

Homeopathy in the Irish Potato Famine

By Francis Treuherz, MA RSHom FSHom

In the terrible scourge of the great Irish famine of 150 years ago Joseph Kidd successfully worked as a lone homeopath. Meanwhile Benoît Mure heroically proved *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*, the diseased potato: decay, dreams and delusions. Read all about it in this fascinating illustrated work of original historical research.

Review from *Homeopathy Today*

Review from *Simillimum*

Review from *Homeopathic Links*

Review from *British Homeopathic Journal*

Review from the *Journal of the American Institute of Homeopathy*

Review from *Homeopathy Today*

National Center for Homeopathy

Homeopathy in the Irish Potato Famine

by Francis Treuherz

Samuel Press, London, 1995

138 pages, paperback,

Reviewed by Julian Winston

This little book is, really several books rolled into one: two biographies, some homeopathic philosophy, a proving, two historical accounts, a materia medica, and a repertory This slim volume begins with the work of Benoit Mure, the prover of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*-the diseased potato. The fungal infestation of the potato resulted in the terrible Irish potato famine of 1845-1848 which led to an epidemic of typhus and dysentery-the result of destitution and starvation of the populace who were deprived of their staple food. The population of Ireland decreased by 2,500,000-thousands died and many more emigrated to other countries.

Treuherz leads us from Mure's proving of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans* in Brazil (and here republished for the first time), through a history of the potato famine, and to the biography of Joseph Kidd, MD-an Irish son from Limerick who became acquainted with homeopathy and returned to Ireland

to treat the epidemic using homeopathy. In his later years, Dr. Kidd became the physician to British Prime Minister Disraeli, and an account of Kidd's treatment of Disraeli's final illness is included in the book.

Of great interest to me was the reasoning that led Mure to his proving. Wishing to treat the diseased potato with homeopathy, he realized that you had to "take the case" of the potato and find the simillimum. But how do you do that? He wrote:

'Human pathology is not the only field for the homeopathist. He should take an interest in every species of suffering, and endeavor to restore the harmony of the organic kingdom, whenever it has been disturbed by some accidental cause. The healing art is one; there is no such thing as one healing art for man and another for the animal, though it is on man that we should prove our drugs because he is the complex of the various kingdoms of nature.'

He then took the kind of leap in lateral thinking that few can do. He potentised the fungal potato and proved it upon humans producing the symptoms of the "potato's illness" in people. He then looked at the symptoms produced and attempted to find, in the homeopathic materia medica, the most similar remedy- and found that *Arsenicum* and *Bryonia* were the closest picture to the potato disease. He found that the diseased plant could be treated with these remedies as well as with the nosode of the disease itself. He suggested implanting a globule of the third dilution in the potato before placing the potato in the ground. He believed that the infection could be eradicated in this way.

Dr. Kidd's account of the results of the potato famine are alone worth the price of the book. We do not often read first-hand accounts of such a terrible suffering and realise the seriousness of the cases that young Dr. Kidd undertook to treat in 1847. During 67 days he treated 111 cases- with 108 cured, 1 dismissed, and 2 deaths- a mortality rate of 1.8% compared to the 13.8% mortality in the local hospital.

Francis Treuherz has provided us with a magnificent glimpse into our history and has given us a very complete materia medica for a little used remedy. This little book deserves to be on every homeopath's shelves.

And, as a footnote, Dr. Emilia Kidd, a physician in the British National Health Service, and the great-granddaughter of Dr. Joseph Kidd, heard Francis Treuherz present a paper on the subject of the book at a conference in Galway, Ireland. It was her first introduction to homeopathy. She is

considering taking up the study of homeopathy after hearing about this illustrious ancestor.

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BOOK REVIEW:

HOMEOPATHY IN THE IRISH POTATO FAMINE

by Francis Treuherz

Reviewed by Alice Duncan, DC

This new book by Francis Treuherz (an inspired historian and homeopath who practices in London, and was, for seven years, the editor of *The Homeopath*) is a very readable, informative, and sympathetic account. Its subject is the Irish potato famine of the 1840s—a period of destitution, starvation, and illness brought on by the failure of the potato crop because of blight.

The initial section of the book presents a proving of diseased potato (*Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*) by Benoit Mure, an adventurous homeopath from France, and a short account of his life and work—including investigations into the idea of homeopathic prevention and treatment of disease in plants. Mure draws parallels between the proving symptoms and symptoms of remedies such as *Bryonia* and *Arsenicum*, but concludes that isopathic prevention of the potato rot would be more effective. A sample of Mure's intriguing, cryptic “logarithm repertory” and illustrations of the potentising machines he invented are also included in this section.

It appears, from reading of the provings of *Sol-t-ae* that many of its symptoms are similar to symptoms of illness that appeared in the Irish people during the famine. Many famine-related factors contributed to these illnesses; it was not necessarily frank poisoning by toxins from potato blight. *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans* was not necessarily a remedy known or used in Ireland during the time of the famine (the proving was performed by Mure a few years later) —but it is, perhaps, a remedy that holds a picture of the suffering of the time.

In his Introduction, Treuherz explains that his book began as a talk presented at the Irish Homeopathic Conference at University College Galway, as part of the 150-year commemoration of that tragedy. The subject aroused such interest and emotion that he decided to make the information he had gathered more widely available. The core of the book is a stirring account of the concerted, selfless work performed by Dr. Joseph Kidd, a homeopath.

“Then came the famine, and Kidd resolved to assist. He was sponsored by the English Homeopathic Society and chose to go to Bantry as being closest to the centres of suffering at Skull and Skibbereen ... Kidd was concerned to show that homeopathy would be effective in the most adverse of conditions where allopathy was ineffective. He had no conception of how adverse those conditions would be. He gladly volunteered to go to Ireland for no material reward and work there as long as he could physically cope ... People lived in such primitive dwellings as holes in the turf with no floor or furniture. They had sold their clothes to buy food. They lay amid their own excrement and dying or dead families.

He simply took any patient indiscriminately, as they came along. In 67 days he saw 192 patients. He visited them at home and after one week he had as many patients as there was time to visit each day, and the pace carried on”

Following the biographical chapter are 30 pages of narrative by Dr. Kidd, and a talk he subsequently gave to the British Homeopathic Society.

“For months previously I had read, in common with everybody else, the sickening details of the sufferings of these poor people in the English and Irish journals. I had read them until the whole thing seemed a mass of exaggeration, drawing the crowding horrors of all other centuries into one hapless period and locality. Even, however, with all this, and the glimpses of misery I had caught since my arrival in Cork, I was totally unprepared for the ghastly sights which encountered us at every step.

In a very short time I saw hundreds of cases of fever and dysentery lying in the most helpless and destitute condition. In many of the wretched huts, every inmate lay abandoned to their fate. Fever and dysentery side by side on the same scanty pile of decomposing straw, or on the cold earthen floor, without food or drink... [The greater part of my] time was spent in the most intimate contact with fever and dysentery, being frequently obliged to remain nearly half an hour in

one single hovel, crowded with poor sufferers, till human nature could hold out no longer, and an instinctive and almost convulsive effort would cause me to escape from the close atmosphere of peat-smoke and fever-miasm to the open air.”

Kidd’s narrative includes a description of the typical pictures of the various maladies and the remedies used most frequently to treat them:

Aconite, *Bryonia*, and *Belladonna* were used for early stages of continued fever; *Nux vomica* and *Rhus tox* at later stages; in typhus, *Rhus tox*, *Bryonia*, *Arsenicum*, and *Phosphorus*, sometimes *China* and *Secale* in relapse; for dysentery, *Nux vomica*, *Mercurius corrosivus*, *Arsenicum*, *Veratrum album*, and other remedies when indicated by strong symptoms.

Kidd also compared the results of homeopathic and allopathic treatment for similar conditions at that time:

[Out of 250 patients admitted to the hospital with dysentery,] the deaths amount to 90, being a mortality of 36%, whilst the mortality under homeopathic treatment was only 14 percent. Again the number of completed cases of fever in that hospital was 254; of these 35 died, showing a mortality of 13.8%; the mortality under homeopathic treatment being 1.8% in the same disease.

That those under homeopathic treatment, circumstanced as they were in general without proper food and drink, should have succeeded as well as the inmates of the hospital of the same town (taken precisely from the same class of people) with the advantages of proper ventilation, attendance, nourishment, etc., would have been most gratifying; but that the rate of mortality under the homeopathic system should have been so decidedly in favor of our grand principle, is a circumstance, it may be hoped, which can scarcely fail to attract the attention even of the most sceptical.”

In the biographical chapter, Treuherz recounts the life of Dr. Kidd (both before and after the potato famine period), including aspects of his personality, anecdotes that show his singular approach to patients, and his eventual parting of ways with the Homeopathic Society because of the “potency issue.” (In Kidd’s opinion, Hahnemann was “drunk with mysticism” when, late in life, he called for exclusive use of infinitesimal doses.)

There is also a chapter - another first - person account - of Dr. Kidd’s professional attendance on the famed conservative politician and former

prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield), who suffered from asthma and Bright's disease, yet remained a powerful personality, and received much relief through homeopathic care until his death.

The final chapter consists of materia medica and repertory extractions, to give us a thorough picture of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*. On the very last pages before the Bibliography, the types of dreams that were found in the provings are emphasised: dreams of destruction, blood, transformation, death, and water; robbers, decay, strange dreams, and dreams of the past.

Many times, as I read this book, I found myself in tears. As health practitioners, and as human beings, all of us are aware that many people in the world are suffering, and need real help... We are also all aware that there are times that feeling empathy for patients drains us, leaves us unprotected, or takes away the time and feeling that we need to conserve for our families. Sometimes patients who are very ill, and have been told they have no hope from allopathic medicine, may look to homeopathy for treatment, and even the most experienced homeopathic doctors or prescribers may be reluctant to take them on. . . out of fear of legal repercussions, fear that their skills are not advanced or knowledge deep enough simply because they don't feel strong enough to share or carry so much pain. These are valid concerns, and we would be fools if we didn't consider them. But it is also valuable to read the story of a homeopath, who had the courage to face unspeakable suffering and try to do something about it.

We can all thank Francis Treuherz, for this informative and heartfelt book.
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Homeopathy in the Irish Potato Famine.
Francis Treuherz
Samuel Press, 1995
138 pages, paperback, illustrated

Reviewed by Gudrun Ruarus, The Netherlands

Although I have a romantic love for Ireland, I know next to nothing about it. To me it is a country on the border of the known-unknown, a mysterious and mystic island where the "little people" still can and may roam. So I was

surprised to read in the book *Homeopathy in the Irish potato famine* written by Francis Treuherz, that Dublin had been a cultural centre of Europe and that the potato-rot put an end to that.

I had only vaguely heard of this Irish potato famine (1845-1846), so I was ignorant of the dramatic and devastating influence and consequences for the peasants.

On reading this book I fully realised the impact of this epidemic: the misery, poverty, the appalling circumstances under which people lived, died and had to give aid, the exodus of part of the Irish population.

The book is about the mission to Ireland of the homeopath, Dr. Kidd, an Irishman by birth and practising in London, who, moved by compassion for the suffering population and the sincere wish to prove the effectiveness of homeopathy in acute diseases to a cynical and even averse medical world, went to the most afflicted districts to give his homeopathic aid.

Francis Treuherz writes a short *curriculum vitae* of Dr. Kidd. The full account of Kidd's stay and medical activities is published as also the provings of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*, done by Mure and Clarke.

In his narrative Dr. Kidd accounts of his homeopathic endeavours, reporting the case histories, the selected remedies, healing process and causes of relapse. He compares his results with those of the local hospital. Homeopathy proves itself.

I enjoyed reading this report because of the vivid, accurate descriptions of the ailments combined with compassion with the sufferers.

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Homeopathy in the Irish Potato Famine.

Francis Treuherz.

London: Samuel Press 1995.

138 pages, paperback.

Homeopathes sans Frontieres must be proud of the central figure of this book - one Dr Joseph Kidd, born in Limerick, who at the tender age of 23 single-

handedly set up a homeopathic clinic in Bantry, County Cork in 1847, at the height of the Great Famine in Ireland. Dr Kidd's own accounts of his mission from London-supported by the English Homeopathic Association-forms the central part of this book, and his homeopathic treatment of the victims of typhus, continued fever and dysentery are recorded complete with a detailed audit of outcome, e.g.

Typhus - 111 cases - Mortality 1.8%
-Bantry Hospital Mortality 13.5%

Dysentery - 81 cases - Mortality 14%
- Bantry Hospital Mortality 36%

These figures and the detailed accounts of individual cases should ensure Dr Joseph Kidd's place among the classic pioneers of the use of homeopathy in epidemic disease. The homeopathic medicines mentioned seem awesome in their simplicity: *Aconitum*, *Arsenicum*, *Belladonna*, *Bryonia*, *China*, *Mercurius*, *Nux vomica*, *Phosphorus*, *Rhus toxicodendron*, *Secale*, *Sulphur* and *Veratrum*. Interestingly, the potencies included the 3rd, 5th and 12th. In later life Kidd resigned from the Homeopathic Society over the potency issue, opting for Hahnemann "sober", teaching the use of the pure undiluted tinctures. Over Hahnemann "drunk" with mysticism calling for the exclusive use of infinitesimal doses..

This book provides an easy way in to a very fraught chapter in the history of these islands, revolving around the failure of the potato crop due to blight in 1845-1847. On the island of Ireland, the effects were cataclysmic. A holocaust / watershed experience ensued, with cultural and political repercussions down to today. In the England of the time, the official response was influenced by anti-Catholic sentiment which saw merit in the death of a benighted Papish culture, and also by laissez-faire economic ideologues who were wary of anything that might interfere with the freedom of the market. The unofficial response was much more humane and various forms of relief and food aid were initiated in England, Europe and North America. Dr Kidd's own project received support in the form of rice and other foods from an alliance of Quakers and Jews. It is heartening to learn that the English Homeopathic Association supported and sponsored the mission to Bantry, and yet it lasted a total of only 67 days in all. Was consideration given to the dispatch of other missions? Or was it felt that one was enough?

Benoit Mure (1809-1858) was an adventurous French homeopath whose proving of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans* (the diseased potato) is reproduced here, along with his fascinating advocacy of an isopathic inoculation of the potato as a form of prophylaxis against the blight. Related information is included from Clarke's *Materia Medica*, Roberts' and Ward's *Sensations As If* and *The Complete Repertory* (with thematic repertory summaries by Michael Thompson).

Dr Kidd's own account of his role in the management of the last illness of the Earl of Beaconsfield-Benjamin Disraeli, is also here, along with well-reproduced illustrations and portraits. I was left with a new sense of perspective on the historical development of homeopathy, which is not often conveyed by our current course structures.

Finally, the book is another milestone in the career of Francis Treuherz, confirming his place as a member of that valuable species: the homeopathic scholar. May he write again soon!

BRIAN F. KENNEDY

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Homeopathy in the Irish Potato Famine

by Francis Treuherz,
Samuel Press, London, 1995.

138 pages, paperback, reviewed by Harris L. Coulter, Ph.D.

To the rather slender library of books on the history of British and UK homeopathy has now been added an engaging collection of materials assembled and introduced by Francis Treuherz, whom we know well as the long-time editor of *The Homeopath*.

While *Homeopathy in the Irish Potato Famine* is principally about this tragedy in Irish history, when in 1845-1847 Ireland lost 2.5 million people from the famine and the accompanying emigration to Boston Massachusetts, and other North American cities, the author gives us much more.

A major theme is the proving of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*, the nosode of the Potato rot, by the French homeopath, Benoit Mure in 1849. He suggested that the remedy for potato rot be found by proving it on humans; the resulting pathogenesis indicated that the potato be preserved from rot by insertion of homeopathic *Arsenicum* or *Bryonia*, or the potato rot nosode itself, prior to planting.

C. J. Hempel's 1854 translation of Mure's essay is reproduced in full and is supplemented by the proving of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans* recorded in John Henry Clarke's *Dictionary*.

There follow two original writings on the Irish potato famine by the English-trained Irish homeopath, Joseph Kidd (1824-1918), and a biographical essay on Joseph Kidd by his descendent, Walter Kidd.

Kidd was born in Limerick in 1824 and studied homeopathy in London under Paul Francois Curie, grandfather of Pierre Curie. In 1847, horrified by the potato famine, he went back to Ireland for several months to treat the associated fever and dysentery.

He then returned to London and pursued a successful practice for many decades, retiring only in 1914. His most distinguished patient was Prime Minister Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield), whom he treated from 1878 until his death in 1881. Kidd's account makes fascinating homeopathic reading and has, indeed, become a biographical classic.

This poignant collection of materials about the "great hunger" not only enlightens us about a dark page in Ireland's history, but also fills some of the gaps in our own incomplete and imperfect picture of Irish homeopathy. As such, it should bring us all into closer relations with our Irish colleagues. Having myself recently met the charming Nuala Eising, Principal of the Burren School of Homeopathy, and heard what she and other Irish homeopaths have been doing to bring our medical truths to the Eastern outlands (in her case, the Republic of Belarus), I know that we in the US. would all benefit from a better acquaintance with homeopathy in the Emerald Isle. For this we owe a vote of sincere thanks to Francis Treuherz.

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