



THE IRISH CHRISTIAN BROTHER

Edmund Ignatius Rice (1762-1844)

In their schools some boys became great hurlers or Gaelic footballers. Boys from poor backgrounds were given an education which afterwards allowed them to reach positions of influence; others remembered only the harsh punishments which inhibited rather than promoted achievement. Some were given a love of Irish culture and history which stayed with them all their lives; others rejected what they felt was extreme nationalist indoctrination. The schools were run by men who were known by their pupils as "the brothers" (or sometimes "the

monks"). Pupils learned their proper name from the badge on their copy-books: *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum de Hibernia*.

Edmund Ignatius Rice, the man who founded the Irish Christian Brothers, was born near Callan in Co Kilkenny on 1 June 1762, the son of a "strong" farmer. In 1778 he was apprenticed to the meat export business of his uncle Michael in Waterford and he inherited the business on his uncle's death. He married in 1785 but his wife died at the birth of their only child, a daughter. The loss was a turning point in his life.

He became interested in the poor of Waterford and opened a school for their children in a stable in New Street in 1802. He spent everything he had on the school and then he was joined by other men with the same mission and they opened their first proper school at Mount Sion. By the time he had started schools in Clonmel and Dungarvan, he and his band of brothers felt the time had come to take religious vows. Pope Pius VII permitted the establishment of the congregation in 1820. It spread rapidly: there were soon CB schools in Cork (1811), Dublin (1812), Thurles (1815), Limerick (1816) and Ennistimon (1824). Schools were established in Britain, the first at Preston in 1825, and later in Australia, America, South Africa and India. This colossal expansion took place when Rice was still superior-general of the order. He eventually resigned in 1838 and spent his last years at Mount Sion in Waterford, where he died on 29 August 1844.