

Dr. Richard Helsham*

"The Most Eminent Physician of this City and Kingdom" (Dean Swift)

Brocard M. Mansfield, O.D.C.

Pue's Occurrences for 1738 carried the two following items of information :

- (1) "Aug. 5-8. Dr. Helsham is so well recovered that he is expected in Town the latter end of this week".
- (2) "Aug. 22-26. Yesterday (25 Friday) died Dr. Helsham, a very eminent physician and professor of Natural Philosophy in our University".

LEGGETSRATH

Richard Helsham grew up within the Liberties of Kilkenny at Leggetsrath Castle, which his father (Joshua) had inherited along with 875 adjoining acres (plantation measure), all in the parish of St. John Without, from his father, Captain Arthur Helsham, who had arrived in Ireland 1650 with the Parliamentary army. Helsham links with this area, classified in Petty's Down Survey of 1657 as "good Arable Pasture and Meadowe with some Timber Trees and underwood," continued for well over two and a half centuries, ending finally as late as the early nineteen-hundreds with the sale by an absentee Helsham of a farm, the earliest recorded lease of which (to the same family) had been dated October 16, 1761.¹

STIRRING TIMES AT KILKENNY

Richard's boyhood years at Leggetsrath, during which Kilkenny hosted in succession two rival monarchs, must have been quite exciting for a youngster whose father was one of the city's aldermen. It was on March 22 1689 that King James II arrived en route to Dublin from Clonmel, Lismore, Cork, Kinsale, his reception everywhere warm. On such an auspicious occasion one might expect a certain measure of hyperbole, as when the Recorder in his address referred to "the trusty city of Kilkenny styled Little Rome", while the "Great Monarch best of Princes" was respectfully bidden "as you are master of our hearts, command our willingness".² For a change Irish Catholics were now at long last on top of the world, having over the previous few years been replacing Protestants in key positions. With James's actual arrival even well-established families, already for over a generation securely settled on once forfeited properties, must have been feeling decidedly uncomfortable, perhaps even threatened. More than 1,800 persons were indeed shortly afterwards attainted of high treason as supporters of the Prince of Orange in a Parliament that convened May 7 at Dublin.³ Though Joshua Helsham's father (Captain Arthur) had actually come in with the Roundheads, his grandfather (Sir John Helsham) and the family across Channel had been staunchly royalist and Cavalier. Captain Arthur's elder brother, John, having gone into exile with Charles II, while a (presumably) younger brother, Richard, laid down his life for James II 1685 at Sedgemore in Monmouth's rebellion.¹ It will come then as no surprise to learn that timely royal protection in ample form was extended

* See also *Dictionary of National Biography*.

to Alderman Joshua Helsham at Kilkenny.⁴ After the Boyne of course the tables were turned,⁵ Protestants found themselves once again in the ascendancy, and very much determined to remain there, as subsequent legislation amply proved. Joshua for his part doesn't seem to have been disadvantaged by favours enjoyed under the previous regime, and quickly became part of the Williamite establishment. In any case, he was not personally one of the dispossessed Irish, and so found it possible evidently to adjust to the changed circumstances. Next we find him taking command of a Company of one hundred Militia-men in the parishes of St. Patrick and St. Canice.¹ After all, the 2nd Duke of Ormonde, who twenty five years later was to be attained by the English Parliament as actively favouring a Stuart versus Hanoverian succession, had July 19 and again August 2 entertained the victor (William) splendidly at Kilkenny Castle.⁶ Joshua subsequently served as Commissioner of Array, and was elected Mayor for two successive terms, 1692 and 1693.

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

In 1698, three or four years before his father's death, young Richard proceeded from Kilkenny College to Dublin University, and here Burtchaell and Sadleir summarize the story in their *Alumni Dublinenses*: "Helsham, Richard, Pen. (Dr. Edw. Hinton, Kilkenny), June 18 1698, aged 15; s. of Joshua Generosus; C. Kilkenny. Sch. 1700. B.A. Vern 1702. Fellow 1704. M.A. Vern. 1705. M.B. 1710. M.D. 1713. Donegal lecturer 1723. Professor of Natural Philosophy 1724. Regius Professor of Physic 1733. (Incorporated M.D. at Cambridge 1714; died Aug. 1738) See D.N.B., Venn, and Allibone". Steady progress, unremitting labour, surely. *Finis coronat opus*.

AN OUTSTANDING MEDICAL CAREER⁷

This is quite obvious from the following pertinent references in chapter five of *The History of the Medical Teaching in Trinity College and of the School of Physic in Ireland*:—

16 August 1711. Foundation of the School. Anatomy House ... the laboratory was opened ye Provost and fellows and many others being present, and several publick exercises were performed by ye several persons following: Sr. Thompson spoke a copy of verses. Dr. Helsham lectured in Natural Philosophy ... Of the other lecturers on this occasion, Helsham and Molyneux were perhaps the most distinguished.

On the 18 October 1710 Helsham was admitted a candidate and Fellow of the King's and Queen's College of Physicians. On the 26th of January 1722/3 he was chosen Mathematic Lecturer in place of Dr. Claud Gilbert, on the foundation of Lord Donegal, and on the 21 April 1724 he was chosen the first Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, a Chair then founded in accordance with the Will of Erasmus Smith, though he had lectured on the subject since the opening of the School in 1711.

The President and Fellows of the College of Physicians recognised the work of Helsham in this Chair of Natural and Experimental Philosophy ... by resolving April 13, 1724 'that Dr. Helsham has deserved a gratuity from ye College of Physicians for his course of experimental philosophy'. On October 30 'the Treasure was ordered to pay Mr Cope, the goldsmith, the sum of 23 pounds for ye piece of plate by the College to Dr. Helsham.

Helsham was co-opted a Senior Fello of Trinity College on the 6th November 1714. and he resigned on 16th January 1729/30, being elected



Professor of Physic in the room of Sir Thomas Molyneux 10 November 1733.

In the College of Physicians he was elected President 1716 and again in 1725, being made Honorary Fellow on St. Luke's Day 1735.

Helsham's lectures in natural philosophy were published in 1739 by his friend and pupil Bryan Robinson, being the first scientific work printed at the University Press. Many subsequent editions of this book were published, and it continued to be used as a text-book in the University for nearly a hundred years. As late as the year 1822 select parts of the work were issued by the University Press for the use of students in the College.

FREEMAN OF DUBLIN

Richard Helsham also interested himself actively in civic affairs, his services in this sphere meriting complimentary recognition, as two entries from the Dublin Assembly Rolls testify :- "1735, July 18. Fourth Friday after the 24th June. . . (3). Certain of the commons, setting forth that the committee for better supplying the city with pipe water have made their report on the 10th day of July, 1735, instant, which report is as followeth. 'We, the committe for better supplying the city with water for the use of the inhabitants thereof, have pursuant to order of assembly, made further progress in the same and consulted with doctor Helsham and doctor Robinson on the schemes mentioned in our last report which schemes being laid before them, they took some time to consider the same and concluded in opinion, that further experiments be made in the said matter referred to us, before the city can safely come to a determined resolution. Which we submit to your honours this 10th day of July, 1735.'" "1737, August 29 (2). Certain of the commons, setting forth that doctor Richard Helsham, has on all occasions shewn his readiness to assist this city with respect to the being better supplied with pipe water, and therefore prayed to have him presented with his freedom in a silver box: whereupon it was ordered that doctor Richard Helsham be presented with the freedom of this city in a silver box, the value thereof not to exceed five pounds".⁸

DELVILLE AND ITS COTERIE OF THE POLITE

Helsham's friendship with Dr. Patrick Delany, Chancellor of St. Patrick's Cathedral, was a well-known fact of Dublin life in the early seventeenth-hundreds. Both of them originally jointly owned that celebrated house in Glasnevin where celebrities and wits regularly convened. First named Hel-Del-Ville from the initial syllables of their surnames,⁹ prudence later dictated the dropping of Hel from the designation! Here "the gardens and walks were laid out by Doctor Delany in concert with the celebrated Doctor Helsham".¹⁰ One wonders if any of these arrangements still remain? In this idyllic setting the polite society of Dublin was accustomed to meet, eat, and hold converse, among them Swift, Stella, Dr. Sheridan, and Mrs Pendarves afterwards Dr. Delany's wife.⁹ Delville House no longer stands, the little estate having been purchased in comparatively recent times by the Bon Secours Sisters as a site for their hospital, which was opened on Candlemas Day 1952. There the Superioress (Sr. Mary) courteously showed me one much-admired Delville relic, an ornate mantel of variegated marble, which is appropriately sited in the Library.

Outstanding among Delany's and Helsham's Delville guests was undoubtedly Dean Swift. "After Swift returned to Dublin as Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Helsham seems to have acted as his physician. In a

letter to Pope Feb. 13, 1728/29, Swift describes Dr. Helsham as 'an ingenious good-humoured Physician, a fine gentleman, an excellent scholar, easy in his fortunes, kind to everybody, hath abundance of friends, entertains them liberally, they pass an evening with him at cards, with plenty of good meat and wine, eight or a dozen together; he loves them all and they him; he offends no Body, is easy with every Body ----- is not this the true happy man?' In a further letter Swift describes him 'as the most eminent Physician of this city and Kingdom' ".⁹

Mrs Pendarves, later (1743) to become Mrs Delany and mistress of Delville, was a rich upper-class Cornish widow who came over to Ireland on a prolonged visit (1731-33), diarist also as well as artist and noted society hostess. Through her influence in government circles Dr. Delany¹¹ became Dean of Down, a dignity that entailed only annual absences from Delville. Mary Delany thoroughly enjoyed these north-bound journeys with opportunities thereby afforded for viewing the Irish countryside, visiting friends en route and — crowning pleasure for her — entertaining parishioners and notabilities at Downpatrick.¹² It was in a letter to her sister from Dublin Jan. 24, 1733 that the then Mrs Pendarves mentioned having met Dr. Helsham at Delville, describing him as a "very ingenious entertaining man".

STEEVENS' HOSPITAL

Dr. Helsham's involvement here right from the beginning is recorded by T. Percy C. Kirkpatrick.¹³ While negotiations were being conducted with a view to this hospital's foundation, Richard Helsham's name appeared among the trustees appointed July 11, 1717 by Madame Steevens to purchase a site, etc. He was also one of the Governors mentioned in the Charter. Always a good friend, on several occasions acting as visiting physician to the hospital, subscribing liberally to its funds, Richard's final benefaction was a bequest of £300.

MARRIAGE

This came only in 1730, and to a banker's widow, Jane Putland,¹⁴ who already had a son and daughter (John and Bridget Putland). Richard then resigned his Trinity College Fellowship. They seem to have resided in Jervis Street, which was still Jane's address when she made her Will (1761) "in perfect health".¹⁵ Richard and Jane subsequently in 1732 and 1733, conjointly leased three properties (one to Sir William Fownes, Bart, and Alderman) in the Dame Street area.¹⁶

THE MAN OF PROPERTY

As early as 1715 a lease was recorded at the Registry of Deeds from "Dr. Richard Helsham and Rev. Patrick Delany, both Fellows of Trinity College, Dublin" of a garden adjoining their Glasnevin property to Ruper Barber, Woollen Draper. This was followed in 1719 by a lease of some more adjacent ground to the same R. Barber. An entry dated Dec. 12, 1726 shows the eminent Natural Philosophy Professor in quite a new role, as lessee from the Hon. Richard Stewart of a "parcel of ground on Jervis Quay *als* Batchelor's Walk in the suburbs of the city of Dublin together with a Dwelling House erected thereon wherein Mr John Knightly dwelt at £52.6.0 per annum in Trust for and to the only use of the Body or company formed in partnership for making Glass Bottles and other Glass Ware in the city of Dublin know and distinguished by the name of Richard Helsham and

Company". Some years after his marriage Dr. Helsham launched himself (July 1735) on the Kilkenny 'market',¹⁶ first renting "137 acres plantation measure during the remaining term of a lease already taken by James Walsh and Mary Walsh *als* Deane his wife and Constance Deane, spinster, of the town and lands of Ballyraghtan and part of Dunmore within the Park of Dunmore". Three years afterwards in April 1738 he paid £300 for Constance Deane's interest in Ormond's Mills with 7 acres (a city property) recently leased by the Earl of Arran. An entry of the same date (April 11, 1738) at the Registry of Deeds — *Deane to Helsham* — records the taking of a lease by Dr. Helsham of certain "houses and parks belonging to the Rev. Dean situate without St. Patrick's Gate within the Liberties of Kilkenny", already demised by Dean Mossum of St. Canice's Cathedral to Constance Deane, this transaction being followed by a lease on property belonging to a city gentleman called Weldon. Could this much-propertied spinster, Constance Deane, have been related to Richard's mother, Alice Deane?

Most significant and indeed enduring of all the Professor's ventures was surely his £800 purchase in March 1737 — again from Constance Deane — of those "forty one acres more or less (plantation measure) of profitable land by Fennell Stream in Blanchfieldsland with Messuages, Houses, Buildings, Watercourses, Common Woods, Underwoods", all adjoining existing ancestral Helsham property in Leggetsrath and Blanchfieldslands.¹⁶ This acquisition, later called Hebron, continued in family ownership until 1854, when it was sold to Michael Murphy by Major Arthur Helsham, great-great nephew of Dr. Richard.¹⁷

FINAL DISPOSITIONS

One can gather from *Pue's Occurences* (already quoted) that Dr. Helsham may have been ailing for some time. His will was dated June 29, 1737,¹⁵ well over a year before he died. In it, brother Arthur and wife Jane were appointed executors, with Arthur as residuary legatee. Bequeathed to Jane, in addition to a house in Queen-street (hers before marriage) were "two-thirds of plate, chariot and horses, books on desk or bookcase in closet off the bedchamber". Mention was made of niece Mary Ford; niece Susanna Frances; nephews John, William and Richard Drury; nieces Alice, Sarah and Elizabeth Drury. Also sister Elizabeth Bambrick. A codicil added well over a year later (Aug. 16, 1738), within a week or ten days prior to death, "bequeathes to William, son of Roger Ford, as many of his Greek and Latin Books as shall amount in value to £50, according to the rates set down in catalogue of his books; the father to make choice and deliver to son when he becomes a B.A. Bequeathed to John Putland his new sword, inlaid, received lately from London. To Bridget Putland, wife's daughter, a small signet ring he received from the late Rev. Thomas Fox of Tullow. Leaves his brother's servants £10 if he die at Leggetsrath". Was Richard even at this eleventh hour contemplating a return to Kilkenny and his boyhood home?

END OF A BUSY USEFUL LIFE

In its (August) note on Dr. Helsham's final departure from Dublin's medical scene, the 1738 *Gentleman's Magazine*¹⁸ included a revealing item of information on this good doctor's last service to the profession of which he had always been such an honour. Richard's taking of quicksilver as a remedy for his disorder having proved ineffectual. "He desired that his body might be opened for the benefit of mankind, which being done . . ." the cause of his death was established.

Helsham's Will of June 29, 1737 concluded: "and thus having disposed of

my worldly affairs, I earnestly recommend my soul to the great God who gave it me, and my body I give to the earth from whence it came; as to my funeral, it is my will that my corpse be carried to the place of burial by the light of one Taper only at the dead of night, without hearse or pomp, attended by my domestics only”.

Burial took place at nearby St. Mary's Churchyard. Richard's will was proved in the Prerogative Court on August 28 1738 by his brother Arthur, who as residuary legatee must have benefitted considerably.¹⁵ This Arthur,¹⁹ (twice Mayor of Kilkenny and father of the Recorder) died in 1749, while the other executor, Jane Helsham, survived her husband by over thirty years until her death in September 1769.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

National Library of Ireland.
Public Record Office of Ireland.
Registry of Deeds.
Dr. Steevens' Hospital.

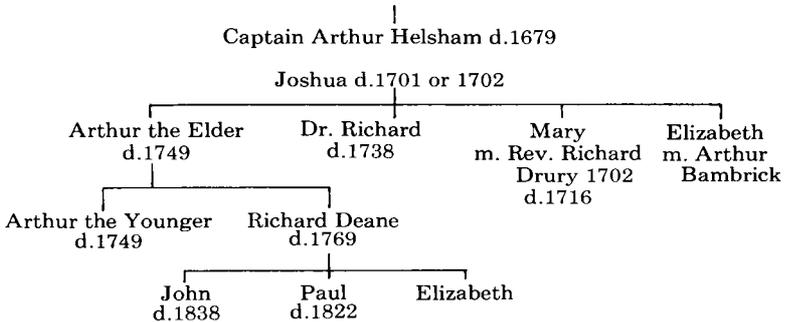
SOURCES AND REFERENCES

1. *O.K.R.* 1982. "The Helshams of Kilkenny".
2. *Ormonde MSS.* N.S. 8, p.389.
3. *History of Ireland.* E. A. D'Alton. Vol. 4, 406. "it is to the credit of James that he disapproved of the Irish Act".
4. By the Duke of Tyrconnell (Viceroy). "Joshua Helsham of the city of Kilkenny, alderman, is hereby received into his Majesties protection, together with his houses, stocke and all other his goods and chattles, to him belonging; and all his Majesties civil and military officers and souldiers, and all other persons whatsoever, are heerby allsoe required not onely to forbear the troubling or mollesting the said Joshua Helsham or his concernes but to be ayding and assisting to him for the preservation thereof, and we are pleased to allow him the said Joshua Helsham one gunn and one case of pistolls for deffence of his person and his concern. Dated at Kilkenny the 18th day of April 1689. 'Tyrconnell' " *Ormonde MSS.* Vol. 1, p.60.
5. In Dublin, for instance, "There was very great joy, and sorrow and sadness were gone away, when we crept out of our houses and found ourselves as it were in a new world". *Orm. MSS.* N.S. 8. "A Diary of Events in Ireland 1685-1690".
6. *The Complete Peerage.* Attainted at Westminster Aug. 20, 1715. Was not attainted by the Irish Parliament, but the regalities in Co. Tipperary of "James Butler lately called or known by the name of James, Duke of Ormond" were extinguished by an Irish Act of June 29, 1716, and his estate vested in the Crown. Swift's appointment (1713) as Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral was due to the Duke's interest.
7. Kirkpatrick, T. Percy C. Dublin. Hanna and Neale, 1912.
8. *Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin.* R. M. Gilbert. Vol. VIII, pp.182, 262.
9. Kirkpatrick. *The History of the Medical Teaching,* etc. c.5.
10. *History of the County of Dublin.* John D'Alton. Hodges and Smith. Dublin 1838.
11. Dr. Delany was in Swift's opinion "the most eminent preacher we have". (Letter to Alderman Barber, March 1738).
12. Dr. Delany's first wife, Margaret Tennison, another rich widow whom he had married 1732, died December 1741. After her husband's death

at the age of 83 in May 1768, Mary Granville Delany returned to England, where she led a useful, interesting life, moving in the highest circles, until after the death of a dear friend, the Dowager Duchess of Portland, at Bulstrode near Gerrards Cross in Buckinghamshire, the King offered her a little house at Windsor, to which she moved September 1785. George III himself was actually there to welcome her, and for the remaining three years of her life Mrs Delany was much cultivated and visited in St. Alban's Street by the King and Queen Charlotte. *Mrs. Delany her life and her flowers*. Ruth Hayden. British Museum Publications, 1980.

13. *The History of Dr. Steevens' Hospital 1720-1920*. University Press. Dublin, 1924. Mr D. S. Hope, Secretary Manager of the Hospital showed me the Helsham mezzotint (by Beard after Jervas).
14. Prerogative Grant 1730. "Licence was granted to solemnise matrimony between Richard Helsham of the Parish of St. Mary, Dublin, Medicinae Doctorem and Jane Putland ejusdem Parish of St. Mary. Directed to the Vicar or Curate of the Parish of St. Mary. D. 16 Dec. 1730". Public Record Office of Ireland.
15. Testamentary Records. *Irish Genealogist*. Vol. I. No. II. April 1942.
16. Registry of Deeds.
17. O.K.R. 1980. "Hebron". Major Arthur was John Helsham's eldest son.
18. 1738. Vol. VIII. p.491.
19. Known as Arthur the Elder to distinguish him from his son Arthur the Younger (Recorder of Kilkenny) and grandson Arthur the Youngest. O.K.R. 1982.

**SOME ADDITIONS (including a correction) TO THE FAMILY TREE
O.K.R. 1982.**



The following direct Helsham descendants have come to light since publication of O.K.R. 1982.

1. Two priest brothers in California — Monsignor Robert and Fr. Edmund Langton Hayburn, the latter a contributor to the current No., who descended from Dr. Richard's sister Mary (later Mrs Duffy) of Leggetsrath.
2. Arthur Bousfield of Ontario, a descendant of Dr. Richard's great-great niece, Mary Helsham of Hebron (John's daughter), who married 1810

- her cousin, Captain William Oliver Wheeler of Lyrath and The Rocks.
3. Arthur Richard Power (1891-1984). Dublin and formerly of Bellevue House, Slieverue, Co. Kilkenny, artist, writer, poet, R.H.A. exhibitor, World War I veteran, descended from a sister of the above Mary Helsham, Anne, wife of Major Richard Cane, whose only child Mary Jane Cane, wedded 1838 (she died 1893) Nicholasa Alfred Power of Bellevue
 4. Irish novelist Charles Lever (1806-1872) was a grandson of Elizabeth *née* Helsham Candler, sister to John and Paul (Ven. Archdeacon) at Hebron, and therefore a great-great-great nephew of Dr. Richard Helsham.

"Although the Helsham's have vanished from Kilkenny and also from England, they are not extinct. There are several Helshams living in Australia today and one of them is a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New South Wales. There are also various people descended from the female lines. Warren Helsham Radford who lives in California, a prominent architect, is one example". (from letter of Arthur Bousfield). Arthur also drew my attention to his relative, the last English male Helsham, a distinguished and erudite Jesuit — Rev. Edward Arthur Helsham, S.J., who in addition to other posts held in the Society, had been Rector of Beaumont and Heythrop Colleges as well as Provincial Superior before his death in 1954. Clerical links are obvious in this family down all the years from Dr. Richard Helsham, whose mother Alicia was a daughter of the Rev. Robert Deane, to Arthur Bousfield himself (now a member of K.A.S.) a grandson of the Rev. George Jacob and Josephine *née* Helsham Bousfield of Ontario, Canada.

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