

of little use by a person who could not afford even a monthly newspaper. Gaelic was the spoken language of the peasantry and there was little reading material available in that language. Most of the education that was available was provided in 'hedge schools' which were taught, often in the open air, by wandering teachers who received a small fee from each pupil. The pupils at hedge schools were chiefly male and from the wealthier tenant families. Apart from the 'Three Rs' the pupils also learned to speak and read English. The Society for the Education of the Poor in Ireland, called 'The Kildare Place Society', was founded in 1811 and by 1831 financed 1621 schools attended by 137,639 pupils throughout. In Mayo the Roman Catholic Bishop John McHale condemned the Society as their schools were multi-denominational.

The Emancipation of the Roman Catholic Church in 1829 made little difference to the majority of the population as the Penal Laws, in so far as they effected the peasantry, had been ignored for the previous hundred years. The faith of the peasantry was a mixture of Roman Catholic dogma and pre-Christian superstition. All accounts suggest that the standard of morality was high. Belief in the existence of fairys was widespread. Entertainment chiefly consisted of dancing in the open air to the music of pipers and fiddlers, many of whom were vagabonds, usually suffering from some physical deformity which rendered them incapable of normal labour. Wandering huxters and tin-smiths carried news and gossip from one village to the next. The drinking of 'poteen' (illegal whiskey) made from potatoes or barley at little cost was commonplace at fairs and 'patterns' where 'faction fights' were frequent. The Pattern was an annual local holy day on the feast day of the patron saint of a locality and involved prayers and offerings at the local blessed well and then singing, storytelling and drinking which led on to the Faction Fight. These fights were pre-organised free-for-alls between people from rival estates or townlands. Sticks were the main weapons used by men while ladies were permitted to throw stones. The faction fighters of Kilvine in South East Mayo were particularly feared throughout the area.

Emigration before the Great Famine to North America was mainly to New Brunswick and Canada for the reason that passage was cheap on board out-going timber ships. The majority of emigrants to Canada eventually made their way into the U.S.A. which had greater need of manual labour. Direct emigration to the U.S. port of Boston was introduced by one Enoch Train in 1844.

THE GREAT FAMINE

Potato blight (the fungus *Phytophthora infestans*) was noted in Northern Germany in 1830 and in New England in 1842. It was noted in the Isle of Wight, off the southern coast of England in August of 1845. By early September the disease had spread north to Kent and was first reported in Ireland by the Gardeners' Chronicle on September 13th: "We stop the press with very great regret to announce that the potato murrain has unequivocally declared itself in Ireland. The crops about Dublin are suddenly perishing". By the time the main potato crop was being harvested in October it was obvious that there would be a famine.

The first effect of the blight was not a shortage of potatoes but a glut. Farmers knew that the tubers were rotting fast and tried to sell what was still presentable in order to buy food. Cash reserves, where they existed, were used to buy meal and material possessions were sold or exchanged for food. In November 100,000 Pounds worth of Indian corn was imported by the Government,