

Dr. Samuel Crumpe

by Michael Conway



In January 27th 1796, Ireland suffered a tragic loss. That year, one of her most talented sons, Samuel Crumpe MD died at the age of 29 from an illness contracted while tending one of his patients.

Few people have a lasting impression by such a young age, but Crumpe had already displayed great ability and had shown promise of making a major contribution to Ireland, medically, socially and politically.

Samuel Crumpe was born on September 15th 1766. Maurice Lenihan, the historian, states that he was born in Rathkeale, where his father kept a small shop. It is probable that he was related to the Crumpe family of Kerry, since his medical thesis is dedicated to Richard Townsend Herbert of Cahirane, an estate on the edge of Killarney. The Crumps of Kerry were originally an English family and had settled in Meath and Castleknock, Co. Dublin.

After the Battle of the Boyne, members of the family were outlawed for their adherence to James the Second and the family lands at Danestown, Castleknock were sold in the sales at Chichester House. Some members of the family claimed to be innocent incumbrances but had their claims rejected. These settled in Kerry. A number of years later, some of their descendants joined the medical profession. Francis Crumpe, who obtained lands in Ballydruber, had a son William John Crumpe MD. John's son, Francis Crumpe MD, was one of the most eminent and respected physicians and surgeons in the south of Ireland for fifty years. He was attached to the County Kerry Infirmary until 1872. (His niece was married to George Massey, younger son of George Massey, Glenville Co. Limerick). It is probable, that the saying in the Kerry Gaeltacht, 'Ta se comh maith le Doctuir Crumpe' ('He is as good as Dr. Crumpe') refers to Francis Crumpe MD.

Samuel Crumpe was married to Susan Ingram, second daughter of the Rev. Jaques Ingram, who was one of the vicars choral in Limerick in 1769. The marriage took place in 1792 at Kilfintane (Kilfinane or Kilfintinan?), and the bride was described as an accomplished lady with a large fortune. One of their two known children, Daniel George Washington Crumpe, was born on 26th April 1794 and died on 31st July in the same year; their daughter was still alive in 1826.

Dr. Crumpe set up practice in Limerick about 1788 when he was 22 years of age. He was a very active young physician, and spent much of his time tending to the poor in a manner similar to Dr. Robert Frith, who was to practise in the same parts of the old city fifty years later. He lived at 6 Arthur's Quay, and also owned a garden in Corbally, "with a five-foot wall", a new slate house, a cow-house and stable adjoining".

Crumpe was described at the time as a kindhearted man of eminent talents, profound judgement, extensive knowledge, integrity, benevolence and suavity of manners. He was conversant in English, Irish, Latin and French. He was a member of the Royal Irish Academy, elected on June 22nd 1793, when the Academy was eight years old.

He is remembered mainly for his literary work. He wrote a thesis for the MD degree in Edinburgh. This is entitled **De Vitiis quibus Humores corrumpi dicuntur,**

eorumque Remediis and was submitted on June 24th 1788. The work was a discourse on disorders which affected the body fluids and their remedies. He pointed out that scurvy was not caused by a disease of the blood. He noted that scurvy was associated with intense cold, damp, overwork, depression and, above all, food with little nutritional value. He also pointed out that all that was needed to cure it was a good diet. He was a firm believer in the importance of fresh air and wholesome food.

Although it is recorded that he had little leisure time, Crumpe wrote extensively while in Limerick. In 1793, he published an article on the **Nature and Properties of Opium**. Robert Herbert, in his short account of Crumpe's life claims that it "gained him no small celebrity". This treatise was translated into German and certainly brought him wide recognition. (The article was quoted as recently as 1981 in a book by Berridge and Edwards).

Crumpe contended that opium had a stimulant effect. Around the end of the eighteenth century quite a controversy raged as to whether the drug was a narcotic or a stimulant. He disagreed with the compromise position that the drug could be both stimulant and sedative. He wrote another medical article on the 'History of a case in which very uncommon worms were discharged from the stomach, with observations thereon'. This was read to the Royal Irish Academy in 1794. It described the case of a woman whom Crumpe had treated in Limerick in 1788. When he first saw the patient, she was complaining of cough, fever and profuse sweating. Later in the course of the illness, she had substernal pain and haemoptysis. All the while her pulse remained normal. An initial diagnosis of 'phthisis pulmonalis' was subsequently revised when a year later she threw up worms. He prescribed 'Stanni pulverati drachmam Salis Martis granum fiant pulvres tales octo & fumat unum quarter de die repetatur infusum corticis'.

This treatment cured the woman. The worm with which she was infested had a head and twelve joints. There were legs on the first three joints. Dr. Crumpe assumed that they were the larvae of some insect and that they had migrated from the stomach to the lungs. Specimens of the worms were preserved in wine in the Royal Irish Academy for several years after.

Crumpe is best remembered for his socio-economic writings, contained in an essay on **The Best Means of Providing Employment for the People**. This work won for Crumpe the £50 prize awarded on April 27th 1793 by the Royal Irish Academy. The article was to complement an essay on the **Best System of Education** which Dr. S. Dickinson had written in 1791, but these had not been deemed satisfactory and the prize was readvertised in June 1792. Crumpe's essay was too voluminous to be inserted in the proceedings of the academy and so it was published separately. (The volumes at present available are leather bound, with the stamp of the Limerick Institution 1809 on the cover).

In the article Crumpe made some useful and, at the time, revolutionary suggestions. He proposed that agriculture should be the most important source of labour and employment, with commerce and manufacture subservient to it. He outlined the great changes in the Netherlands due to the development of agriculture. He felt that Ireland's climate, her fertile soil, her insular posi-