

**The Ballad of Edmund Rice and the Early Monks by
Brother Patrick McManus cfc R.I.P.**

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.
They 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 so 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 so 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 gauge.

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 now 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 dark.

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.

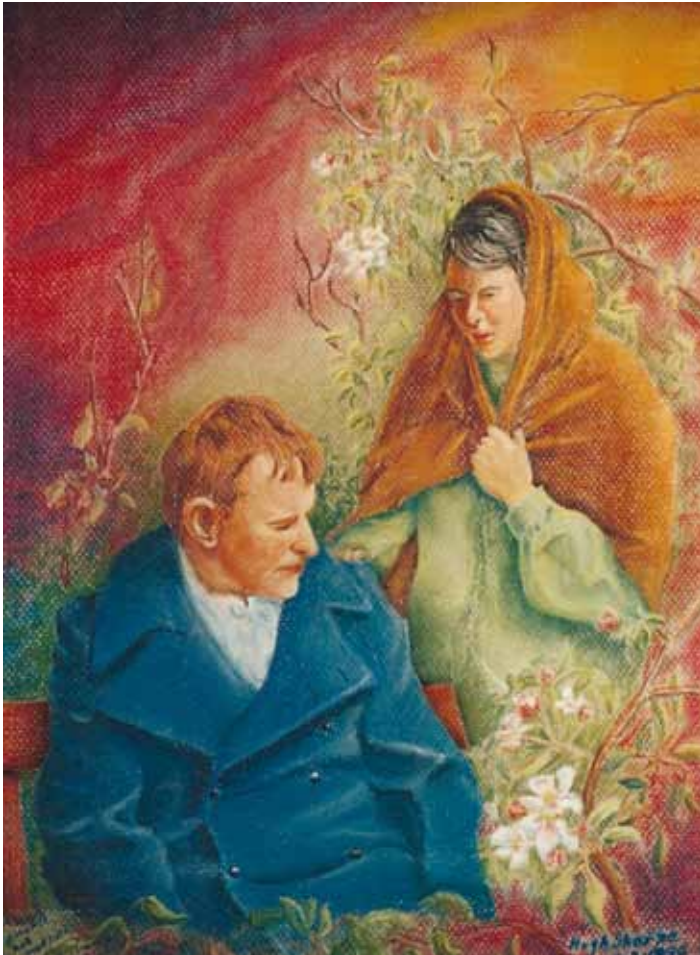
But Joseph's life was well nigh spent
Just ten more years he'd own
Before the good Lord summoned him
Grand monk, he called him home.

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 Thurles 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 a 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.

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.



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

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

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, one more.

Bolton and Salford got their turn
As well as busy Leeds,
Ignatius 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 teacher 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.

Ignatius Barry 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 revealed
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 in Cork
To start an order too.

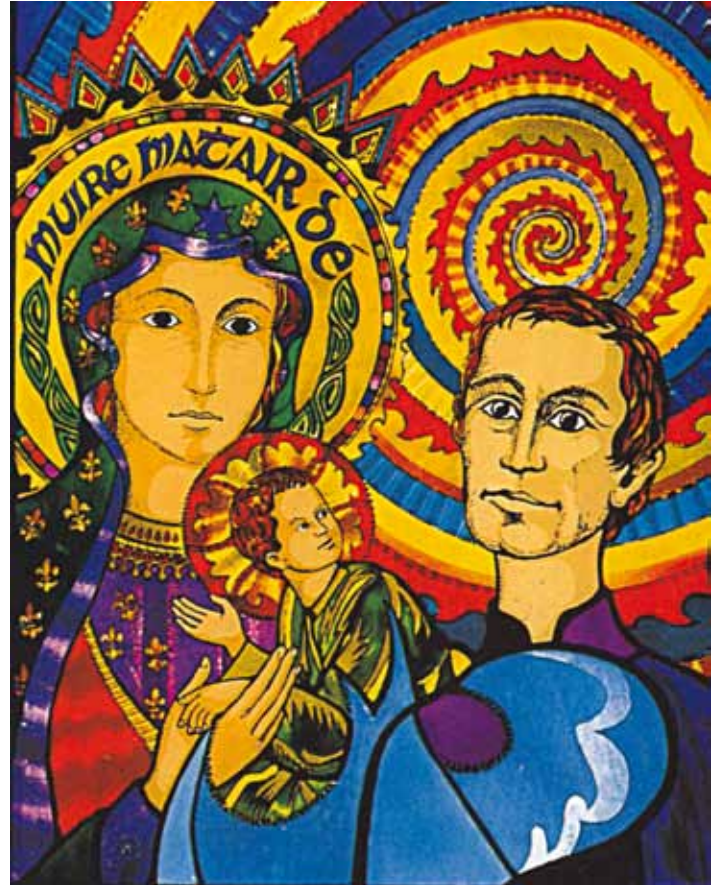
He set up school and others came
At work they did not baulk
The Presentations now they are
In the diocese of Cork.

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 met 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 pounds.
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.

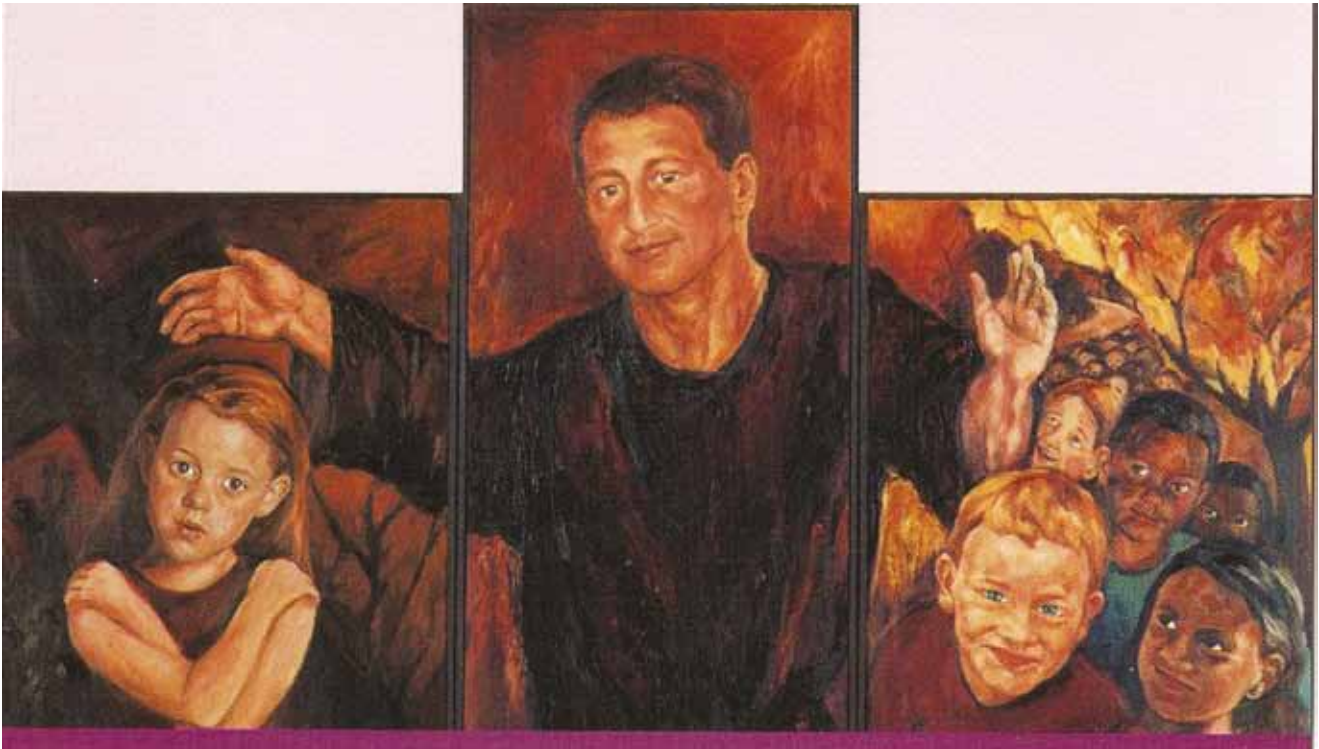
The Will was fierce contested
The assets all called in.
The Founder could not find the cash
No helpers could he win.

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.



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.

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 thirty-eight
'Twas thought he'd run his course.

The Chapter called in thirty-one
Some errors did undo;
Assistants were reduced in half
Joe Murphy 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
"What e'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 to 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 when e'er it came to justice,
His course was always right.

'Twas hard to fathom jealous minds
Who wrote 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 Riordon 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.

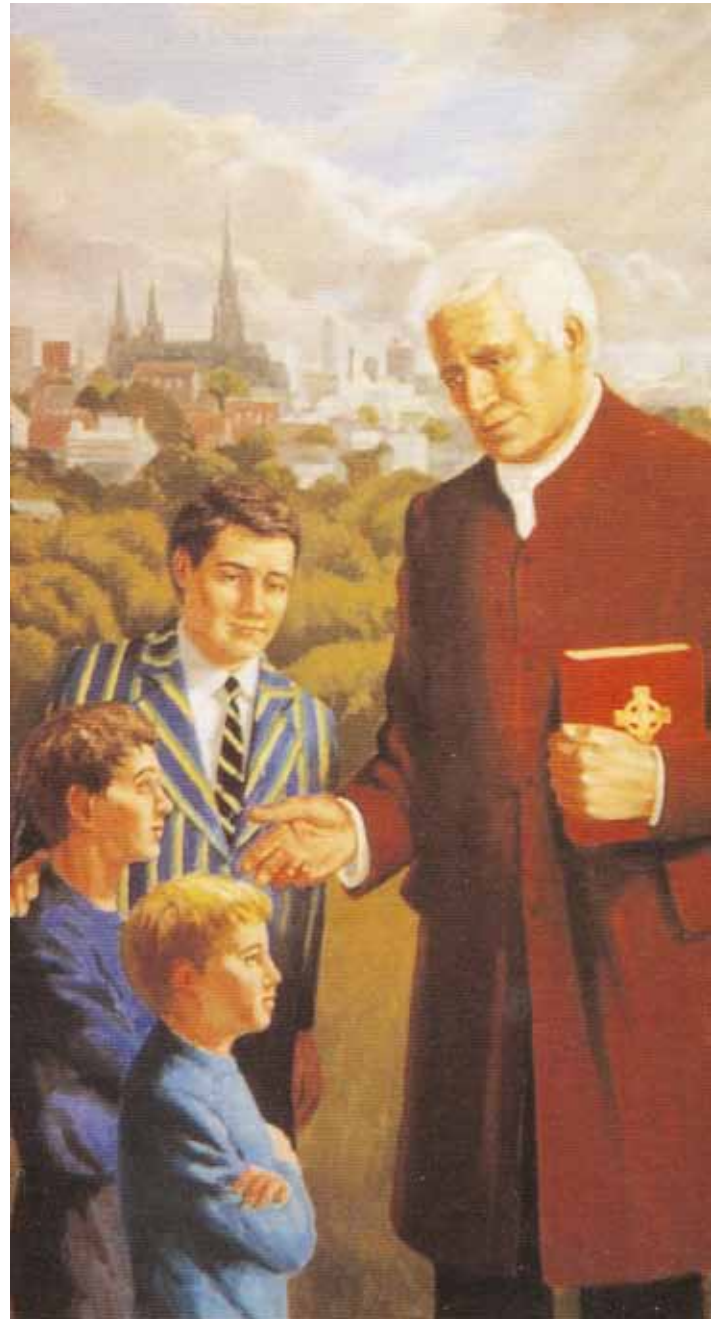
And years it took to realise
Just what a saint he'd been;
Beneath the tough exterior
His virtue oft unseen.

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 tally 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 Repetio;
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 was sure
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 to 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.