkee, they all dived and swam in the deep rock pools, after their father had taught the boys to swim by the drastic method of throwing them into the water and leaving them to find their own salvation.

But childhood came to an end and Joseph went off to Dublin to follow his brother, Charles, as an apprentice to Dr. Walter of that city. There he attended the lectures of Graves and Stokes, whose bold new methods of clinical teaching had put Dublin at the forefront of the medical schools of Europe. He learned strange lessons at the Rotunda Maternity Hospital from the man who, finding that none of the windows were made to open, ordered the glass to be cut out immediately. Fortified by the influence of those great men, he was off to London in 1846, before he was 21.

When Joseph left Ireland to seek his fortune in London, he carried with him the last five-pound note his father could afford to give him. He lived on that great sum for several months while working to obtain the MRCS, LRCP of England. The week after he qualified, he secured an appointment at the Homeopathic Hospital; all his hopes having been set on this when he left home. His chief was Dr. Curie father-in-law of Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium. He held this appointment for a year and found it very valuable in experience. Then he set up in two small rooms on Blackheath Hill and began to practice.

Joseph was just finding his feet and beginning to get patients, when on the evening of 26th March 1847, he read in the Times about the appalling conditions that his fellow countrymen were now suffering in starvation and pestilence ~ the potato famine. It was clear to him that the need was now for surgeons and medical staff even more than for food, and Joseph realized that there could be no more noble field

in which to test the powers of homeopathy. The battle over homeopathy is an outwork theme today, but though he tempered his opinions later, to the youth of barely 23, burning with zeal, it was a living issue. He had read of fine results from its methods during a recent outbreak of typhus in Vienna, and he had the spirit which is never afraid of some new thing. He communicated his enthusiasm to the Committee of the Homeopathic Society and a special meeting was called. It was decided to send at the expense of the Society, Mr. Joseph Kidd, an Irishman but a member of the London College of Surgeons, who joyfully undertook without the slightest prospect of reward and in the full consciousness of all the appalling circumstances with which he would be obliged to contend; to proceed to Bantry or Skibbereen, whichever should prove the most infected district, and there offer his gratuitous services and with no limit but that of the exhaustion of his own physical powers. A group of Irish Quakers who had settled in London, friends and connections of Joseph's mother also handed him a collection they had taken up. So on 3rd April 1847, he was on his way to Cork by steamer, a voyage lasting five days. He then proceeded direct to Bantry, where the local doctor had fallen ill. Towards the end of his work in Bantry, the Chairman of the Homeopathic Society Committee, Mr. Sampson, persuaded the Committee of the British Association for the Relief of Destitution in Ireland to place a quantity of rice at his disposal. The Archbishop of Dublin sent £108 and Samuel Jones Lloyd the same. These gifts enabled him, as his professional exertions were drawing to an end, to provide with rice, bread, milk and fuel, many hundreds, particularly those who had recovered under his care and everyone else that seemed in danger of death from imperfect convalescence. By the end of May, the fever began to decline, and in July and August a most rapid diminution took place, leading to its almost total disappearance. In Bantry Bay, they talked for a long while of the young doctor from London, their fellow countryman.

From: "When That I Was" by Dorothy McCall