

Br Thomas Baptiste Cahill

Br Baptiste Cahill, founder of our Thurles house was born at Goatsbridge, Callan. His people were farmers and the site of their old home is still to be seen. Thomas took up the boot-making trade in Green Street, Callan. As well he had some property in land near the town. To this day one of the former fields is referred to as "The Monks Field." Young Cahill was apparently a good businessman, because we are told that he employed a considerable number of men. Towards the end of the 18th century Callan was a great shoe making centre. We are also told that in those days the town had two flourishing tanneries. The owner of one of these was a man named Dunne, a relative of the Rice's of Westcourt.

During the rebellion of 1798 the town had its days and nights of terror. People lived in fear and trembling and tales of the brutal torture inflicted then were common up to very recent years amongst the survivors of the older generation. In all likelihood Thomas Cahill was one of the Callan men who shouldered a pike and answered the call from Carrigmacleer.

To terrorise the people Yeomen had erected in the centre of the town one of their machines of human torture, the dreaded "Triangle." Young Cahill was noted for his patriotic principles and his insurrectionary activities. One day he was seized by the Yeomen, stripped and hung upon the "tripod" where he was being flogged to death to extract some secret from him. His life was saved through the merciful intervention of an influential local Protestant minister.

The ropes by which his now apparent lifeless and mangled body swung being cut, he crashed helplessly to the ground. His friends came and carried him to a place of safety, where he was tenderly nursed back to health. His awful experience so moved him that he determined to spend the remainder of his life in helping others to save their souls insofar as he was able.

When restored to health he left the locality. For a time no one knew where he was. Eventually he was traced to Quarry Street, Thurles, where he and William Joseph Cahill – (no relative of his) and James Healy had established themselves as "monks," and were conducting a school for the boys of the town.

After some years Archbishop Bray sent him and William Joseph Cahill to Mount Sion, Waterford, to our Founder to make their novitiate. On having completed their novitiate and course of training under Br. Rice they returned to Thurles. Then Br Thomas Baptiste Cahill sold his property in Callan, and with the proceeds founded and endowed the Thurles house of the Brothers.

According to the annals of the Thurles house, it would appear the Most Rev. Dr. Bray, Archbishop of Cashel favoured having the Thurles "Monks" live according to some rule as he wished to form them into a religious Institute.

In 1810 Br. Rice on request, sent the Archbishop a brief outline of the form of life followed by his Brothers. About the same time his Grace, whilst on a visit to France got a copy of the rules of a Society of Religious men called "the Society of St. Crispin." He urged the Thurles "monks" to adopt the rule of the French Society. The rule provided that the Superior should rule but for a very short time (a month or for some short time). After a period of probation, each member should assume authority over the house. The Superior was elected. There are indications that an effort was made in Thurles to give this unusual type of rule a trial.

It was in all probability between the year 1810 and 1815 that Dr. Bray was endeavouring to found a society of men for the education of boys either according to the rules of Br. Rice's society or to those of the Society of St. Crispin. When it failed he sent them off to Mount Sion.

Fr. James Healy continued to have a big interest in the Thurles house. He donated vestments and sacred vessels to that house as well as to Sexton Street, Limerick. He used to visit Br. Baptist Cahill in Thurles and in Limerick during the time that Br. Baptist was a member of the Limerick community. He died 24th January 1844 as P.P. Newport, Co. Tipperary.

Tradition amongst the Cahill family, Callan, states that Br Baptist Cahill joined our Founder in Waterford under the following circumstance: "One day most Rev. Dr. Bray of Cashel met Dr. John Power of Waterford at some ecclesiastical function. In the course of conversation, they spoke of education and of the lamentable ignorance of religion that existed amongst the children of the poorer classes. Dr. Power said: "I am very fortunate indeed in having many of the poor boys of Waterford City being cared for, I have an excellent man." "Indeed," said Dr. Bray, "and who is the teacher?" "A Mr Rice, who comes from Callan, a man who has devoted himself and his wealth to the instruction of the poor. I have no fear for them now." "Well" said Dr. Bray, "is not that strange, I'll wager I have as good a man in Thurles teaching my boys, for I too have a Callan man, a very good and generous man – Mr Cahill."

As a result of their conversation, Brs. Baptist and Joseph Cahill were sent by the Archbishop to Mount Sion, Waterford, to make their novitiate under the Founder and to be trained by him in the religious life and in the management of the schools. On the completion of their training they returned to Thurles, where Br. Baptist established a regular monastery under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop and in which they followed the rules of life given them by the Founder.

John Shelly, in his book on Edmund I. Rice, referring to Brs. Austin Dunphy and Baptist Cahill said: "they were always cheerful and would remind a person of the headlines in the old copies" (used before we were nationally educated). "Quiet minded men have always peace within." They visited Callan every year and they had many friends here.

Most of the details re Br. T.B. Cahill were given the writer by the late Thomas Baptist Cahill, grandnephew of Br. T.B. Cahill. Mr Cahill remarked that every generation of the Cahills has had a member bearing the name Thomas Baptist after their worthy uncle.