FROM VICTORIAN BOYHOOD TO THE TROUBLES: A SKIBBEREEN MEMOIR

Willie Kingston

Willie Kingston was born into the small, but lively Methodis community in late nineteenth century Skibbereen. His fathe was a shopkeeper, but he, the youngest child of a family of six children, qualified as a solicitor, coming first in the all Ireland Law Exams. Willie's main interests were sport, world-wide travel, and local history. He was a humane and open minded person; as a young man h decided to become a vegetarian and, during the first world war, a pacifist. He was not involved in politics, but he did sympathise with the aspirations of Irish nationalism. Apart from his expeditions abroad, he spent all his life in Skibbereen. He worked for the solicitors' firm of his cousin Jasper Wolfe. He kept a detailed diary, and in his sixties wrote a memoir. The following extracts have been edited by Daisy Swanton (his niece), and Jasper Ungoed-Thomas (the grandson of Jasper Wolfe). Willie Kingston married late in life, and lived to be ninety.

Growing up in Skibbereen

I am told I was born on the 8th day of January, 1885, in 72 Bridge Street, Skibbereen. My recollection of events during my first few years is very sketchy indeed, and disconnected. Visions of illness flit through my mind, accompanied by rubbings of my chest with turpentine and camphorated oil, and the heat which followed when my chest was covered with flannel. And once, I remember old Dr Somerville, who had a full beard, bending over me, whom I promptly kicked in the beard!

Another, but pleasant memory is on occasions, when dressed for bed in a sleeping suit, being seated on my mother's knee near a fire in the bedroom when she used to warm her hand repeatedly at the fire and then rub my bare feet, which was very comforting.

A third memory is being led by the hand by my father to Lissard, on Sunday afternoons, to see wild rabbits in the fields. On arrival there I generally needed a lavatory, but declined to use the open country, and I used to run home suffering great discomfort meantime.

I used to sleep with my brother Sam, (three years older), in a cot, alongside our parents' bed which had a canopy over it. When sick I was sometimes put in my parents' bed, and when feverish the canopy assumed many shapes and gave me many queer ideas. On one occasion, some kindly, but badly advised person, presented me with various child's carpenter's tools, and I remember trying the wooden mallet in bed on my brother's head, with unpleasant results for myself!

Christmas was, of course, a most exciting time, and I used to wake early in the morning to examine the contents of the paper bag hung at the foot of my bed. My elder sisters had a habit of removing from my bag some sweets, and substituting apples and oranges, on the pretext that they were better for me than sweets! Perhaps they were right!

On Christmas day it was customary for us all to go to the Methodist church for an early service at 7 a.m. As I grew older I was in the habit of rising well before the service, and after lighting the gas in the dining room, of laying the table for breakfast. I felt very proud of this service. Of course, we left the house before daybreak, and returned soon after dawn, and had breakfast, and spent the rest of the day at home eating and drinking, with often resulting tummy aches, for which we had to drink olive oil, laced below with wine and above with brandy to drown the taste of the oil. We used to issue an enormous number of Christmas cards, as all our family, (six children and two parents), each sent cards to our own pals, and received the same number in return. But I have no idea what became of the cards afterwards – probably they were used to light the fires.

We kept two maid servants, and part of their duties was to draw water in buckets from the town pump, and to empty the slop buckets into the adjoining river, as we had neither water laid on nor any kind of lavatory or sewerage system in the house. Incidentally, I may add that the village pump was the nerve centre of the gossip system of the town!

My father generally boarded two male clerks who worked in his grocery shop, and they sat with the maids in the kitchen in the evenings. It was a great pleasure to me to join these gatherings and I heard many things from them which I did not then understand, but which remained in my memory.

A dirty old woman, known as Kitty Pheasant, used to get free dinners in the kitchen very often, and I remember gleefully leaving the dining room for the kitchen, there to be fed by her with potatoes peeled with her

In the schools, and at home, we Protestants were educated to belie
that the British were the greatest race on earth, and could do nothi
wrong, and that the Irish were a second rate crowd whom nothing cou
satisfy and who should be kept down with a firm hand. Accordingly, w
were strongly pro-English in the Boer War, and when Colonel Th
O'Donovan, who commanded the Cork militia in South Africa, returne
home after the campaign he received a wonderful welcome
Skibbereen. [The O'Donovans were a distinguished Old Irish famil
Unusually, they had become Protestant. Their magnificent residence
Lissard, was between Skibbereen and Tragumna]. His carriage wa
drawn by men through the town, many of whom had served in the mi
tia. He rewarded them with a beer party that night at Lissard, whe
dancing and singing under lights from tar barrels and torches, brough
by the townsfolk, continued until a late hour, and converted the groun
beside his house into a shambles, as I know because I spent a couple
hours there looking on.

The O'Donovan then conceived the not too bright idea of giving tw
garden parties as a reward to the town, the first day being for the ari
tocrats, with a band from Cork, and the second day for the rest with
Baltimore band. In his innocence, he thought there were only two class
es in the town, the upper ten and the lower five, and he issued his pos
invitations accordingly with very bad judgement. ["The Upper Th
Thousand" was a phrase originally introduced by a now forgotte
author. However, during the late nineteenth century it was widely use
by Gladstone, and radical Liberals generally, to refer, in a critical spiri
to the aristocracy and the landed interest. The O'Donovan's lamentab
error was to overlook the status which the Nonconformists enjoyed i
Skibbereen, not least in their own eyes]. The invitees were delighte
until those invited on the second day met those selected for the first da
and then "the band played"! The second day was boycotted and turne
out a lamentable failure, and The O'Donovan never regained his forme
prestige.

After our father's estate was wound up and we settled down i
Victoria Terrace life became very pleasant, and the future promising. I
the first place, brother Sam passed his exam for the Irish Lan
Commission when he had almost reached the age limit for the Civ
Service, and he went to Dublin in 1903, and his future was thus secure
Then, in 1905, sister Sarah married the man of her choice, Willie Peart

and went to live with him in Dunmanway, where he was stationed in the Bank of Ireland. They lived comfortably on a salary of £165 per year! In October 1906 Sarah's first child, Gladys, was born in our house in Victoria Terrace. The following day the nurse made me take the child in my arms for a minute or two, and I was scared I would let her fall, or otherwise damage her. Her second child was also born in our house, in 1908, but her third and last child, Jack, was born in Dunmanway, in July 1911, and it has been whispered in the family that his conception was the "result of an accident" and that he was not a wanted baby. If so, Jack certainly got his own back on his parents before he emigrated to Australia in 1938! Close acquaintance with three babies greatly strengthened my bachelorhood! Sarah's departure meant the closing down of the art classes in the school, but the rest of the school continued to flourish, so much so indeed that sister Rachel went to Lausanne and Paris in September 1905 to learn colloquial French, and did not return until May 1906.

We had a nice circle of friends at this time, and there was much fraternising, resulting in numerous picnics and parties, and even dancing had started to creep in, as well as cycling on Sundays. Private dances had now become socially respectable, even with religious people, although I am afraid some of the older folk still considered we were heading straight for hell as regards both the dancing and Sunday cycling! And of course, there was no drinking as this was looked on as wholly out of bounds; smoking, too, was not practised, being frowned on by us as being dangerous.

Public dances, moreover, were still taboo. Some of our boy friends ventured to go to a public dance in the Town Hall, and were violently attacked by some of our girl friends, (including sister Daisy), on the grounds that they danced with common girls they would not salute in the street the following day, and the boys were threatened with ostracism if they repeated the offence. But this form of snobbery came to an end in 1910, when the extraordinary popularity of roller skating joined all classes and creeds together in the Town Hall.

The roller skating craze was started in December 1909 by Billy Wolfe (of the Grove) and myself when we practised for the first time in the Methodist Rooms. The innovation was an immediate success, and the Town Hall was opened for skating on 17th January 1910. The skaters laid down, and paid for, the maple floor. In April we had a Fancy Dress

Skating Carnival which was a tremendous success. The craze last about two years. Skating accounted for quite a few marriages during this period.

Mrs Gott and Miss Carey used to produce very good Costume Concerts in the Town Hall, including one or two farces. I took part in most of these, and very much enjoyed the acting. On one occasion I took part in a play produced by the Catholic Young Men's Society, and appeared as a hunting squire, attired in Charlie Kennedy's [a Catholic solicitor] clothes and boots.

Sport filled a great deal of my life at this time. Ping-Pong became a craze for some years, and I won two open tournaments. Hockey came in as an innovation about 1898 and gradually superseded rugby. I played my first match for Skibbereen when I was fifteen, and my last in 1923. The only final we ever won was the Junior Munster League, in the season 1912/13. I was captain that year, as well as several others. Our travelling to matches at the beginning was by "brake" (or long car) with a pair of horses, a most sociable and pleasant method of locomotion. Later we used trains when possible, and, eventually, came the motor cars, and motor lorries, but I may add that more than once I cycled in order to save the few shillings fare, to Bantry and Dunmanway, distances of over 30 miles return. For most of this long period our players were teetotal, and not more than one or two of the team would take a drink at all. During the concluding period, however, it became the reverse and the exception was to find two who did not drink.

In summer we played cricket and tennis. I first learned to play tennis at Glencurragh where, at that time, William G. Wood lived. A little later T. R. Roycroft made a good tennis court at the back of his house in Townshend Street, and he gave us young people an open invitation to play there at all times, and we made good use of that court for about five years. We also had a very successful Harrier Club for several years. Our runs were in the evening after tea. We used to dress in the Town Hall and then the bugle sounded the start, and we poured out of the door in single file, and ran through the town, and went on for about three miles into the country. Large crowds used to assemble to watch our start, as the finish was always at a fast pace to prove our stamina.

In 1904 I bought the only brand-new bicycle I have ever owned, a Premier, though I have ridden many second hand ones. The same applies to hockey sticks as, though I played for 40 years, I only once pos-

sessed a brand new stick, and that cost just 4/6! Shortage of money necessitated my using second hand articles, and even these needed careful preservation; habits thus acquired became permanent, and to this day I enjoy and am proud of, being able to keep and use a machine, or even of wearing apparel, for a longer period than others.

The shops closed for the first time at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, 1st May 1912, and even then we were not sure that the solicitors' offices would follow suit, but they did so the following Wednesday, and have never ceased since, though very often 1 p.m. became 2 p.m, or even later. Still, the half day became a very precious possession of all workers.

Family finances having improved, I was able to indulge in my travel hobby during my annual holidays. My first trip outside Ireland was in 1907, to Scotland. [Until the outbreak of the Great War, W.J.K., with brother Sam or friends, went abroad regularly. In 1908 it was London; in 1909, Paris and Switzerland; in 1910, Paris, Switzerland and Northern Italy; in 1912, Holland, Germany and Belgium].

The Great War

In July 1913 sister Daisy married Tom Mansfield in Union Hall Methodist church, all the family being present. She then went to live in Cappoquin and the school suffered in consequence. Though the school continued until the time of my mother's death in 1924, it never went back to the palmy days of pre-1913. In October 1914 brother Sam married Lucy Lawrenson, quietly in Dublin, none of our family being present. In March 1915 sister Daisy died in Cappoquin of pneumonia, and her child also died, and, of course, this was a great blow to the family. I went to Cappoquin, and saw her corpse, and accompanied the funeral to Aughadown where she was buried. There was also a birth in the family as Sam's first child, Ralph, was born in Dublin in 1918. Daisy was born in 1923, and Sam completed his family when Elsa arrived in 1928.

In spite of these changes in the family those of us at home did well financially and, largely owing to the fall in money, (or rather the rise in interest rates), due to the war, we increased our unearned income from investments etc. from £87 per year at the end of 1912 to £258 per year at the end of 1919. From July 1916 a further source of income arose for me, as Jasper was appointed Crown Solicitor in the middle of that year, and he could not thereafter take Petty Sessions cases, or deal with

Publicans' Licences. He allowed me to undertake this work for myself but I had to pay my own travelling expenses and other outlay.

The war brought many other changes. I was shocked when I first saw the one-step danced, by men and women in close embrace as, prior to the war, to dance too close to a woman might even mean expulsion from the hall, as being indecent. Furthermore, polite and discreet conversation with women disappeared, and after the war men told the fair sex the smuttiest stories to which they gladly listened, and I was astonished to find that they understood all the indecent slang which men previously only uttered among themselves. In pre-war days women wore long skirts, and if a man saw more than her ankles the lady was expected not to faint, at least to blush, and the man was thrilled! This attitude disappeared after the war, as the ladies unblushingly wore very short skirts and appeared in scanty and tight bathing costumes in mixed bathing. And, of course, the ladies smoked openly, and countenanced drinking by men, and finally took strong drink themselves. I will not say that Victorian prudery kept the sexes more moral in secret, perhaps the reverse, but it did shake pre-war men to see how calmly and easily the pre-war angels shed their modesty and descended to men's level. The war certainly finally emancipated women, but whether for their benefit or otherwise is debatable.

Another surprise came to me to find the change in the appraisement of soldiers. In my young days I was taught to look on soldiers as the scum of the earth, and a decent boarding house could not accept a soldier in uniform. The war changed all that, and the fear of losing their possessions was, I am satisfied, the real reason the wealthy spent so much of their time and money entertaining the defenders of those possessions.

At the start of the war the sense of adventure and military glamour stirred me, and I went so far as to buy a small six chambered bull-dog revolver for 6s. 6d. As the war dragged on from year to year, and steadily became more sordid and bloody, I lost faith in both God and Man, as I realised that in fact Man worshipped only two Gods, Mars and Bacchus, and that all I had been taught of the justice and kindness of mankind, and especially of the British, was merely propaganda, and that all virtues disappeared under the slightest strain.

My own outlook on war became that I could not take life, and I had no anxiety to lose my own. If, therefore, conscription came, I decided to sub-

mit to superior force, and if it became a choice of going to the front or being executed for not going, I would go, but would take good care to kill no one unless in absolute personal self defence. When conscription was threatened in Ireland, in the spring of 1918, and the Roman Catholics organised opposition thereto, I was the only Protestant in Skibbereen, so far as I know, who signed the public protest, and I was truly thankful when the threatened conscription was dropped. To compel a man to fight against his will seems to me a negation of all religion and humanity, and the treatment meted to conscientious objectors in England and America was a disgrace.

My feeling was that the war was wholly unnecessary and could have been avoided. I had, and have, much admiration for the Germans, and I am still convinced that a drawn war was the only hope of a lasting peace. It was shocking the way the winning nations grabbed German possessions after the war, and the Treaty of Versailles was so obviously unfair it was certain it could not last. The Churches lost two great opportunities during, and after, the war of extending their prestige viz:– they failed to condemn the war itself, with its ensuing savagery and immorality, and they failed to cry out against the obvious injustices of the various peace treaties.

The war made very little difference to us in Skibbereen, save that goods got dearer, and the bread was nearly black. Occasionally, when near the sea, we heard distant gun fire, and I believe on one occasion I got a glimpse of a submarine off Toe Head, but we saw no hostile aircraft, and, indeed, only a few British ones towards the end of the war, when they flew over the town and dropped propaganda leaflets. At one time the police warned all house-holders that should the Germans land near us we were to proceed to Dunmanway. But we got no instructions as to what we should do when we got there, nor how we were to travel!

In fact, on the whole, both town and country became better off than ever before. The farmers got wonderful prices for their produce and they spent a great deal of it in the town, and in improving their houses, while the poor people had relatives in the army and navy who sent home separation allowances, so more money circulated than ever before. Gold disappeared very early in the war, but this was not really missed. Later on, silver suddenly vanished for a time, with lamentable results, as no one could give small change, and postal orders and postage stamps became currency. The shortage disappeared as suddenly as it came, and the

cause was never really explained, but it was said to have been a mon
making trick of the Jews.

In December 1915 I purchased a 6.h.p. single cylinder Rover t
seater car, 1906 model, familiarly known as "The Bridget." Its avera
speed was 15 m.p.h.! It had neither windscreen nor hood, but I fitte
windscreen later, and also a dicky seat. Just after the 1916 rebellio
had to get a police permit to drive the car as far as Tragumna! Perm
had to be obtained at that time for all journeys.

In June 1916 began one of the pleasantest periods of my life as so
of the local boys and myself started camping in Tragumna in a marq
canvas tent. The following year we put up a wooden shack which, thou
roughly built by ourselves, was much more comfortable, and this last
until 1921 when it was blown down in a gale. In 1917 Bill Wood a
myself bought a sailing boat. She was clinker built but, as she had
deep keel, she could not sail to windward. However, we generally us
the sail in one direction, and used the oars the other way. To sail in
Lough Ine was our favourite cruise, but we had occasional trips
Sherkin Island. Once, near the Kedge Islands, we almost scraped acro
the back of a basking shark longer than our boat, lying motionless a
feet under the surface. We had six in the boat and got a great fright.

The Troubles

Following the foundation of the National Volunteers, and the gun ru
ning in Dublin, quite a few young men joined the movement, includi
some of my own Protestant friends. [The National Volunteers had be
founded in 1913. This was a non-denominational, all Ireland moveme
dedicated to the armed support of an independent or Home Rule Irelan
It provided an alternative to the Protestant Ulster Volunteers. In 19
armaments were landed at Howth, near Dublin, for the Nation
Volunteers. Later the same day, in Dublin, three people were shot de
by troops after a confrontation with a crowd.] However, there was ve
little local interest, and the movement died away. Accordingly, the Ir
rebellion of 1916 in Dublin had few sympathisers in Skibbereen and,
fact, there was a sense of relief when it collapsed. But the brutalities
the British forces during the fighting, and particularly the shooting
the prisoners afterwards, caused a great revolution of feeling, and pav
the way for the successful Sinn Féin rising.

After the war, the Republican revolution increased steadily in tempo. Luckily, Skibbereen remained very quiet to begin with, save for a few incidents. We moved around and enjoyed life much as usual, that is to say, we played badminton and hockey and cycled to the sea, and camped out, and walked, without being molested or threatened. Nevertheless, we certainly took a risk in our travelling to matches for hockey, to which we went by lorry. For instance, on one occasion, at Shannonvale, we were wise enough to refuse to take tea in order to get home early and, in consequence, we just missed an ambush at Leap in which some Black and Tans were killed.

British military were stationed in the Town Hall during those days and they remained in town until the Treaty came into force early in 1922. On the whole, they gave no trouble and were quite popular. There were a few Black and Tans with the regular police, who also gave little trouble, but we were spared the Auxiliaries who were never stationed there. Martial law came into force at the end of 1920, and when that happened I gave my small revolver to Jasper for safe keeping, as he had a permit to keep firearms. I never saw it again, and I have been told he gave it to a priest!

We played hockey with the military, which saved me the indignity of being searched on one occasion, when the military made a cordon round part of the town, and searched all caught therein. The captain in charge recognised me as having played hockey with him, so dismissed me without a search.

My attitude towards Sinn Féin was that I sympathised with their objects though I abhorred the brutalities committed by both sides. I always condemned the hypocrisy of Britain who publicly pleaded for the right of self-determination for small nations yet denied it to Ireland.

Meantime, I remained in the office with Jasper, though it was an anxious time owing to his job as Crown Solicitor. He was fortunate enough to have good friends in both camps but, nevertheless, he had many narrow escapes, more often by accident than otherwise.

For instance, on one occasion, in February 1921, he, Miss Browne and myself motored to Durrus via Ballydehob, where I had a case at Petty Sessions. I finished quickly, but Jasper did not appear until 5 p.m. Earlier that day, when walking through Bantry Square, I met two men coming towards me. As they approached they leaned towards each other, and one said to the other, "There he is". I had the feeling I was in a fix,

even though I felt it was a case of mistaken identity. It struck me like a flash that my only safe course was to show complete indifference, so I passed the men nonchalantly, without even looking at them; but I had cold shivers down my spine when my back was to them, and I did not dare turn round or hurry away. Nothing more happened until dusk when I went to meet Jasper at the hotel. A man sprang out of the shadow of a house and peered into my face, and then vanished without saying anything; but it was obvious something was on foot, and somebody was being looked for.

In Bantry, Jasper met T.T. McCarthy (Bawnie), and offered him a seat in his motor to Skibbereen and, as events turned out, it was mighty lucky he did so.. The three of us and the chauffeur motored to Durrus and had tea with Miss Browne and her mother, which meant we did not leave for home till after dark. By another lucky chance, McCarthy was seated in front, alone with the chauffeur, and Jasper, Miss Browne and myself were together in the back seat. The profile of McCarthy, including bowler hat and large stomach, clearly proclaimed a cattle dealer. As we passed through Caheragh village, at a spot where the driver had to slow down to take a corner, and avoid some projecting stones which then existed at the road-side, a whistle was violently blown close to our side and the sound then moved away up a side road, suggesting the man was running and giving a pre-arranged signal. Miss Browne and myself crouched down expecting a volley every moment, but nothing happened. Jasper was too sleepy from drink to realise what was happening.

When we got home, we learned that it was known in Skibbereen that an ambush was being laid somewhere for Jasper and, no doubt, the man with the whistle was put in position to make sure no other car would be attacked. The unexpected chance of the spotter seeing a cattle dealer undoubtedly saved us, and his whistle was a signal not to fire on, or stop our car.

On the late evening of 12th August 1920, the first Sinn Féin Arbitration Court in Skibbereen was held in the Land and Labour Hall in Bridge Street, which has since been removed save for the arch under it leading into the Fair Field. I acted for the plaintiff in the only case for hearing, and won it. It was a rather famous case which passed through many courts before it finally ended. The chief point of interest in it was that the defendant was accused of having sold a cow which had no tail but he had tied on to her the tail of another animal, and so had deceived

the purchaser, who agreed to buy for a larger sum than he would have paid had he known the cow was tailless.

These arbitrations were illegal according to British law, and all taking part were liable to prosecution. The above evening was the end of a summer day, and as I strolled up the town to the Court I felt much as a man must do who is contemplating, but has not yet committed, his first crime or, in other words, I was a free man then but might be otherwise before night. Within a few days after I had a warning from District Inspector Foster that he knew I had been at the Court, and that if I was ever caught in one of them I would be prosecuted, even though he was a friend of mine.

Subsequently, I attended several of these Courts, at Fahoura School, in a field at Derryclough, in a stable at Ballyourane, and in a mill at Donemark. All the local solicitors attended these courts as we could not desert our clients whatever happened. In fact, Jasper knew, and approved, of my attendances, though I expect he would have had to prosecute me if I was caught!

There were generally scouts on watch outside the Court on the lookout for military or police. On the Derryclough day, just as we assembled, there arrived a small boy galloping on a pony, to warn us that a force of police was coming towards us. We promptly scattered; but when we found the police were moving off in another direction, we reassembled and did our business. That Court was the pleasantest of all, as it was held in the open air, on a glorious summer day, and there was tea and cake provided in the nearby farmhouse. I spotted an American lady taking a photo of the group, and promptly turned my back, as I feared the photo might, by some chance, appear locally. I was right, as the picture appeared in an American paper soon after, and a copy of the paper reached Skibbereen, but actually it did not cause any trouble to those who could be recognised, and I was not one of them.

We got a patient hearing at these Courts, but hearsay evidence was admitted, which in many cases produced absurdities. It was the practice always to have at least two, and sometimes as many as five, arbitrators sitting together, and they did their best and some of them were really excellent, but there were also some ludicrous cases. For instance, at Fahoura, I appeared in a case in which husband and wife had had a row and, as instructed by the wife, I solemnly asked a bench of elderly farmers to grant a divorce! The answer of the Chairman was to refuse my

application and advise the woman to go back to her husband and rea
large family as her mother did before her. Perhaps she took his adv
as I never saw her or heard from her again.

I got a shock when, on the night of 19th February 1921, Willi
Connell and Matt Sweetnam were shot by the IRA in their homes
Lissanuhig, because they had refused to contribute to the funds of S
Féin, and had reported to the police that cattle belonging to them h
been seized by the IRA in consequence. Under duress by the police, th
were forced to give evidence against some people arrested for taking
cattle.

Some days before, Connell had shown me an anonymous letter he h
received, warning him he was in danger, and advising him to leave
country. He asked my advice and I told him to leave, and that I took th
warning seriously. He said he would consider the matter but, at a
rate, he would make his will, and this I completed for him. On the mo
ing of the shootings, George Jennings of Lug had called on me at h
office and said there was a flying squadron of the IRA on his farm, a
that two men were in danger. I went at once to E.A. Swanton J.P., (la
friend of Jasper Wolfe, and himself later confined for several months
the IRA), and told him of the warnings, by letter to Connell and to
personally, but he laughed at the idea, and said he could guess who th
writer of the letter was, and that it was a person who had built a ne
house and who was afraid the military might burn it if there was
trouble. Consequently, I took no further steps in the matter.

I attended the funerals of the two men to Aughadown, where th
were buried in adjoining graves, and it was the only time I ever hea
the burial service read over two corpses. The punishment, even throug
Sinn Féin eyes, seemed to be entirely too severe and unjust, i
Skibbereen was thought by the IRA to be too lukewarm, and perha
this was done as a warning?

Towards the end of 1920 it became apparent that there would be
long spell of trouble and, in consequence, there was a wave of emigr
tion. In December 1920 several of my friends went to Australia. I w
also unsettled and thought of going with them, but of course, moth
was against it, so I postponed joining them.

As it happened, just before the shooting of Connell and Sweetnam, w
sold by auction our fields at Carrigfadda which our family occupied f
half a century. The night before the auction all the bridges round th

country were destroyed by the IRA to impede movements by military
and police, not a cheerful start for an auction, but notwithstanding this
we got a good price, and sold at the top of the land boom following the
war. About three months later there was a heavy drop in prices of land
and cattle and goods.

On the same afternoon that Connell and Sweetnam were buried I
decided to leave Skibbereen, and go to South Africa with some friends
who were planning to emigrate. I intended to spend a year abroad, and
then make up my mind whether to settle or return to Skibbereen. This
time, I got my mother's consent, and was delighted as thus I could sat-
isfy my love of travel, while at the same time I would avoid the further
horror of the revolution. The purchase money from the sale of our fields
financed my trip. [W.J.K. found employment in South Africa, as a solici-
tor].

I finally returned to Skibbereen on 21st February 1922. I was firmly
convinced that, following the Treaty, and once the British removed their
forces, Ireland would immediately go back to its usual peaceful condi-
tion. But I was not long home before I discovered my mistake, as the
country was more upset and dangerous than when I left.

Shortly after I got back I cycled to Schull District Court where I had
business. I was held up by Commandant Sean O'Driscoll, and some of
his men, and questioned as to my absence from Skibbereen for a year,
and why I had gone to South Africa. The split between the "Free Staters"
as they were called, and the Irregulars had then commenced and
O'Driscoll and his men belonged to the latter body. Actually, they had
come to question Jasper, who was also at the Court, but with his usual
luck had gone before they arrived, so they took me instead. I got a bad
fright as I was afraid that, at least, I would be held as a prisoner, but I
kept my head and answered their questions quite coolly. Charlie
Kennedy (solicitor) was at the Court and, seeing my predicament, he
came to join us and gave me a clean bill of health, for which I was truly
grateful. The men then moved off, and I cycled home as fast as I could.

It went like wildfire all round Schull that I had been taken away to
the hills as a prisoner, and one motor driver hearing this went back to
Skibbereen by a circuitous route to avoid a similar fate. There was no
real authority at this time to which to appeal for protection, and any
man with a gun was a law unto himself. But the following evening I took
part in a concert in the Parochial Hall, and in the dance which followed,

and even accompanied a girl to her home and kissed her goodnight, so I was not too frightened!

While in South Africa I had received a cable offering me a half share in the legal business of Francis Fitzmaurice in Dunmanway. I replied that I would decide nothing until I got home. That was a wise decision of mine because poor Fitzmaurice was shot dead in his own house by the Irregulars on 26th April, for no known reason. If I had joined with him I might well have suffered the same fate. Other residents in Dunmanway, and elsewhere, were shot about the same time, and it was rumoured that there was to be a general massacre of Protestants.

It was obvious to me that we were sitting on a volcano about to erupt, so I decided to clear off to Dublin on 29th April 1922. The evening before it was rumoured that the shootings, which had already taken place in most other towns in West Cork, were that night to be carried out in Skibbereen. In consequence, few men slept in their own beds that night, or, if they remained at home, they had well planned means of escape.

My own plan was an unusual one, viz. to climb out of a back window and then up and into a large water tank over the lavatory. I proposed to lie flat under the water, and breathe through a short copper pipe which I had provided. I felt pretty sure I would never be discovered there. The idea was not original as I read of it being done in a Wild West romance. I dressed in old clothes, lay down on my bed before sunset, hoping to get some sleep, in order to sit up and watch when night fell. I was not long in bed when I heard a knock at the front door. I grabbed my pipe, and made for the back window, but I decided to wait there until I could hear who was there. It turned out to be a neighbour, who was in terror also, and hoped to get some advice from my folk as he had no escape ready. I gave up the idea of sleep after that, and sat on my bed until morning, looking out the window, and listening to every sound. It was indeed a very long night!

I said goodbye to mother that morning, for the last time as it turned out. In the train to Cork I took the precaution of hiding behind an open newspaper at each station. Sister Rachel came with me, and saw me off to Dublin at Glanmire. The train to Dublin was packed with Protestants fleeing like myself to Dublin, and some to England. Obviously all were nervous of, and suspected, their unknown neighbours in the train. Just as the engine entered the tunnel at Cork, there were several loud explosions, and it is believed the train was bombed from the street above the

tunnel. If so, no harm was done. At Limerick Junction some shots were fired, and I saw a man on the platform with a revolver in his hand. That trip was a nightmare, and I was mighty glad to meet brother Sam at Kingsbridge, and to go to his house in Glasnevin, even though it was uncomfortably close to Mountjoy Barracks, from where often came the noise of machine gun and rifle fire. Sam found a bullet in his garden, and during the Civil War, a neighbour used to spend his dinner hour firing at the Barracks!

I remained in Dublin until towards the end of June when, reluctantly, I decided to go home. But, before I could do so, the Civil War broke out. About 4.30 a.m. on 28th June, while staying with the Peards [sister Sarah and her husband Willie Peard] in Leeson Street, we were awakened by cannon fire and afterwards we learned the Free State Army was attacking the Four Courts, in which the Irregulars had entrenched themselves. Later, sister Sarah and myself decided to walk as far as Merrion Street to find out if Sam had gone to his office in the Land Commission. When passing over Leeson Street bridge I saw some young men standing there, dressed in trench coats and leggings. They must have been waiting in ambush because, when we returned some 20 minutes later, we saw a motor car wrecked at the bridge, with the back riddled with bullets, and large pools of blood and oil under the car. Some of the bystanders told us that the car, which was carrying Free State Officers, had been bombed and shot up, and two of the occupants had been killed, and the three others wounded.

On the evening of 30th June there was a tremendous explosion, when the Record Office was blown up and, though some two miles away from us, we could see a huge cloud of smoke rising into the air, and I picked up some of the papers which had gone up in the explosion.

While we moved about freely in the suburbs, we did not venture downtown until 7th July, when Willie Peard and myself inspected Sackville Street and the Four Courts; both were well damaged, but we found the city perfectly quiet. One day sister Sarah and myself were in Rathmines Road, in a shop, when from the Library, right opposite, firing started. A woman rushed in, in terror, and hid behind a glass case, which amused me. I myself stood at the back of what I thought was a solid pilaster of the shop; but I found that my cover was also a glass panel, so the joke was on me as well!

When I learned that the fighting had spread to the country, and that

there had been two battles in Skibbereen, I gave up all idea of returning there. I arranged to return to South Africa, and to take up a job as sub-editor in Durban.

Note – Willie Kingston remained in South Africa until spring 1924. He then returned to Ireland, via Australia, New Zealand and Canada. From 1926 he settled back into life in Skibbereen. He worked, as a junior partner, for Jasper Wolfe, pursued various social and sporting activities, and made regular trips abroad. By 1939 he had visited the Norwegian fjords and the Arctic Circle; Portugal, Spain and France; the Baltic, the Mediterranean, including Istanbul, Jerusalem and Egypt; the West Indies; and the East Coast of Africa, sailing through the Suez Canal, and returning via South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. A trip to South America was only prevented by the outbreak of war. After 1945, his surviving sisters, and his brother, died. However, in his mid sixties, he finally and happily married. He also became a respected expert in local history. In 1943 he, with some others, founded the Skibbereen Historical and Archaeological Society. He gave various papers, and wrote "The Story of West Carbery", published posthumously in 1985. For a while, he was Chairman of the Board of Directors of *The Southern Star*. His travels abroad continued. After marriage he and his wife went to Ceylon, Austria (twice), Yugoslavia, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and North Africa to France and Spain. The memoir was occasionally updated, and finally concluded in his seventy-seventh year.

MICHEÁL CHORMAIC Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN

Eugene Daly

Micheál Chormaic Ó Súilleabháin was born about the year 1800 in the townland of Ballyriree, parish of Kilmacabea, about six miles north east of Skibbereen. He was known as Micheál Chormaic during his lifetime and after. He was so well known and loved that the surname was superfluous. His father, Cormac Ó Súilleabháin, married Cáit Ní hIarfhlaithe (Herlihy), who was born in Derrylugga on the northern side of Skibbereen parish. They settled in Ballyriree when they married and had three children. Micheál was their firstborn, followed by Pádraig and Máire.[1]

Filíocht (poetry) was "in the blood" of the Herlihys for generations and it must be from them that he inherited "féith na filíochta" (talent for poetry).[2] It was believed that this talent was more inherited than learned. The *seanfhocal* (proverb) puts it like this: "Trí rud nach féidir a fhoghlaim: guth, féile agus filíocht – three things that cannot be learned – a singing voice, hospitality and poetry."

As a young boy he herded cattle for a neighbour, Pádraig Breac Ó Conghaile (Connolly) of Ballyriree. It seems that Micheál Chormaic got some schooling, but very little. He was never able to write but could read both Irish and English. The only schools at that time were conducted by "hedge-school" masters who taught children in some bothán (outhouse) or, in summer, in the open, hence the name hedge-school. There were hedge-schools in that part of Kilmacabea parish, in Cappanaboha, Killinga and Mealisheen.[3] It is more than likely that the Connollys of Ballyriree, who were known as Breacairí (writers) and the Herlihys (his mother's family) had manuscripts of Irish history and poetry which Micheál would have read. It is clear that he read or heard much of the history of his country and that he knew many Irish poems "by heart". There are many allusions to Irish heroes and mythological figures, as well as to Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, in his poems and songs.

Two tragedies happened to Micheál when he was young. His mother died and the family were evicted from their farm. At the age of twenty, Micheál went to live in Derrylugga, where he had O'Sullivan and Herlihy relations. He worked as a labourer for the farmers in that area. Sometimes he went "ag spailpíneacht síos amach" (labouring away out)

nails, and pieces of meat torn off with her dirty hands. I fail now to understand this attraction.

A little girl, Kitty Wolfe, a cousin of mine, lived in a house opposite us in Bridge Street, and she was the same age as myself. When I was about six years of age I conceived the idea of marrying her, and wrote her a proposal, and, having enclosed it in a used envelope, I attached a used stamp and posted it in the post office. The postman must, in a sporting mood, have delivered it as some 20 years later, Kitty joked with me about it.

It was during this period that the maids used to terrify and subdue me by tales of spooks and ghosts, to which grown-ups, including my mother, added tales of a like nature, all of which created in me a fear of the dark which pursued me for half a century, in spite of my common sense.

Also, during this period, a student doctor friend of the family came to pay us a visit, and we brought him to see Glandore, and there we visited a graveyard. There was a tomb with iron bars through which we could see skulls and bones lying in profusion on the ground. The doctor suggested that I, being very small, could squeeze through the bars and bring him some of the bones for medical research, but my parents luckily vetoed the idea. I was terrified at the prospect of getting in and being unable to get out again, and I blame that doctor's suggestion for giving me a dread of squeezing through narrow places, such as souterrains, in archaeological outings, though my curiosity urged me to proceed. I may add that for many years, in fact right into middle age, my usual nightmare was to dream I was crawling through a narrow tunnel, watching the small opening closing, and wondering could I reach the opening and get through it before it closed.

My youngest ambition was to be Queen Victoria's uncle! I have no idea now who the gentleman was, and I need hardly say that my ambition was based not on the man but on the soldier's uniform with medals attached, in which I had seen him in some picture. My next ambitious plan was to discover the North Pole in a whaler which I proposed to purchase, but some outsiders forestalled me, so I dropped the idea! I then flirted with the notion of becoming a Paymaster in the navy but, curiously enough, I never passed through the engine driver stage so common in youths. When eventually I was told I was destined to be a solicitor I got a shock, and my castles in the air fell to pieces, and were never

rebuilt save that, later, my ambition was to travel the world, and I did manage to do a good deal of that before the wretched war of 1939 put an end to globe trotting.

My earliest memory of sport was playing rugby football, the sole spectator being the maid whom my mother always sent to watch over the welfare of my brother and myself during our outings, until our objection thereto induced the cessation of this surveillance. I remember feeling a bit of a hero when, for the first time, I tackled Robert Vickery, who was deemed very strong and heavy. There were quite a number of young Protestant boys in Skibbereen, and, while we had a football club, we had no playing ground, so our football was played in the nearest available field, and we had to keep a sharp lookout for the owner, who naturally resented our trespass, and often our fastest runs were made out of the field when he appeared! We also added cricket to our games, and, of course, the game of marbles was a regular source of amusement.

We had no nearby boys' clubs with which to arrange matches of any kind, but, eventually, we Protestants arranged an annual rugby match with the Catholic schools. The latter having unlimited "manpower" to select from invariably beat us until the last of such games we ever played when we made it a draw and felt "on top of the world" in consequence. Truth to tell, we were greatly helped on that occasion by including in our team a Catholic youth who had played against us on previous occasions and who had been left out of the Catholic team because we complained of his roughness! Thirsting for revenge against his former friends, he did yeoman service for us.

We also had our share of the ordinary field sports, including running, jumping and wrestling, and at a later stage we even organised junior sports with prizes. I was classed as rather a good long distance runner, and one incident comes to mind. I was forced to race Charlie Symes, with hoops, from the "Cross" to the "Three Cottages" and back, a distance of about half a mile. I was very much afraid of Charlie, who was older and stronger than I was and, besides, he used to bully the younger boys. I am afraid I have always suffered from the "Inferiority Complex" and when, on the return run, I found myself ahead of Charlie I could hardly believe it was possible, and at the finish, when I won by a long lead but almost in a state of collapse, I felt more surprised than elated by the result.

During the period I am now dealing with, and for many years afterwards, there was a goodly number of Methodists in Skibbereen and

neighbourhood, and it was usual to hold, periodically, special services in the Methodist Church, conducted by clergymen from other circuits. Religion was a force in the world then, and the preachers urged their congregations to repent and become converted and to signify conversion by some overt sign, such as walking to the top of the church and kneeling in prayer at the communion rails. Intense fervour and excitement were often roused by an eloquent preacher, similar in nature, but considerably less in degree, to the well known Welsh revivals of that time. Occasionally, some clergyman overdid the overt acts by calling on different classes of converts to do different things, such as to raise the left or right hand, or to stand up in the pew, and these "religious gymnastics" as one wit called them, sometimes ended in comedy.

Once, Rev. Morris conducted a special service in Skibbereen. Some of the older boys of my set were genuinely "converted", and went "up to the rails", as the overt act was commonly called. We younger ones were ashamed not to do likewise, and followed them, and so considered ourselves converted. I have not the slightest recollection now of what the preacher said, but I do remember that I felt very proud of having gone "up to the rails", and I must admit that, on the whole, the results were good for us, because, out of a large number of us youngsters, there was not a black sheep, and we were a moral and steady pack of boys who obtained good positions in the Civil Service, in various professions, and in business.

I conceived the idea of reading the Bible through from beginning to end, and did so, but it took me a year, and most of it was entirely beyond my understanding. All my life I have preferred to find out things for myself from books instead of asking questions, hence many of the lurid passages of the Old Testament conveyed nothing to my mind, but they remained stuck there, and it was long years afterwards that I discovered their meaning. It was my habit to read as much as possible of the Bible each night in my bedroom before going to bed, and I well remember one night in August 1898, (the night before Jasper Wolfe, [first cousin of W. J. K.], got married), when there was vivid lightning all night. I was scared of lightning then, and longed for the fancied security of bed, but dared not shirk my self-imposed reading of at least a small part of Scripture before retiring. I had then reached the Psalms, so salved my conscience by reading the shortest one of them and then hopped into bed.

I reached the age of puberty some time before I was 14, though I had not the faintest idea then of what this meant as I received no instruction whatever from anyone about sex matters. Of course, I knew there was such a thing as marriage, and that it was not right for an unmarried girl to have a baby, but I had no idea how children were produced or where they actually came from. In fact, after reading a book by Victor Hugo, I got the impression that it was sufficient for a girl to fall in love with a man in order to have a child! Indeed, it was not until some time after I became a solicitor's apprentice, (i.e. when I was about 17), that from the reading of law books, added to what I had read in the Bible, plus stray remarks from other boys, I gradually discovered the truth.

My mother had a horror of sex and always blamed the woman instead of the man. From her remarks I conceived the idea that the unforgivable sin mentioned in the Bible was intercourse with a woman, an idea which remained with me for a long number of years, and which probably accounts for my never having indulged in this quite natural pleasure, either legalised by marriage or otherwise. In direct contrast to my mother's opinion, however, for a long number of years I looked on women as angels, free from all sexual urges, who merely out of their goodness and kindness yielded to men's evil desires.

My innocence, however, could not arrest the growth of sex, and long before puberty I found myself being fascinated by Trot Clerk, a Methodist Minister's daughter, who wore a dark green dress. I got hold of a small piece of cloth, similar to hers, and I used to fondle it without in any way knowing why that gave me pleasure. Later, I fell violently in love with Lil Correll, and this continued on and off, with lapses, until I qualified as a solicitor at the age of 21. She was nearly three years younger than me, and lived next door, and from the time we were very young we used to do dialogues at concerts, so we were very much thrown together, notwithstanding which, and though I often suffered severely from jealousy because of her, I never told her even that I admired her, and never kissed or cuddled her save at parties when playing "Postman's Knock" or some such game. Indeed, I may say I never "moused" any girl until I was about 19, when Dolly O'Shea, [aged about 14 at the time, and in a few years to marry Willy Wood Wolfe, W.J.K.'s cousin and older brother of Jasper Wolfe], used to come into the office very often, and even then my "mousing" was done in the presence of clerks so was not very serious. Looking back, I fear I missed a lot of harmless fun in my deal-

ings, during my younger days, with the fair sex, and probably often dis
appointed them into the bargain!

I do not know at what age I first went to school, but I remember going
to Mrs Copithorne's school in Townshend Street, and I must have been
very young, as she used to kiss and pet me. I remember learning sewing
there, and sitting on my stool with my legs swinging in the air, and drop
ping my needle, which disappeared through a hole in the boards. I also
remember being taught in that school by Miss Fuller, and one day, after
eating raspberry jam, I had one of the pips stuck in my tooth. In school
I got it loose and blew it out of my mouth. It struck Miss Fuller in the
face, and she was very cross, and sent me home for punishment on the
complaint that I spat in her face. I was punished, and that injustice still
rankles in my mind.

After this school, I attended Longmore's school in the old Methodist
rooms which have since been rebuilt. He had a violent temper, and used
to thrash the boys with a cane. I gave little trouble, so I escaped very
well. On one occasion, however, I was caught playing with another boy,
and we were sentenced to 12 slaps of the cane each on the hands. My pal
got his punishment, and towards the end he was obviously suffering,
and the more he suffered the more my courage oozed away. When my
turn came I received the first slap on my right hand, which really did not
hurt, but I copied my pal's action and writhed in seeming agony and
nursed my hand between my knees – but, unfortunately, I mistook the
hand and nursed my left hand! There was a roar of laughter, in which
even the master joined, and, though I escaped further punishment, I was
sent ignominiously back to my seat, and felt very sorry for myself.

Bicycles were then in their infancy, and I remember seeing solid rub
ber tyres in use, then those called cushion tyres which were much thick
er, and had a hollow centre, and last came the pneumatic tyre. I also
remember seeing the "penny farthing" cycles, as well as the "bantam"
and the "safety". There used to be road cycle races on summer evenings
and Longmore our master generally came in at the tail end, and the fol
lowing day he used to be very cross in school. One evening, by some
chance, he came in first, and the next morning we cheered him on
arrival and he was all smiles and gave us a holiday.

Towards the end of the period of which I am writing [about 1896] the
first motor car arrived in Skibbereen. I was at a juvenile party at the
Corner House when we heard an unusual noise in the street. One of the

boys looked out of the window and shouted it was one of those cars which
ran without a horse. We had heard of them, but had no name for them.
We all rushed out and inspected the strange machine which we learned
belonged to a doctor from Cork. It was a tiny two seater, without hood or
windscreen, but lit with an electric light from a battery.

When I was about 11 my sister Daisy started a school in our house 72
Bridge Street, and, as numbers increased, she moved the school to
Bridge House. About the same time, Longmore left the town and was
succeeded by Storey, and I was sent to my sister's school called the
"Ladies School", even though a good sprinkling of boys were included. I
completed my education in that school. At that time teachers were paid
by the Intermediate Board fees for each pupil who passed, and the more
subjects the pupils passed, the bigger were the fees. Accordingly, during
my school time, to make money for my family, I studied and passed in
English, Latin, French, Italian, Mathematics, Geometry and Drawing.
For one year I even studied Pitman's Shorthand (a hateful subject) and
sat for an Exam. I believe I would have scraped through but for the
inspector, Rev. Bell. Soon after, Rev. Bell was murdered near
Dunmanway, by his servant man, who was sentenced to death, but
reprieved. I signed a petition for the reprieve, from humanitarian con-
victions, not from revenge for my shorthand failure!

Owing to these result fees I was practically self-supporting, which
was very necessary as our family was very badly off owing to my father
having become much addicted to drink (which began soon after I was
born) and was due to the advice of a doctor who recommended him to
take whiskey for his weak stomach. He had a very good grocery and bak-
ery business, and a number of horses and sidecars, covered cars, and
"brakes", which he hired out. As the drink grew on him he let the busi-
ness fall away, and he would have gone bankrupt but for my sisters'
school, as all four of them taught in it.

I have very unhappy memories of seeing him tottering upstairs, even
early in the day, and lying in his bed to sleep off his drunkenness.
Frequently my mother, who had a violent temper, used to abuse him
when drunk, and on one occasion I saw her attack him in the dining
room, and pull a bottle of whiskey from his pocket, and smash it against
the wall. Yet I never heard him use a bad word to her, or make even an
attempt to strike her. These bad memories created in me a horror of alco-
hol which no doubt accounts for me being a teetotaller. My family even

bought drugs guaranteed to cure drunkenness and put them in his t
but without result. And then, suddenly, of his own volition, he compl
ly gave up drink, and for the last few years of his life never touched
In spite of these unpleasant memories I had a great respect and af
tion for my father, who never at any time hit or punished me and I ne
saw him in a temper. My mother, on the contrary, often lost her temp
and when my brother and myself fought (as boys will) she used to
and beat us with a whip, under the table where we had taken refu
and of course she never could reach us in her rage. And yet, in spite
this, we had no fear of, or much respect for her; but needless to say,
recognised that she took great pains to care for and educate us, and
protect us against dangers, physical and moral, some real and so
imaginary. And in justice to my mother, I must say that though her te
per was quick and hot it lasted only a short time.
In those days there were no organised amusements for young peop
such as cinemas and radio, and so we had to make our own
Accordingly, our little crowd was not divided, and there was much te
spirit, not alone in sport, but also in other ways, such as walks, picn
etc. When we were very young, my mother used to bring us all, oc
sionally, to Tragumna, in a small wagonette, drawn by one horse, wh
we built sand castles, and caught fish in pools, and we thoroughl
enjoyed ourselves. At the age of 11 I taught myself to swim. Up to th
time I had bathed in the Ladies Strand, and woe betided the unfortun
man who ventured to approach that strand, even though the bathi
costumes then worn by the ladies were heavier and more conceal
than some of the street costumes of the present day [written *c.*1950].
costume was a bathing pants, but after I learned to swim I deserted
Ladies Strand and went to join the men in their strand where I learn
the pleasure of bathing in the nude, which was then the custom
Tragumna for men, even though their strand was very near the pub
road and nothing like as private as the Ladies Strand.
During this time my sister Daisy organised annual Childre
Concerts in the Town Hall, held in January, which were very success
and profitable. I used to recite, either alone, or with Lil Correll in di
logues.
We were still full of religious fervour, so we boys formed a Soci
known as "The Christian Working Band", and we conducted services
our own in the Methodist Rooms, and later the more senior memb

even preached at some country houses. The organiser was Collen Christie, son of the then Methodist Minister, Rev. W. J. Christie. I remember sitting in the Church rooms on some fine evenings writing out many copies of some circular for Collen, and while regretting missing various outings, I had not the pluck to refuse him. Incidentally, I did all the writing while he just sat and looked on!

Our meetings were very successful and well attended until, typical of Methodist preachers, Collen introduced collections for Dr Barnardo's Home in which he had a relative as matron. Money was very scarce amongst us boys and gradually the sums collected dwindled until one day it amounted to two pence. Collen stood before us with a penny in each hand, and a most mournful look on his face which greatly amused us. The high spirits of Foster Johnson tempted him and he threw his cap at Collen and knocked one of the pennies out of his hand. The meeting, of course, broke up in disorder.

There was one poor Methodist, Mrs Levis, living in Mardyke, who existed largely on the charity of her church. It was thought that she loved to have young people call on her to sing and pray with her. It is not fair to judge her, but I have a feeling that she pretended to enjoy these meetings to curry favour. At any rate, we boys decided it was our duty to visit her periodically. At that time Mardyke was a slum, and very dirty, and we Protestants never passed through it without being stoned or jeered at by the young Catholics, who far outnumbered us. Their favourite taunt was a doggerel verse:

> "Proddy waddy greenguts, never said a prayer,
> Catch him by the long legs, and throw him down the
> stair".

We in reply, had a rhyme:

> "Catholic, Catholic, go to Mass,
> Riding upon your old Jackass".

One Sunday night, after the ordinary Church Service, which means it must have been about 9 p.m., seven of us went to the little house of Mrs Levis and, after singing some hymns, we knelt in prayer, and Ormie Welply led off and, solemnly, each one of us prayed in turn, as it was considered a disgrace for anyone to miss. Then Ormie began a second round. Unfortunate Mrs Levis, on her knees all the time, joined in now and

again with "Amen" or "Praise the Lord" during the first round. But wh
the second round started she probably thought this was a bit too mu
to suffer so she heeled over, and gave a stifled groan to suggest she ha
fainted. We took the hint and departed, and I have no recollection of ev
going there again.

It was during this period that I first came into personal contact wit
death. My mother's brother, William J. Wolfe, (after whom I wa
named), suffered from creeping paralysis, and I never saw him save in
bath chair, very grey in the face, and his clothes powdered with flour an
meal, as he insisted on being wheeled daily to his grocery shop in Brid
Street by his man Mick Walsh. In 1894 he died, and I remember tha
morning being awakened at dawn by a knock at the door of the bedroo
occupied by my parents and myself, and a voice calling to my mother t
get up at once and go to her brother who was dying. She was very upse
as she was very fond of that brother. He died the same day.

In those days our fuel was turf. My father used to buy large ricks o
turf annually, which were stored in a shed behind our house. But, grad
ually, coal ousted turf, and held its premier position for half a centur
and it took two world wars to bring back turf into common use.

Our delicacies were very different then to what we have now. Fo
instance, bananas and tomatoes had not arrived, nor tinned food. On th
other hand, we used to enjoy dried fruits, called locusts, which were sol
in many shops, and no doubt they were the locusts on which John th
Baptist lived in the wilderness. A sweet we greatly liked was "Salmo
Trout". It was exhibited in shop windows in the form of a large fish, an
it was sold in cuts off the fish to customers. My recollection is that it co
tained much marzipan.

Another dish we were very fond of was boiled maize, ground fin
served with milk and sugar like porridge, which we called Indian meal
In fact, we used to eat this meal uncooked but heavily mixed with brow
sugar. We used to eat three kinds of seaweed, viz. "myvawn", brown i
colour, which we chewed when dried hard; "slokawn" which had to b
boiled for hours, and was fine and green like grass, and was eaten wi
cream and pepper and salt; and, of course, "carrigeen" which was, an
still is, cooked in milk and served as a dessert.

During my father's lifetime he used to get a pig killed in his backyar
once a year near Christmas, and the entrails were used for sausages
while the flesh was salted, and either eaten in the house or sold in th

shop. The bladders were blown up and presented to my brother and myself for footballs. The whole family used to assist in the sausage making, and we thoroughly enjoyed the eating of them.

The actual killing had a horrible fascination for me and, in my imagination, I can still hear the smack of the back of a hatchet on the pig's head, whereby the butcher made the animal insensible before he cut its throat. A woman from the lanes squatted nearby, and caught the blood in her bucket, and kept stirring it meantime with her bare hand and arm. What she did with the blood I do not know, but I imagine she mixed it with oatmeal and made it into "drisheens" or white puddings for consumption in her household, or for sale, as some folk consider drisheens a delicacy.

On one occasion the pig made a dash for liberty, and the look in its eyes as it was brought back to be slaughtered suggested that it knew well what was coming and was in deadly fear. On another occasion I saw a chicken, whose neck had been almost cut through with a knife, and laid aside preparatory to being plucked, get up and walk around the yard with its head almost trailing on the ground. These scenes recurred to me many times as I grew older, and I became convinced that it was not right to kill any animal, or bird, or fish, for food. I also read many books, and found out such food was not necessary for mankind, so I decided to become a vegetarian for humanitarian reasons. I eventually started my new diet in 1905 against the advice of all the family, and of Dr O'Meara, [distinguished Skibbereen doctor], who warned me I would become a crank! To the surprise of my friends, I put on weight.

Getting started in life

Our father, at the age of 57, died at 72 Bridge Street, on 1st March 1899, after being ill for less than 24 hours. At the present time he would probably be certified to have died from heart failure following an acute appendix, but at that time appendicitis, and the operation therefor, were unknown, and the disease was then called "obstruction", or more vulgarly "twist in the gut." His death meant the closing down of his business and the realisation of his assets to pay his creditors who in the result received only 3s. 4d. in the £, which, however, they agreed to accept without legal proceedings. He was buried in Aughadown and I was at the funeral. On my own I peeped into the room where he was laid

out. He wore a full beard so seemed to be only asleep even though h
died in agony.

This was the second corpse I had then seen. The first was some tim
before, at Russagh Mill, when a number of us boys were permitted
walk into the mill and look at the body of Driscoll, who had been kill
in a fight with the "Darling Man", (Collins). Driscoll's head had been ba
tered with a stone so the head was covered with a cloth but, lookin
back, it seems absurd to have allowed youngsters to have viewed th
body. I can still mentally see the corpse laid out on a board and dress
in dark trousers and white shirt.

A sale of our leasehold interest in the business premises was attem
ed and failed so the lease was surrendered to Wood Wolfe, [cousin, son
William John Wolfe, and brother of Jasper], the landlord, and our fam
ly moved to Victoria Terrace, which we rented. Up to that time t
Ladies School, for some years, had been housed in Townshend Stree
but we then converted the coach house and stable at the rear of Victo
Terrace into two school rooms and gave up the Townshend Street hou
The school was our sole means of support but it flourished and kept u
in comfort, though we had to watch every penny to balance our budg
our father's debts having created an indelible fear of suffering the sam
fate.

Soon after moving, Jasper Wolfe suggested to sister Daisy that
should join his solicitor's office as his apprentice, without fee, [normal
paid by the apprentice], and she agreed and, as I generally did what
was told, I agreed, though with regret for some other more spectacu
career. I then studied for the Law Society Preliminary and Intermedia
Exams. In May 1901 I was sent by train to Dublin, alone, to take t
exams, complete with new clothes and shoes and bowler hat, at a cost
15s. 9d. return for a young person's ticket. It was my first journe
beyond Cork, and my first trip of any kind alone, so I felt very nervou
especially after all the warnings given me by my mother of the dange
to be met in a big city!

I stayed with May Haskins, [cousin, younger sister of Jasper an
Willy Wood Wolfe], in her husband's manse in Heytesbury Street. S
showed me much of the city on foot, including Patrick Street at midnig
on Saturday when the street was crowded with shoppers of the poor
class buying food from shops, or street barrows, or stalls. I enjoyed th
sights, but not the awful blisters on my feet from my new shoes and th

unaccustomed pavements.

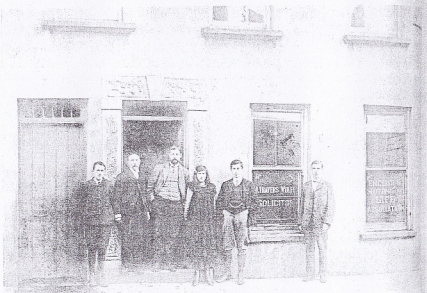
On the day of the examination May Haskins walked me to the Four Courts, and told me to walk back alone. After the examination, I turned in the wrong direction, and in a short time found myself in a courtyard of indescribable squalor, the worst I have ever seen, with tall houses all around, and dirty children, and even dirtier grown ups, playing or squatting around. Memories of what I had heard from my mother overwhelmed me, and I legged it back to the Four Courts and comparative safety. I was very happy when I eventually arrived back in Heytesbury Street.

I got second place in the exam, and on 10th July 1901 signed my indenture of apprenticeship. In much trepidation, I walked to work in the office, then in North Street. I was always very shy and afraid of the unknown, so I was charmed to meet Jasper coming out of his hall door across the street. He was never punctual in going to the office, so I give him credit for kindness in watching to meet me that morning. I was given a desk in the public office, on the ground floor, with the two younger clerks. At that time typewriters had not reached Skibbereen and all the copying was done by hand. I must have been a boon to the junior clerks as I copied everything I was handed and, like Oliver Twist, I asked for more. When I arrived the office had on hand the defence of a big High Court action relating to the title of land, in which three counsel were to be briefed, and accordingly three copies had to be made of all deeds, which were numerous and of the long, old fashioned type. My earliest impressions, after long hours of copying, were that I could never hope to draw such deeds. I did not then realise that this continual copying was driving legal phraseology into me with the result that, eventually, conveyancing became my pet branch of legal work.

After three years of my apprenticeship I took charge of the whole office. From 1904 onwards the business was rapidly increasing, and also my hours of work. Frequently, some of the clerks and myself worked till after midnight and, after the arrival of the typewriter, many was the day when, from morning till night, I worked at it, typing documents read out to me by one of the clerks, as I was quicker and neater on the machine than they were.

On 4th March 1905 there was a serious fire in the lower office in North Street, and that room was entirely gutted, but luckily it was put out before it reached the upper floor where most of the important papers

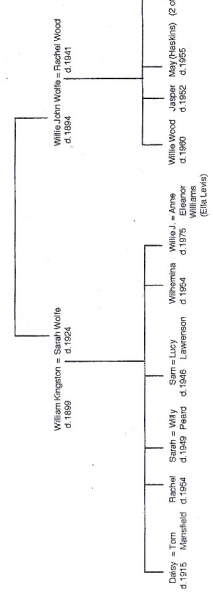
The Kingston family, 1904. Standing, from left, Willie, Sarah, Daisy a
Wilhemina. Seated, from left, Sam, Sarah Anne and Rachel.



Willie Kingston, second from right, outside the offices of Jasper Travers Wolf
Co., at North Street, Skibbereen.

Willie Kingston, aged about seven.

The Kingston Family, and their cousins, the Wolfes



were kept. The fire frightened Jasper so much that he immediately built a new office in Market Street, with a strong room, and we moved in there on 24th January 1906. The junior clerks and myself did most of the moving, including the shifting of a heavy safe which I wheeled through the town on a truck as the clerks considered it beneath their dignity to do so!

In spite of much hard work I look back on my apprenticeship days with pleasure. Only one unpleasant incident remains with me, and that was when the senior clerk, Whittaker, a married man from Dublin with a large family, came to the office one day, during Jasper's absence, in such a drunken state that he was almost, if not entirely, in the D.T.s, and he put the fear of God in all of us. He was sacked soon after, but before he left town he gave Jasper a lot of trouble and on one occasion he had to throw Whittaker physically out of the door.

In 1906 I stayed in Dublin for over three months, studying hard for my Final Law Exam, held in the Four Courts on 21st and 22nd May 1906. It was made clear to me by Jasper, and my people, that I was expected to do well, and I did so, as I obtained first place with a Gold Medal, and I was also awarded the Findlater scholarship as the best man of my year, [Jasper Wolfe, and his younger brother Jackson, had both, in their years, come first in these all Ireland exams]. From all this I collected £63.3.0., which was a welcome addition to the family purse. While in Dublin, Jasper wrote to me offering me the post of assistant solicitor in his office, at a salary of £120 per year. I gladly accepted as I was most anxious to stay in Skibbereen. I remained assistant solicitor until 1921 when I went to South Africa.

The Boer War started and finished during the period of which I am writing, and it stirred up in us youths enormous interest and enthusiasm. At that time tie pins and brooches were sold with photos of the British generals attached, and we bought crowds of these and decorated the lapels of our coats with them. Puttee leggings with continuous straps, and riding breeches, as worn by the British yeomanry, became a popular costume, and even looped hats were worn by some young men. Bar the hat, I fell for the costume, and thus attired travelled to lectures in Dublin. I felt very smart, but got a shock when a man sitting beside me in the train asked me questions about the stables, which strongly suggested he took me to be a stable boy! The costume was left behind thereafter while in Dublin.