

# HOMEOPATHY

IN THE IRISH POTATO FAMINE



Francis Treuherz

# Homeopathy in the Irish potato famine

FRANCIS TREUHERZ



**B. Jain Publishers (P) Ltd.**

USA — Europe — India

Homeopathy in the Irish potato famine

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First published 1995 by Samuel Press, London. The Samuel Press is named for Samuel Hahnemann, Rachel Mary Samuel Montagu and Francis Samuel Treuherz.

For my sons Eli and Isaac who like to eat potatoes.

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An essay by Francis Treuherz with  
contemporary evidence from Joseph Kidd  
and Benoît Mure, and the materia medica  
of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans*.

# Publisher's Note

Francis Treuherz is a dear friend and we are very proud to bring out his book on the Irish Potato Famine.

He is one of the most wonderful homeopaths I know. His contribution to the system through his clinical practice, his online service for homeopathic consultation and his homeopathic phone service are commendable. Francis is a partner in a phone call service, the Homeopathic Helpline that has been active 365 days a year since 1996. Here they offer homeopathic advice to all the people needing medical help and seek homeopathy as an option. This is a great way to popularise homeopathy and testify its use in emergency and day-to-day ailments.

“Homeopathy in the Irish potato famine” throws light on the dark era of Ireland and also connects the broken links of Irish homeopathy and brings us the real picture. It shows how homeopathy played a major role in saving a nation from becoming extinguished. Dr Kidd's work has been discussed in the book, which shows him as a pioneer in successfully using homeopathy in epidemics. He was a young homeopathic physician who decided to assist dying people in Ireland, with homeopathy. He treated many cases of typhoid, fever and dysentery and saved many lives. The book also gives a detailed account of the remedies used

by Dr Kidd. He has also compared the results of allopathic and homeopathic treatment.

A detailed account of the proving of *Solanum tuberosum aegrotans* by Benoît Mure is also given, which gives account of symptoms where the medicine can be used.

We thank Francis Treuherz for writing such a work, which is more than just a proving. It is a proof of how homeopathy has saved a nation and thus establishes the efficacy of homeopathy in epidemics.

**Kuldeep Jain**

C.E.O., B. Jain Publishers (P) Ltd.

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# HOMEOPATHY IN ACUTE DISEASES

## NARRATIVE OF A MISSION TO IRELAND DURING THE FAMINE AND PESTILENCE OF 1847

By **JOSEPH KIDD, Surgeon**

There are few patients commencing homeopathic treatment, who do not feel and express their dread of the insufficiency of that treatment in acute disorders or where life is endangered, in their ignorance of the fact, that in none more completely than in the most dangerous diseases does homeopathy stand successfully over the practice of the old system.

The same objection is also attempted to be made by the greater portion of our medical brethren of the old school, and has been often witnessed in the first trials of the homeopathic principle and medicines by allopathic practitioners, in their transition state from the uncertainty of their former practice, to the true 'rational medicine' of the Homeopaths, founded on a general law which

experience proves to be unerring in its guidance, in the proper adaptation of medicine to disease.

To be able to dispel this illusion, it has been ever deemed by the true friends of homeopathy, most desirable to accumulate evidence, by submitting the system to the most severe and open tests, whenever the opportunity presented itself for applying it in the treatment of acute diseases. It has been felt, indeed, that the success gained in trials of this nature must be the true touchstone of the system, inasmuch as the most favourable results in chronic diseases may always be exposed to special criticism and ingenious explaining away, which writers like Dr Forbes, confessing the force of the results, but not inclined to give credit to the means, are usually ready to make use of when no other arguments remain.

Thus it is that the full confidence in the truth and universal applicability of the homeopathic principle has ever caused its professors to look with delight on every possible opportunity of testing its actual value as well as in individual cases as in the severest epidemics, whenever and wherever occurring.

The treatment of the epidemic of typhus fever which occurred in Germany in 1813, by Hahnemann himself, is a prominent instance of this kind, when nearly two hundred patients were treated without the loss of a single case, at the time when an enormous mortality attended the mode of practice sanctioned by ages.<sup>27</sup> Again, we have an equally remarkable instance in the promptitude and zeal with which numbers of homeopathic practitioners in Germany, Russia and France, came forward to

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<sup>27</sup> A most interesting and curious proof of the certainty with which the homoeopathic law enables practitioners to apply medicines to any disease may be found in the fact that the medicines used by Hahnemann in 1813, in typhus with such success (*Bryonia* and *Rhus tox*), and by Dr Quin, of London, in the typhus fever following cholera in Moravia, in 1831, were those which a comparison of the typhus in Ireland with the materia medica enabled me to select, and which my experience found most useful, although ignorant at that time of their use in either of the former cases.

apply the treatment in the Asiatic cholera, at the last visitation in 1831-2.

Also in various epidemics of scarlatina, measles, etc., treated homeopathically on the continent and in this country, a very interesting account of an epidemic of scarlatina thus treated being contained in the *British Journal of Homoeopathy*, Vol. III. p 91, by Dr Ozanne, of Guernsey, and another of measles, in the January Number of the present year<sup>28</sup> of the same Journal, by the same able practitioner, in both of which remarkable success resulted from the means employed.

As evidence of the same, may be adduced the results obtained in the treatment of acute diseases at the homeopathic hospitals of Vienna and Linz, where the most dangerous diseases have been treated with such success<sup>29</sup> as to have caused the violent remedies of the old system to be laid aside, and to be considered,

<sup>28</sup> 1848.

<sup>29</sup> Comparative results of homoeopathic and allopathic treatment in certain acute diseases, furnished by Dr Fleischmann, of the Homoeopathic Hospital at Vienna (from *Introduction to the Study of Homoeopathy*, by Drs Drysdale and Russell).

PNEUMONIA (Inflammation of Lungs).

Mortality under ordinary treatment

Authorities	Number of Cases	Deaths
Guisolle	304	43
Briquet	364	85
Edinburgh Infirmary	222	80
Skoda	19	4
Total	909	212

Mortality 23.32 per cent, or nearly one out of four

Mortality under Homoeopathic Treatment

Fleischmann	299	19
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6.70 per cent, or about one out of fifteen.

PLEURITIS (Inflammation of the lining membrane of Lung).

Mortality under ordinary treatment

Edinburgh Infirmary	111	14
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12.61 per cent, or about one out of eight.

(Contd. on page 46)

indeed, positively injurious by many of their former most attached admirers, one of the most celebrated of whom (Skoda, Physician to the General Hospital at Vienna,) now regards ‘hay water’ as the best and universal medicine for all diseases. Finally, perhaps, the same confidence in the truth and universal applicability of the homeopathic system may be found in the results of its trial in the epidemic of fever and dysentery in Ireland, in 1847, undertaken by myself, at the request of the committee of the English Homeopathic Association, and carried out in the face of difficulties and dangers not to be surmounted, save by a firm confidence in the unvarying truth of the homeopathic law.

As introductory to our more immediate object, a glance at the history of the great Irish famine of 1846-7, will be necessary.

Ireland has been visited, from time to time for centuries, with partial and almost periodical famines,<sup>30</sup> which except as matters of history, and for the suffering produced in the localities afflicted, were soon lost sight of, and their sad but instructive lessons unheeded. Few of the present generation will ever forget

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Mortality under Homoeopathic Treatment

Fleischmann	224	3
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1.24 per cent, little more than one out of a hundred

PERITONITIS (Inflammation of the lining membrane of the Cavity of Abdomen and of Intestines).

Mortality under ordinary treatment

Edinburgh Infirmary	21	6
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27.61 per cent or more than one out of four

Mortality under Homoeopathic Treatment

Fleischmann	105	5
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4.76 per cent, or less than one out of twenty-five.

<sup>30</sup> In the year 1740-1 (called the year of slaughter), it was estimated that one-fifth of the entire population perished of want and fever! In the years 1798 to 1800, general scarcity and dearth of all provisions. In 1817-8, general distress all over Ireland, from the same causes, one million and a half of the population having been affected with fever that year. In 1822, almost total loss of the potato crop in Munster and Connaught. In 1831, the same in Galway, Mayo and Donegal. In 1835-6-7, partial famine in various parts of Ireland. In 1839 a partial failure of the potato crop in most parts of Ireland.

the melancholy visitation of 1846-7, when, at the approach of some unseen but all-powerful agent, of which we know exactly nothing, the food of millions of human beings was destroyed in the course of a very few days,<sup>31</sup> and when in the face of the most amazing efforts made for its relief by all classes of society in England, America and various continental countries, hundreds of thousands of victims told how insufficient all human aid must prove at such a crisis.

The recent potato disease first appeared in Ireland in the autumn of 1845, and caused the destruction of a large portion of that season's crop, but only in particular districts, and to a partial extent, which was in some degree compensated for by an abundant crop of corn and green vegetables, hay etc., so that none were prepared for the universal destruction of the next year's crop, which occurred much earlier in the season (long before vegetation had ceased), and more generally than at the previous visitation. The corn crops also proved very deficient, both in those countries, and all over Europe, necessarily followed by an extraordinary increase in prices, so that in most parts of Ireland the cost of provisions became more than doubled, and in many places (where food at other times was cheapest) nearly trebled. The almost inevitable consequences soon followed; the greater part of the population, previously existing – almost without the use of money – on potatoes, easily obtained by a small outlay of labour and seed, found themselves without food, or the means of purchasing

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<sup>31</sup> The following extract from the able and impartial history of the 'Irish crisis,' by Mr. Trevelyan, in the *Edinburgh Review* (January 1948) conveys a good description of the rapid destruction of the potato crop which then took place: "On the 27th of last month (July), I passed,' Father Matthew writes in a letter published in the parliamentary papers, 'from Cork to Dublin, and this doomed plant bloomed in all the luxuriance of an abundant harvest. Returning on the 3rd instant (August), I beheld with sorrow one wide waste of putrefying vegetation. In many places the wretched people were seated on the fences of their decaying gardens, wringing their hands, and wailing bitterly at the destruction that had left them foodless."

it, and want and starvation began to prevail very generally. At this particular juncture, the system of 'public works' was humanely instituted by the Government, afterwards so grievously abused, and gradually extended during the winter and spring, till the major portion of the male population was employed.<sup>32</sup>

As the winter advanced, distress increased to a most fearful extent, in spite of the employment given to myriads of the people, and melancholy instances of death from actual starvation were of daily occurrence by the roadsides, in the fields, and often of entire families, shut up in their wretched hovels. Thus did matters go on without improvement till the latter end of March, when vast supplies of Indian corn and meal arriving from America, and the continent,<sup>33</sup> prices declined most rapidly, and the supply, even in the most backward places became abundant, from which time the previously numerous instances of death by starvation became more and more rare, finally disappearing as the system of out-door relief under the new Poor-Law Act came into operation, towards June and July.

As might have been expected, disease rapidly followed in the track of famine,<sup>34</sup> adding fresh victims to the ravages of the latter, prolonging (or renewing) the period of suffering and affliction.

Dysentery had appeared early in that fearful winter, increasing in amount until spring (the time most to be dreaded for

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<sup>32</sup> The numbers were –in October, 114,000, in December, 440,000, in January, 570,000 thence gradually increasing till March when 734,000 (representing nearly three millions of the population) were so employed, when the Government found it necessary to dismiss twenty per cent, and the remainder gradually, till nearly all were disbanded in June, as otherwise the lands would have remained uncultivated.

<sup>33</sup> In the last week of March, it was estimated that in the harbour of Cork alone, upwards of 250 vessels were lying, containing nearly 50,000 tons of Indian corn, and a fall in price of three to four pounds a ton took place within a few weeks. - *The Irish crisis*, in *Edinburgh Review*, January 1848.

<sup>34</sup> The connection between famine and fever will be resumed in another place.

epidemics), when fever followed, and the entire of Ireland became covered with a widely-devastating pestilence, by which numbers of the clergymen of all persuasions, medical men and the resident gentry, who had devoted themselves to the relief of their afflicted fellow-creatures, fell victims to their benevolent exertions.<sup>35</sup>

I cannot better illustrate the ravages which fever and dysentery were then committing, than by introducing the following quotation from the second edition of my friend Mr. Sampson's work on homeopathy,<sup>36</sup> published in January of the present year, which will at the same time explain the cause and origin of my mission to Ireland.

During the early part of 1847, the accounts from Ireland of the daily extending ravages of pestilence first took that frightful form, which caused the year to assume that place it now occupies in the records of human calamity. It was not, however, until the 26th of March that the extent of the evil became fully known. On that day the news came from three localities widely asunder, Armagh, Mayo and Cork, that the progress of disease in the respective districts was such, that hundreds of the sufferers were without any medical assistance whatever, that the workhouses were crowded and that the attendants and medical men were daily dying, so that, in many instances, both paupers and officers were alike destitute.

'In Ballinrobe,' said the *Mayo Constitution* of the 23rd of March, 'the workhouse is in the most awfully deplorable state,

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<sup>35</sup> The week after my arrival in Bantry, the Rev. Dr Trail, of Skull (10 miles from Bantry), died of exhaustion, consequent upon repeated attacks of the epidemic, caught in close attendance upon his poor parishioners: also Capt. Drury, the inspecting officer of public works in Kinsale; and the curate of Bantry (Rev. A. Hallowell), as well as the physician to the Union, were both laid up with the same disease; also one or two Roman Catholic priests, in the county between Bandon and Cork.

<sup>36</sup> Marmaduke B Sampson, *Homoeopathy its Principle, Theory, and Practice*, London, Samuel Highley, 1848.

pestilence having attacked nearly all within its walls. In fact, the building is one horrible charnel-house, the unfortunate paupers being nearly all the victims of a fearful fever, the dying and the dead, we might say, huddled together. The master has become one of the victims; the clerk, a young man, whose energies were devoted to the well-being of the Union, has been added to the number; the matron too, is dead, and the respected and esteemed physician has likewise fallen, in his constant attendance on the deceased inmates. This is the position of the Ballinrobe house, every officer swept away, while the number of deaths amongst the inmates is unknown. It yet remains, also, to add, that the Roman Catholic chaplain lies dangerously ill of the same epidemic.

From Cork the accounts were equally alarming, and amongst other details, mostly showing that ‘professional men seemed to be more particularly marked out as doomed victims of the malady,’ and that, consequently, the great want amongst the mass of the sufferers was that of medical attendance, the following appeared in the Reporter newspaper:

Most horrible – most dreadful – are the last accounts from the west of Cork, even to listen to the description given by eye-witnesses of what is passing in that part of our county, and, above all, in the two Carberies. A gentleman who has sojourned there, whose duties compelled his stay, assured us no later than last Sunday, that none of the communications appearing in our journal conveyed an adequate notion of the terrible realities. It is not food the unfortunate people now want most - it is medical attendance; not additional poorhouses, but hospitals they require. A pestilential fever, more mortal and destructive than cholera or plague, is carrying off the poor. All the food, solid or liquid, on earth could not save them without medicinal and sanitary accompaniments of the most

extensive, active, and efficient sort. There is not a house from Bantry to Skull, that, with scarce a dozen exceptions, does not contain either the sick, the dying or the dead. The latter lie where they die, or are barely pushed outside the thresholds, and there suffered to dissolve. Their living relatives within the huts are too feeble to remove them further; and the strong, outside, from distant places (and they indeed are few) are afraid to handle unshrouded and uncoffined bodies. Judge of the consequences. The weather begins already to grow warm, and decomposition sets in more rapidly than a month since. Let us state two or three facts which we have on unimpeachable testimony. Our informant is one who, besides being incapable of an untruth, has an interest rather in exposing than encouraging exaggeration. He has told us, that in one locality, where public works are in progress, the labourers were forced to examine a cabin at some distance, in consequences of the noxious and intolerable effluvium issuing from it. They discovered in it five bodies in an advanced stage of putrefaction, the whole of a family who had died none knew when. None of the labourers dared touch the bodies, and to protect themselves while remaining on the work, where they were compelled to earn their bread and chance of life, they pulled down the hovel, heaped timber and thatch over the blackened corpses, applied fire, and kept aloof until the dwelling and the dead were consumed to ashes. Such was the internment.<sup>37</sup> It is our duty to publish these appalling facts. We have authentic information of others just as dreadful, but our flesh creeps at the remembrance. We must, however, in order if possible to instigate the authorities to adopt proper measures, state one other fact for their consideration. In the neighbourhood of Dunmanus Bay three dead bodies were lying for many days,

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<sup>37</sup> (Cremation was not then a normal method of disposal of the dead, and at least among Catholics was forbidden until very recently; Ed).

and still, we believe, remain exposed outside the thresholds of three cabins, while within, the families were dead, or dying, or struck down by fever. None of the peasantry, for the world's wealth, would go near the bodies – such is their apprehension of contagious fever; even the Water Guards at a neighbouring station dreaded to approach them. There they lay, festering in the sun, and breeding pestilence, and there for aught we know, they still remain, emitting poisonous exhalations, and rendering the recovery of the sick within the cabins altogether hopeless.

When these accounts, which appeared in the Times of the 26th of March first met the eye of the author of the present work, the idea instantly flashed upon him, that a more noble field on which to test the powers of homeopathy could not have been presented. He accordingly requested Mr. Heurtley, the Honorary Secretary of the English Homoeopathic Association, with which he and that gentleman were then connected, to summon a meeting of the Committee, with the view of proposing that a homeopathic practitioner should be immediately despatched, at the expense of the Association, to the scene of destitution, with instructions for him to proceed at once to Bantry or Skibbereen, or whichever might prove the most infected district, and there to offer his gratuitous aid, without any other limit than that which would be occasioned by the exhaustion of his own physical powers. This proposal was at once hailed by the Committee, and after an attempt at opposition from two persons whose motives subsequently transpired, and from whom the leading friends of homeopathy have subsequently disconnected themselves, it was immediately adopted and carried into execution. The party selected for the arduous mission was Mr. Joseph Kidd, an Irishman, but a member of the London College of Surgeons, and this gentleman joyfully undertook its duties without the slightest prospect of remuneration, and in the full consciousness of all the appalling circumstances with which

he would be called upon to contend. He knew that in the midst of the ordinary difficulties of his task he would be assailed by the cries for food of the miserable beings by whom he would be surrounded, that he would have to attend the sick lying side by side with the dead, that all ordinary requirements would be disregarded, that fresh air, warmth, cleanliness and every other aid would be wholly wanting, that he could hope for no professional co-operation, and that, in face, it would have been difficult to have imagined circumstances of greater disadvantage under which his exertions could be carried on. But he had some years' experience of homeopathy, and hence he went with undaunted confidence upon what, under other circumstances, would have seemed a hopeless and a most dangerous undertaking.

This very serious step was undertaken by me, not in a spirit of blind enthusiasm, but after the most mature consideration of all the dangers, obstacles and difficulties which might be expected to oppose our efforts, and in the full confidence that at all times homeopathy wants nothing but a field in which it may be tested, to prove triumphant.

Nor was my confidence shaken even by the gloomy forebodings and discouraging opposition of a professional colleague, who was at that time a leading member of the Committee of the Association, nor by the petty and vexatious impediments of another professional member, belonging to that '*genus irritabile*' whose love of approbation preponderating over the intellectual faculties, cause them to view an original idea of any other mind, no matter how beautiful and perfect, as if it were unsightly, and to oppose it by every petty shift and hindrance in their power.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> It is deserving of remark, that no sooner had the idea thus opposed led to successful results, than the party last alluded to took immediate occasion to attempt the appropriation of a portion of the credit of the scheme, and to bruit about the share of *eclat* due to him, for his exertions in having urged it on.

Leaving London on the night of Saturday, April 3rd, with the utmost dispatch, the following Tuesday found me in the city of Cork, and, after making the necessary enquiries, I determined to press forward to some part of the west of the county of Cork, where most disease and destitution were reported to exist. Accordingly, I started for Bandon, where I called upon the rector (the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Bernard), who very kindly afforded me much information about the state of the country, and recommended me most earnestly to make Bantry the scene of operations, knowing it to be then overflowing with disease, and that, on account of the illness of its chief physician, and the increase of sickness, it was, in a great degree, destitute of medical aid.

Without loss of time, therefore, I went forward, and reached Bantry towards midnight, where the sounds of misery soon came upon our ears from the sobbing crowds of children at the coach windows, as, drenched with rain, they importuned for food. Never was a more pitiable cry raised; and by those upon whom it fell, it can scarcely ever be forgotten.

Bantry is a small town in the west of the county Cork, with a population of about 5000, situated near the bay of that name; and within a few miles of those places, immortalised in the annals of suffering and distress, Skibbereen and Skull. The country surrounding it forms the most picturesque and grand district in the south-west of Ireland.

Immediately after my arrival in Bantry, I called upon the vicar, (the Rev. John Murphy), whose kindness was most liberally extended to me in many ways, during my entire stay, and the example of whose devotion to the relief of his destitute parishioners of all sects became a continual source of encouragement to me in my labours in the same field. This gentleman forthwith invited me to accompany him on one of his daily visits of charity, through the outskirts of the town, and then for the first time did the full