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# *The Famine around Slievenamon*

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By Cáit Ní Mhainnín

All the [following] information I received from Miss Brigid Butler of Kilcash. This she remembers hearing her father tell when she was a young girl. Her father was a boy of fourteen or fifteen at the time of the Famine.

As she related it to me, the Famine started in this district in 1845 and lasted until 1848. Actual famine and loss of the potato crop was much worse in the townlands that lie on the slopes of the mountain (Slievenamon) rather than in the lowlands. No crop came to maturity in Toor, a district on the north-east shoulder of the mountain; potatoes, oats, etc., failed from '45 onwards.

The people of the village of Kilcash also suffered severely from hunger, and [those] westwards along the slopes of the mountain. Many died from hunger and exhaustion in these districts; but there was no evidence of cholera being prevalent. Turnip was the only food the people had, and on turnips and salt they had to exist.

People named O'Donnells living a short way from this village, whose descendants still [1945] live in the same farm, were very good to many of these suffering poor from Kilcash, and provided them with Indian meal and oatmeal from which they made stirabout. Milk too was very scarce. Indian meal could be bought for 3 shillings [30p] a stone; anyone who had money were able to procure this in Carrick-on-Suir or Clonmel.

Relief was given out in Kilsheelan in the southern half of this parish, and people had to go five miles from the village of Kilcash to procure this relief. One pound of meal per person was the allowance granted.

A scheme of road-making was started in the district also to help the poor. On the whole, the better-off and more comfortable farmers of the lowlands helped their suffering neighbours. A kind of pease [pea plant] porridge was also made from some of the vetch [sweet pea] plants. It was quite black when made. I remember my grandmother speak of it as being used in her childhood home near Dualla, where the cholera was very prevalent.

Souperism was tried in this district, but was not responded [sic] to at all. The poor people said they preferred to die rather than renounce their religion. There seem to have been no evictions. Toor, Kilcash and other townlands on the mountainside were very populous; from that time onwards the population declined, until today [1945] they must be some of the most sparsely populated districts in the South.

An old man came in one day to the Butler home during the Famine days and said he would sing a song for a saucer of stirabout. The people of the house – her grandfather, etc. – were having a meal of stirabout at the time. The old man came from Mount Cahill, a couple of hundred yards from the village here. They told him to sit down and that there was no need to sing; when they had eaten, he could have all he wanted.

Another memory of the time was of a poor woman named Jude Hearn, whose husband was hanged in Clonmel for shooting a man – Cody by name. This poor woman had to go to Kilsheelan to collect her one pound of meal on the day of her husband's hanging.

On the whole, the Famine was not too severe in this part of Tipperary. Anyone who had money could buy meal, and only in the mountain districts was there real want or starvation.

