

Mount Trenchard of course gets its name from one William Trenchard of Wiltshire, who in 1557, acquired more than 14,000 acres as his portion of the confiscated vast estates of the ill-fated Earl of Desmond. Some time in the 17th century the Trenchards moved from Corgrigg Castle (the ruins of which still stand) to Cappa, and built themselves an imposing residence with a splendid view, calling it Mount Trenchard. The property remained in the family for the next one hundred and fifty years until the family ended in the female line.

Eventually the Trenchard property came into the possession of the Rice family. This family originally came from the Dingle area. Some of the family were staunch Catholics and one of them, Edmond Rice, was imprisoned at the time of the Popish Plot and was fortunate to escape the savage execution like that meted out to St. Oliver Plunkett during that same period. However, it was from a Stephen Rice who supported the Catholic King James II that the Rice family of Mount Trenchard was descended. In acknowledgement of his loyalty and devotion to the Jacobite cause, James conferred on him the title, Baron Monteagle.

During the Penal Laws, like quite a number of other prominent Catholic, land-owning families, they took up the Protestant religion to maintain possession of their estates but, it must be said, to their credit that they were always just and humane landlords and exemplary in the manner in which they treated their tenants. \*

In 1780 Stephen Edward Rice married an heiress, Catherine Spring and their eldest son, Thomas Spring Rice, inherited Mount Trenchard. Though he qualified for the Bar, he was more interested in politics than in law and in 1820 he stood for election in Limerick. At the time Limerick was governed by a corrupt corporation and Thomas promised that if elected to Parliament he would put an end to this unjust regime. There was great jubilation in Limerick following his election success, the spirit of which is well captured in the painting 'The chairing of Spring Rice' which hangs in The Chamber of Commerce, Limerick.

Though a Protestant himself and a prominent member of the Conservative Party, Thomas Spring Rice was, nonetheless, a dedicated supporter of Daniel O'Connell's struggle for Catholic Emancipation. His constituents were so grateful for his unselfish efforts on their behalf that they erected in his honour the tall stone column topped by his statue which stands in Pery Square.

Eoghan O. Caomhanaigh, the Gaelic poet, composed a poem in his honour. The original manuscript is still in the British Museum. However, when O'Connell endeavoured to have the infamous Act of Union repealed he lost an ally in Spring Rice. Instead, when it was put to a vote he actually voted against the Act of Repeal of the Union - to the great disappointment of many of his followers.

The continued success of the Conservatives made political promotion inevitable for Thomas Spring Rice and, in 1835, he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer and, for his loyalty to the Crown, in 1839 he was awarded the title Baron Monteagle and Brandon. Most people are of the mistaken opinion that he was the first to hold this title but, as already shown, the title had been conferred by James II on Stephen Rice many years before. The remains of Thomas Spring Rice and those of his wife now lie under an inscribed plain stone slab in the shadow of the ruins of the old Protestant belfry in Shanagolden.

A year before his death, his eldest son Stephen Edmond died tragically at sea and so his grandson Thomas succeeded to the title and family property. Thomas took a keen interest in parochial affairs and was very popular among the local people. He was a great personal friend of Sir Horace Plunkett and with the latter helped promote the Co-operative Creamery Movement in this part of West Limerick. Incidentally, the work of Horace Plunkett and his associates has not to my mind got sufficient national recognition. The creamery they established in Ballyhahill was reputedly the first co-op in Ireland.

Each succeeding generation of the Spring Rice family became more nationalist in outlook, culminating in the fervent patriotism of Mary Spring Rice. She became an active member of the Irish Volunteer Movement and it was she who started Cumann na mBan in Foynes. Mary Spring Rice played a key role in the 'Howth Gun Running' affair when, with Mrs. Childers, she helped unload the guns which had been brought from the Continent for the Irish Volunteers. This activity alone on the Asgard would have secured a permanent place in Irish history for her but there was much more than this to Mary Spring Rice.

She was passionately interested in the revival of the Irish language and when her close friend Douglas Hyde founded a branch of the Gaelic League in Foynes Mary Spring Rice was determined that it would be a success. She went to the Gaeltacht to study Irish and employed a native Irish speaker as gardener in Mount Trenchard. Irish classes were held in the house and Mary proved more than a competent teacher. Erskine Childers was a frequent visitor and when he was 'on the run' his son, the late President Childers, stayed there. Indeed, during that period, Mount Trenchard would have been considered a 'safe house' as refuge was given to men 'on the run'.

For some time before her death in 1924, Mary Spring Rice was receiving instruction in the Catholic religion for which she had developed a great love but, for her untimely death, she might well have returned to the Faith of her distant forebears. She is buried in the little Protestant cemetery in Mount Trenchard and her epitaph fittingly in English and also in Irish - the language she loved so well.

When one considers that a primary objective in sending people like Trenchard to Ireland was the suppression of the Catholic faith and that now, four

hundred years later, that same property is in the hands of the Sisters of Mercy who educate young people in the Catholic tradition, we are surely reminded that "the mills of God grind slow but exceeding small".