was born towards the end of the 19th century in the small town of Birr in the centre of Ireland, with the Bog of Allen as its near neighbour, the blue Kinnity mountains in the offing and, about ten miles away, the lovely river Shannon. The town, well planned and laid out with its squares and the malle, had a weekly market day and frequent fairs and was the shopping centre for the farmers from the surrounding country-side. There were still some large landowners in their big houses in the neighbourhood and overlooking the town was Birr Castle, the residence of the Earl of Rosse. Birr Castle had been, in former days, the chief seat of the O'Carrolls, but in the reign of James I the castle and its appendages were assigned to Lawrence Parsons, brother of Sir William Parsons, Surveyor-General. Parsons is the Rosse family name. As children we were given right of entry to the castle grounds, the demesne with its fine trees, its gardens and the river and, best of all, the famous telescope.

The telescope was erected in 1845 near the castle between two high walls by the 3rd Earl of Rosse. The 6-foot reflector had a focal length of 54 feet and the tube was 7 feet in diameter; five people could fit easily in this huge tube. The telescope contributed considerably to astronomical science, the 3rd Earl discovered the Spiral Nebulae, while the 4th Earl succeeded in measuring the heat of the moon. Nearby was a small observatory where the data was collected on the moon and various nebulae. On the death of the 4th Earl the telescope was dismantled, the reflector was removed and is now housed in the South Kensington Museum.

We were fortunate to have in our small town, one of the few 'Model' schools of Ireland, and, at the back, quite large playgrounds; the boys' playground was separate from the girls'; there was complete segregation of the sexes. At the time when we were at the school, the headmistress was a stalwart woman from Limerick City, very decided in her views, a strict disciplinarian, a very good teacher except in her method of teaching scripture. She would sit on a desk, with her feet on the seat, facing at least thirty of the older children seated at their desks. She would read the pupils the text to read, verse about, from a chosen chapter in the Bible. There was no attempt on her part to give an explanation of the text and the hesitant reading of the pupils did not convey to us anything of the beauty and strength of the old scriptures. It was strange that she fell down on this subject, for she was very good on English literature and she gave us an early introduction to all the well-known English authors.

She had a temper and it was not surprising that she lost it when she was confronted with what to her was some particular stupidity. She could be merciless to some of the poor children who were a bit slow in the uptake, it was really not their fault that they could not understand what she was talking about. Today, these children would be streamed and left to learn nothing in a group by themselves. Our teacher would have none of that, it was her job to teach and teach she would, even if it meant a few sharp raps of the cane and the subsequent tears. I never liked this practice of hers of slapping children and I told her so in unmistakable terms when she slapped my sister and I said I would tell my father. Considering that I was under 12 years of age, this was rather a nerve on my part, and I often wondered in later years why she did not turn me out of the school.

I remember well, one day I walked out of the school myself after I had been told I must stay in as a punishment over some matter of wrong sums. I was never much good at multiplying and adding up farthings and quarters of ounces and such like quantities used in those ghastly sums where one goes shopping and has to buy goods in small quantities. I could not get the wretched sum right and hence my punishment, but I had had enough of school and I just opened the front door and went out and home to my mother. I often think that a wise woman she was, she took no notice of my escapades, there was no frantic visit to the headmistress for her; she simply ignored the whole business and back I was sent to school next day - as far as I remember the headmistress took no notice either. There were no ill feelings on either side, and when I visited her after my transference to another school.
later on, she expressed pleasure at my improvement in speech and manner - the little hooligan was being tamed at last.

From quite an early age we were allowed to travel on our own, or rather in the charge of the railway guard as we made the journey from our home to our relatives in County Limerick for the long summer holiday. My sister Violet, my brothers Victor and Sandy, and myself made up our party, and although we were sad at leaving mother for four to six weeks, we looked forward to the freedom of living on a farm without elder brothers and sisters to restrict our movements and with only a kindly uncle and aunt to look after us. Limerick Station seemed huge to us, so many platforms, but we found our local train and then there was the excitement of the drive behind a high stepping horse to the farm. Uncle was waiting for us in the station yard and off we went on the last stage of our journey. It was to my mother's brother's farm that we went year after year and well I remember when we were introduced to the many friends and relatives we were usually introduced as Kate's children and that seemed to be sufficient title for us.

In our own county we had no relatives, but in County Limerick we were in the midst of quite a large gathering of cousins, first, second and third cousins, all ages, and a nice selection of aunts and uncles. They had a variety of surnames, definitely not Irish, although as children we were not aware of this. There were the Shiers (my mother's people), the Barkmans, the Smythes, Bovenizers, Switzers, Hecks, Heaveners, Millers, Sparlings and Teskeys. They were mainly farmers, and their comfortable farmhouses, neat, tidy and well furnished, were surrounded with flower and vegetable gardens and well stocked orchards. The farm buildings were kept in good repair, each farm had its dairy where the pans of milk were laid out on long tables for the cream to rise. It was one of our treats as children, to watch the thick yellow cream being skimmed off the great pans of milk for the churns, which were shaped like wooden barrels and mounted on stands, and which were turned by hand until the delicious butter came.

All these relatives of ours were great churchgoers, some went to the Church of Ireland churches, and others to the various Methodist chapels. They also held services in their homes, and in my mother's old home there was one bedroom called 'The Preachers' Room, for that was set aside for the preachers who travelled about from village to village in County Limerick. They all loved music and singing, they were and are great folks for entertaining each other and their parties at each other's houses in the winter and their picnics in the summer were no half-hearted affairs. There was food in great variety and plenty, all home-cooked, each family with its own particular speciality, fruit cakes, apple cakes, special meats, but no alcoholic drinks, tea in plentiful and soft drinks only. We accepted all this hospitality as our right; it did not occur to us that we were living in what might almost be called a closed community or order with its own particular rites and ceremonies. It was not until years later that we learned that our group of relations were the descendants of religious refugees from the Palatinate in Southern Germany, who were given asylum by the British government in Southern Ireland.

The stories about these ancestors intrigued me, and I was determined to find out more about their history by visiting their place of origin in the Palatinate. I had to wait until after the second World War when conditions were suitable for travel in South Germany. I made my way to the small town of Neustadt in the Palatinate and from there I set out to visit nearby towns and villages to see if I could find any trace of the families who had to leave their homes for far-away England. Yes, there were a few familiar surnames over shop fronts in the town of Speyer, and in the cemetery at Bad Durkheim I found on a grave filled with flowers a wooden cross bearing the name Barbara Heck, 1885, and another wooden cross with he names Martin and Charles Heck, the same names and even Christian names that we knew in County Limerick.

My school German was just enough to get me about, but not enough to allow me to enter into long conversation, so that I did not make any extensive enquiries from the folks in the towns. I decided to adopt the plan suggested to
American group of families are linked up again.

On the occasion of their 200th anniversary, members of the clan, from far and wide, came to Ireland to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of American Methodism in 1766 by Limerick-born Barbara Heck and Philip Embury. A service was held at Ballingrane Methodist Church, within a mile of where the two founders were born. Later, at a reception in the Limerick Methodist Church, Commander J.W. Frost, representing the Taoiseach, Mr. Sean Lemass, read a letter in which Mr. Lemass stated that it gave him great pleasure to send greetings to commemorate the founding of the American Methodist Church. The Rev. A. C. Godbold, Secretary to William Hinchy, Regency Press, 1971).

The strong sense of kinship has not died out in the present day. Descendants of the Palatines, although outwardly there is little distinction between them and their neighbours in the county, there is still a strong feeling of belonging to a separate clan, who had passed through sorrowful times and whose release to the comparative freedom of Southern Ireland is still remembered every first Tuesday in June, when the surviving members of the clan, from far and wide, meet in Lord Dunraven’s Demesne at Adare for a religious meeting, which is followed by a social gathering at which news is exchanged and the separate families are linked up again.

On March 26, 1966, some members of the American group of Palatines returned to Limerick to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of American Methodism in 1766 by Limerick-born Barbara Heck and Philip Embury. A service was held at Ballingrane Methodist Church, within a mile of where the two founders were born. Later, at a reception in the Limerick Methodist Church, Commander J.W. Frost, representing the Taoiseach, Mr. Sean Lemass, read a letter in which Mr. Lemass stated that it gave him great pleasure to send greetings to commemorate the founding of the American Methodist Church. The Rev. A. C. Godbold, Secretary to William Hinchy, Regency Press, 1971).

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