

The Ballard of Edmund Rice and the Early Monks.

By P.A.McManus

Dedication:-

I sat before this master
Just one of seried ranks
I dedicate these musings
To J.E.C with thanks.

'Twas June the first in sixty two
That Edmund was born
In Westcourt house , a country home
Near Callan town at dawn.

In eighteenth century Ireland,
The times they sure were bad
For she was ground beneath the heel
Of tyrants –oh 'twas sad.

They stole her wealth, they made her poor.
The forced their will with guns
They tried to rob the very faith
She'd learned from Patrick's sons.

Our Edmund was a lucky lad,
His folks had land and all.
He could afford to go to school,
In Kilkenny's own Burns Hall.

Another would grow to boyhood
In times that were do grim;
A hedgerow school was where he learned
'Twas all there was for him.

And most, they did not learn at all;
Oh God—'twas such a sin.
They couldn't raise the penny fee
It cost to get them in.

The Papist could not go to school
Unless he sell his soul;
For food and books they promised him
Oh Lord—how great a toll.

Thank God, the folk of Ireland
Just would not trade in sin
They'd live both poor and ignorant
But would never give in.

They would not barter faith for bread
They spurned the proffered aid;
They'd just live on in ignorance
No compromise they made.

So Edmund came to manhood;
'Twas a fortune now he sought,
For he'd become a merchant
In that lovely southern port.

A shrewd successful businessman,
The Good Lord favoured him;
For staunch and true he was to God
Despite the times go grim.

A grand and really handsome man
He attracted colleens too.
He thought, he chose , he married then
God's holy will to do

For a few short years he enjoyed the bliss
Of wife and daughter one;
Till tragedy then claimed his spouse
God's holy will be done.

He plunged himself into his work
His sorrow to assuage
And heaven smiled on Edmund Rice
His holiness you'll guage.

It was now he bought his Bible ,
That truly precious tome
Its standards always were his guide
In life, at work or home.

He saw the direful poverty;
It well nigh broke his heart
To see the abysmal ignorance
In boys their lives to start

And a vision formed within this man
God's hand was surely here
He prayed but stronger still it grew
And he began to fear.

He felt that God was calling him
A soft voice spoke within
To raise the youth of Ireland
From the hell that they were in.

To the bishop then his plans he brought
A good man through and through
He asked, "Is this God's will for me;
Is this call surely true?"

The bishop smiled he blessed his friend,
He saw God's finger there.
"Go forth and plan this work of God
The call is loud and clear.

Now that was back in ninety three
The penal laws still banned
The work so dear to Edmund Rice
He'd have to stay his hand.

He worked, he prayed, but still he knew
He'd have to make the break,
And spend his life and fortune
For poorer people's sake.

The slight relief Westminster gave
Determined him that now
The time had come to launch the ship
To God's will he did bow.

And now at last he felt relief
Decision cleared his mind.
He knew the work was that of God
He would not look behind.

Eighteen o two was now the year
And Edmund full two score
He'd now become a schoolmaster
Though still outside the law.

The bishop came and blessed the pile
"Mt Sion be thy name
This place shall ever sacred be"
It was no idle claim.

The Waterford lads they crowded in
A scruffy lot to boot,
Now this was making history
Among the destitute.

For never had they gone to school
And books were something new
And God – how they did treasure it
As knowledge painful grew.

Readin', 'Ritin', 'Rithmetic,
They got from nine to three
But religion held the pride of place
As sure it had to be.

For Edmund Rice was a man of God
His work was all for Him
And Godlessness just had no place
In schools he taught for Him.

The 'monks' boys grew in learning
Their pride it swelled and grew
They fought those bloody protestants
For every job in view.

The bishop beamed, the bishop purred
As bishops only can
For Waterford now had the start
On every other man.

Those jealous eyes peered from the north
They long to share the boon
That he had brought to Waterford
It could not come too soon.

Then other men they caught the fire
That Edmund had lit
They came from o'er the diocese
Said they 'We'll do our bit.'

The first to knock upon the door
Mulcahy, tall and thin
Priests monks and people idolised
John Ig of Cappoquin.

His brother James, a widower
Joined up- some thought him mad
For he had sons and daughters
Who loved to call him dad.

From Waterford came Tom O'Brien,
A man of sixty, he
"If Edmund Rice can do this work,"
Said Tom, "then so can we."

He had his little troubles,
But sure he left his mark
For the curate with his whip he brought
In case the work went back.

Then in came that darlin' man
Pat Corbett, Carrick born
He idolised the very ground
That Edmund Rice walked on.

He had his own quaint ways for sure
He loved his Carrick town
He loved the market folks and fairs
From school he would hurry down.

The fair colleens he kept in mind
Full many a match made he
He talked to every passing friend
He loved good company.

In later years monks found the pile
Of letters cold and grim
A heap of threatening cuts
The top men sent to him.

With Pat there came Joe Hogan
A farmer's life he'd had
He knew his land and cattle
We sure could use this lad.

But Joseph's life was well nigh spent
Just ten more years he'd own
Before the good Lord summoned him
Grand monk, he called him home.

An Austin Dunphy came
To join the little band
'Twas he who wrote our history
In neat and flowing hand.

Jerome O'Connor hailed from Cork
His bishop sent him on
It was he with Baptist Leonard
That started up North Mon.

Sent Dr. Bray of Cashel
His heart was deep in shock
"Please Edmund teach my sons your ways,
So they can feed my flock."

So down from Thurles came the Cahills
A hardy pair were they
They soon transformed the Thurles scene
Up Tipperary way.

Their names were Thomas, Baptist,
And Joseph, so they say
Those names still grace the family
In Thurless till this day.

And there was Francis Thornton
" 'Twas he" the monks used say
"Would rouse the house at five o'clock
In Carrick town each day."

A convert too, he felt the urge,
Frank Manifold so sound
He'd join the little fighting force
To serve the God he'd found.

He'd fought in the Wicklow cavalry.
He came from landed folk
He sacrificed all this to bear
His Christ's own gentle yoke.

Pat Ellis was a brilliant man
In maths he did excel
He passed up a professorship
He'd better goods to sell.

There were others too who came and went
They found they did not fit
Though after years they moved away
Don't forget they did their bit.

These were all extraordinary men
The finest men we knew
The greatest monks in the Institute
But so are quite a few.

'Twas Dublin's turn to make a plea
A cry he could not spurn
For thanks to Bishops Murray, Troy
His institute was born.

So Edmund made the sacrifice
A friend he held so dear
'Twas Baptist Grosvenor headed north
God's will—it cost him dear.

Now Dublin town was poor as poor
The monks they barely lived
But down the docks quite near the quay
A mighty work they did.

They shifted up to Hanover St.
The going still was tough
They only ate but twice a day
They never got enough.

But mighty works have started hard
I've looked in awe. Amazed.
I've seen the schools in Dublin town
These men with God . have raised.

Don't imagine all was rosy
A garden all serene
For Edmund Rice had enemies
With pens not always clean.

His own bishop called them wretches
He called them traders too
He must have thought on apple trees
The needed money grew.

A spiteful bitter unknown pen
Charged him with heresy
But Rome did clear his name of that
And all dishonesty

They called him proud ambitious man
Their fury knew no bounds
That he aspired beyond their ken
Like jealousy it sounds.

But Edmund rode above the storms
His soul was sublime
He never stooped to calumny
Nor raked among the slime.

A model of pure charity
His motives always high
He never opened ear or lips
To slander or to lie.

With Christ he bore a heavy cross
With Christ was crucified
With Christ he prayed with Christ he rose
Yes—fully justified.

They'd taken vows in eighteen eight
By the Presentation Rule
He knew that this could not last
Our Edmund was no fool.

Ten years of study, work and prayer
Then our own Brief he sought
It came in two more years, thank God
And His approval brought.

For two more years they conned it well
Its contents to ensure
They prayed, they stormed the God on high
Good men, they were not sure.

The band had grown to thirty men
Decision must be made
But only nineteen took the step
Their vows by Brief to take.

The monks in Cork we'll hear about
A few more verses yet
Their absence was a bitter blow
When the Monks at Sion met.

Ignatius Rice he led the way
Joe Mulchay next in line
With Dunphy, Corbett, Baptist Cahill
Their names on vows did sign.

Francis Manifold and Thornton
Then Francis Grace as
And also Francis Hanrahan
For so the books do tell.

And Jerome Foley, Louis Ryan
Joe Murphy, Lawrence Byrne,
With Joseph Cahill and Joseph Keane
They also took their turn.

There was Aloysius Kelly
Patrick Ellis all serene
Francis Ready, Austin Coleman
And there you have nineteen.

Of the nineteen grand pioneers
Francis Ready did not stay
Louis Kelly died a Cistercian
He lies down Clapham way.

Some good men left the ranks for aye
One carried on the work
For boys in his own diocese
Poor Edmund—how it hurt.

And others heard a higher call
The Spirit was not still
The church it needed men as priests
To work His holy will.

Our Thomas Baptist Grosvenor
A priest he now becomes
And Dublin loved him as its saint
The saint among the slums.

Then Waterford's dear Patrick Finn
For solitude he yearned
In a French Cistercian monastery
His God's reward he earned.

John I, he kept the ancient rule,
Until death came to him
His farm, his lads and lasses all
Up there in Cappoquin.

Those Chapter men in forty one
I think that they might have erred
They wanted to return to us
His plea it went unheard.

Then they elected officers
The general he became
Patrick Ellis his assistant
Austin Dunphy the same.

Then back they went to schools and boys
They felt like men inspired
They'd teach and teach and sow the seed
God's seal they had acquired.

They were tough and hardy warriors
Those men of twenty two
They started off the enterprise
'Twas theirs to teach and do.

The work it grew, the numbers swelled
As others trickled in
They scattered schools through Ireland
Expansion did begin.

Their boundaries were not confined
By priest or bishop now
So over the land they spread
The faith they did endow.

Monks already taught in Waterford
Carrick and Cappoquin
Dungarvon, Cork, and Thurles
Were places they were in.

And Limerick too had got its men
And up in Dublin town
Establishments had swelled to three
While Ennis held one down.

Eleven schools in twenty years
Foundations laid with care
But still requests came pouring in
The benefits to share.

Emnistymon by the sea
Got men in twenty four
Then from the great North Richmond Street
The cry went up for more.

They scraped up men for Claren bridge
And gladly filled it too
And then 'twas up to Francis Street
The work was there to do.

He sent his monks to England
To Gib. Out o'er the seas
He blessed the band of three that went
To the Antipodes.

'Twas Joe Murphy opened Preston
In eighteen twenty five
And houses followed steadily
The mission it did thrive.

Manchester next, then London town
In poverty and want
At Soho and at Wapping docks
The hard work did not daunt.

Liverpool was next in line
The schools there grew to four
Sutherland too it got a school
Manchester then on more.

Bolton and Salford got their turn
As well as busy Leeds
Ignatuius Barry's novices
From Preston helped the needs.

And so by eighteen forty four
When Edmund Rice did die
The English mission flourished well
A jewel to his eye.

Oh dear! Oh my what can I do
My story leaps ahead
I fear that I am wandering
The path our teached led.

In Ireland in those far days
Another problem grew
Our Edmund watched with sympathy
The winds of storm they blew.

The men of Cork would dear have gone
To Mt.Sion with the rest
But Bishop Murphy blocked the way
To a general –I protest.

You men have simply joined for Cork
In Cork you men shall stay
And I will be your general
And me you will obey.

O'Connor Jerome sore perplexed
To Sion he withdrew
He made retreat , he took the Brief
And vowed his life anew.

IgnatiusBarry followed him
Then Bernard Duggan too
They took their vows with Edmund Rice
Their minds they surely knew.

The crisis came in twenty six
The Bishop simply said
I'll have the deeds to your North Mon,
The monks they wished him dead.

The Leonard brothers all confused
They thought they owned North Mon
They needed time to think it out
Its implications con.

They came up with their answer
Our names on deeds as well
Said Bishop, "No it should not be"
Thought they, "Then go to hell".

The work went on-a worried time
Their prayer God's will reveal
They would now turn to Edmund Rice
Their plans must stay concealed.

Then one by one to Sion came
Three men their vows to take
One came, one went, another then
'Till all had made the break.

'Twas Baptist Leonard led the way
And Joseph followed suit
Paul Riordan third and now at last
They'd joined the institute.

And now they had a status
Immunity by the Brief
The Bishop fully realised
That he was badly beat.

One man did not take the step
To Bishop he'd be true
'Twas Austin Reardon stayed I Cork
To start an order too.

He set up school and others came
At work they did not baulk
The Presentations now they are
In the diocese of Cork.

And even till this present day
These men still proudly claim
That Edmund Rice had founded them
And loudly praise his name.

There might have been some scheming plans
Let history's voice suffice
For some Cork brought in years of pain
To the heart of Edmund Rice.

For Cork men lived a better life
No poverty they knew
They almost scorned the greatest men
From whom the C.B's grew.

They wrangled place of influence
In government as well
They even libelled Edmund Rice
As Lisbon Letters tell.

But sure it is a wondrous thing
The Providence of God
For grief and trouble proved the worth
Of saint beneath the rod.

He treated them with courtesy
He even called them friend
His kindness simply overflowed
As rifts he sought to mend.

An Act of Relief in twenty nine
O'Connell forced it through
But oh! It seemed to spell out death
To Edmund's saintly few.

It singled out religious men
To be outside the law
It would have wrecked a lifetime's work
As Edmund quickly saw.

Though worn and wearied out by toil
Petitions he did raise
To save the work the schools of God
This evil to erase.

The orders of all Ireland
Besought his guiding hand
To lead their deputation
To the highest in the land.

He led the talk at Westminster
With Wellington, the Duke
Alert and keen he pressed their claims
Full many a point he took.

Now surely this choice lays the lie
And calumny so foul
That Edmund was not fit to rule
'Twas Cork that raised the growl.

Meanwhile at home dire pressures grew
To call a chapter now
The Cork clique and the seeming gloom
Caused him this to allow.

And so they meet in twenty nine
The minutes are all lost
Maybe 'tis best for charity
Its deliberations glossed.

Edmund there resigned his post
But common sense prevailed
And loyally they changed his mind.
His brave decision hailed.

But there must have been dissension
The brief was set aside
Assistants grew to number four
And Cork was not denied.

For Joseph Leonard was of these
Already sick in mind
Though discourteous disloyal
To him was Edmund kind.

Though Joseph died in thirty one
He left as legacy
Intrigue and frightful bitter strife
Effects we've yet to see.

'Tis true when saintly men are called
A mighty work to do
They will be nailed upon the Cross
But rise with Jesus too.

Of Edmund Rice this was so true
His grief he bravely bore
His virtue rose above the storms
Though battle scarred and sore.

But let me not philosophise
His course is not yet run
For fourteen years he'd bear the cross
Of trials just begun.

O'Connell Schools were building slow
For some they had no cash
The work just stopped for three full months
Till Thorton made his dash.

How slowly then the building grew
It cost both sweat and tears
Till Austin Grace took up his reign
As boss for forty years.

The National Board of thirty one
Was hailed with feelings mixed
This Bishop Murray pushed with force
He thought the problem fixed.

The other bishops were not sure
And Edmund Rice opposed
But at Murray's pressing pleading
Six houses were proposed.

They tried the scheme for five full years
They found it did not work
So Edmund then withdrew those schools
His duty did not shirk.

He risked a valued friendship
The money it was nice
But principle was always first
In the mind of Edmund Rice.

He stood his ground he weathered storms
A Rock in troubled seas
For faith in Christ 'twould undermine
The Christ he sought to please.

And history has proved him right
For later 'twas revealed
That Whately still did proselytise
In ways just then concealed.

Have you heard of Brian Bolger
He advanced a thousand pound
He lived in Little Longford Street
Where Tom Moore's pub is found.

Advance from a large legacy
He'd willed to Edmund Rice
This boon would help with Richmond St.,
To complete it would suffice.

The Will was fierce contested
The assests all called in
The Founder could not find the cash
No helpers could he win.

Now Edmund did not steer the ship
To General he'd submit
The thorny mixed financial toils
He'd gathered bit by bit.

Paul Riordan would not budge at all
But better words exhale
For Miles Ignatius Kelly
'Twas pay or go to jail.

Since Riordan would not pay the cash
A mortgage was then called
But trustees were then under vow
No sign—they were appalled.

Our Edmund saw injustice here
His name he did append
And so did five more worthy men
Their standards did not bend.

It was indeed a heavy cross
For Edmund and the few
Their confessor supported them
His judgment put on view.

Thank God, the men of forty one
At least would justice do
Erased the blame—e'en praised the stand
Of men some tried but true.

But even they did weight the Cross
That Edmund ever bore
For when he sought admittance there
They turned him from the door.

Round this time in came Louis Hoare
A tender seventeen
Those tough and seasoned warriors
Thought him a trifle green.

They thought Pat Corbett rambled far
But he did not compare
With Joe Murphy guiding Father Matt
To rallies here and there.

'Twas said between two of them
In Waterford alone
They closed down forty seven pubs
Sure Keily's did a moan.

Our Edmund aged from year to year
His illness gained in force
The climax came in thiry eight
'Twas thought he'd run his course.

The Chapter called in thirty one
Some errors did undo
Assistants were reduced in half
Joe Murhpy ousted too.

The body now could have a say
From ancient Brothers eight
Elected now from out the monks
Their votes would carry weight.

The General would be in for life
A good thing this would be
On Edmund's shoulders fell the lot
Eleven votes to three.

In twenty nine some wanted tea
 'Twas punch in thirty two
On both counts the decision read
 "Whate'er the purse can do."

From thirty one to thirty eight
 The work just steady grew
And new men came to join the ranks
 The schools were growing too.

Though flesh was weak but spirit strong
 He rallied strength again
And set the plans for monks to meet
 In conclave once again.

Next Chapter sat in thirty eight
 'Twas Edmund's date to fix
He was tired and worn and weary
 And all of seventy six.

From the Brothers then assembled
 Did Edmund seek relief
Please accept my resignation
 The plea was short and brief.

They'd much prefer he'd stay the course
 But he'd been mortal ill
With heavy hearts they took the steps
 This highest office fill.

Five ballots then there did ensue
 The method much in doubt
E'en Rome was called to arbitrate
 Approve the final count.

'Twas there Paul Riordan took the reins
 You've heard of him in Cork
And many monks, they shook their heads
 In prayer for guidance sought.

And now you'd think that grand old man
 Whose name was Edmund Rice
Could end his days in honoured peace
 He'd paid the rightful price.

But Oh! My God it was not so
 For he was crucified
By many trials and his own monks
 His soul was purified.

Those spiteful tongues called him insane
 In calumny and worse
They said he just would not obey
 His money was a curse.

This saint by now the full four score
 He still could fight with might
And whene'er it came to justice
 His course was always right.

'Twas hard to fathom jealous minds
 Who's write in deep cabal
That Edmund did not found the monks
 We were of de la Salle.

Oh God how this his soul did hurt
 And fierce his soul was tried
But ne'er complaint did cross his lips
 'Twas Christ he sought, not pride.

I hope I have not damned the man
 Don't think Paul Reardon bad;
Just think of him as raised by God
 To prove the saint we had.

This General did a right good job
 In all he undertook
He also had his ups and downs
 Beyond this little book.

The Chapter held in forty one
 It showed to him the light
To down all care, prepare his soul
 His God to keep in sight.

Around the school he'd wander in
 Just sit and watch the boys,
Look at their work, give words of praise
 It made his heart rejoice.

He was sent all round the country
As if to say goodbye
To see the great and holy work
The pleasure's in his eye.

Mulcahy Joe and Corbett Pat
With these he lingered late
The sole survivors of the group
Who'd vowed in eighteen eight.

Nineteen they were in twenty one
When the Brief allayed their fears
And now they were full four times that
In just o'er twenty years.

Infirmities soon crippled him
And now he could not walk
In wheel chair now he'd get about
Or sit with God to talk.

And as life slowly ebbed away
In the twilight of his years
He could look with unfeigned thankfulness
By now he had no fears.

Himself to prayer he would betake
And consolation seek
He knew that God would understand
Yes make the fierce man meek.

The Bible too 'twas never far
From his outstretched hand
Its words he read and pondered deep
Its meaning understand.

And Mary's chaplet, his support,
He prayed by night and day
The beads did seldom leave his hands
His homage he did pay.

Ah yes his life was ebbing fast
Though still he felt the rod
With manly soul and purified
He'd go to meet his God.

'Twas a long and lingering illness
His body did endure
The sands of time were running out
But running out for sure.

At eleven in the morning
Of August twenty nine
His soul just slipped away from us
A death so calm, so fine.

The year was eighteen forty four
His years were eighty two
And forty two of these he gave
To the Institute he knew.

And years it took to realise
Just what a saint he'd been;
Beneath the tough exterior
His virtue oft unseen.

When old folk spoke of Edmund Rice
These words you'll ever find
He gave his wealth, he gave himself
The poor he had in mind.

Big hearted, noble, generous man
He could not be unkind
His charity embraced all men
No flaw in him you'd find.

They say that he's a saint who lives
The sermon on the mount
Our Edmund did this all his life
No telly did he count.

From first to last beatitude
He exercised each one
He saw in poor, in sick, in young
The image of God's son.

They say Mater Studiorum
Est Repetitio;
Our teacher certainly used this
His way I will not go.

He was not first of all the band
To wing his way above
A group of monks awaited him
Still joined to him in love.

Yes—grand monks waited him
Their joy did not abate
I'll bet that they were close at hand
When Peter op'ed the gate.

And sure they were all crowding round
McDermott led the race
Joe Hogan helped to hustle him
Before the throne of grace.

All doubts dispelled, Edmund wassure
The toil had been worth while
He felt the warmth of Jesus's thanks
And Mary's gentle smile.

And there for all eternity
He watches us below
And helps us to pursue the goal
I'm sure it must be so.

But let's go down to earth below
And see what has been done
To push the cause we'd love to see
Through all its stages won.

Sure Austin Grace did do his bit
And testimonies get
Mark Hill did wear his body out
In pushing further yet.

Then Davy Fitz, he's gathered much
He's worked by night and day
And Berchman Cullen's hard at it
Down south, out Callan way.

Then Johnny Carroll's in research
He's travelled many miles
He'll go here or there or anywhere
To search through dusty files.

You'll say this verse is doggerel
With you I will agree
It just the way I clothed the thoughts
That Johnny brought to me.

But though this verse is second rate
I trust it shows the love
We all should have for this great man
We hope to meet above.

For Edmund Rice is a saint, I'm sure
And I long to see the day
When the Church and I can call him so
And pray to him that way.

A hundred thirty years have passed
Since Edmund closed his eyes
It's time we stormed the heavens
Our Founder canonise.

So down upon your knees, my lads,
And pray God's will be done
That Edmund Rice will gain that crown
His works have surely won.

So when we tertians scatter
To our homes of sun or ice
Please God we'll spread the love and cult
Of our Founder, Edmund Rice.

(end)