

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: MEMORIA OF BLESSED EDMUND IGNATIUS RICE

The *Memoria* of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice will be celebrated on Tuesday, 5th May, 2015. Wherever *Muintir Éamainn* work in the service of youth for the sake of the Gospel, on that day his sons and daughters will commemorate the life and charism of our Holy Founder.

Two hundred years ago, in 1815, Blessed Edmund's world was in turmoil. In Europe, Napoleon had escaped from Elba and a continental war with global repercussions was resumed. In Ireland, a letter from Cardinal Litta, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, then in charge of Irish Church affairs, was deemed to accept the "Veto", i.e., the right of London to decide, in effect, the appointment of Catholic bishops. The whole "Veto" debate convulsed the Catholic Church in Ireland. Writing the year before, and not long after the publication of the Quarantotti Rescript, also deemed to favour the Veto, Blessed Edmund had expressed his misgivings: "We are all in confusion here on account of this Roman Rescript on the *Veto*. If his Holiness should concur in what has been done, that respect which has always been paid by the Irish will suffer materially. It is considered here that the treatment was most contemptible to the Irish Bishops, Clergy and People. May the Almighty preserve us from Schism, and from every other mischief with which we are threatened by this wicked Veto".

Life, though, went on for the Founder and the Society of the Presentation. In its Annual Report for 1815, the diocesan charitable group which had facilitated and funded the introduction of the Brothers to Cork in 1811, commended the "gentlemen of the Monastery" on the positive effects on the city of the education provided by the "Brother Monks" in their North Parish school. For the rulers of Europe, marching their armies towards Waterloo, for their representatives at the Congress of Vienna, what the Brothers did in Cork would have been without any significance whatsoever. They sought material and temporal ends. Br. Ignatius and his Brothers, though, knew that those who instructed others unto justice would shine like stars for all eternity (see *Daniel* 12:3).

Blessed Edmund did, indeed, live "a life of love and service"; a life committed the real and enduring welfare of the neighbour, especially of "the least". It was, in fact, also in 1815 that Charles Bianconi started his coach service between Clonmel and Cahir, a very important contribution to public transport in Ireland and to the "rags to riches" story of this Italian immigrant who acknowledged, not least in his will, that it was Mr. Rice of Waterford who had taught him English and who had advised and encouraged him to better himself, spiritually indeed, but also materially.

It is good to remind ourselves that, as in the age of Blessed Edmund, so in ours, education is the road to human dignity, particularly for "those oppressed by poverty and injustice". It is the way to liberation, integration, participation, for all outsiders and for all incomers. As he had "redeemed" John Smith, a black boy he encountered on the Waterford quays, so he "freed" Bianconi, helping him exercise his considerable entrepreneurial skills, to the material betterment, not just of himself, but of his adopted country. We, therefore, should take heart. However small in the great scheme of things our work may seem, we can be "redeemers", "liberators", of the young people in our professional care, preparing them for "life abundant" (see *John* 10:10) in this world and in the next.