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RIGHT REVEREND EDWARD DOMINIC FENWICK, O.P., 1832-1932

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HE year 1932 is prolific in centenary celebrations. Notable among these public tributes to the memory of world-famous men is that to the great German writer, John Wolfgang Goethe, the centenary of whose death is being celebrated with pomp in his fatherland and by lovers of literature throughout the world. In America a nationwide celebration lasting almost the entire year marks the second centennial of the birth of George Washington.

As lovers of literature we hail the memory of the illustrious Goethe. As loyal Americans we enter spontaneously and enthusiastically into the celebrations in honor of the noble Washington, vying with our fellow countrymen to express our appreciation of the inestimable services rendered by him during the trying times of our national birth and infancy. But we American Catholics and particularly those of us who are interested in the Order of Saint Dominic or living in the states of Ohio and Kentucky have in this year 1932 still another anniversary to evoke our admiration and stimulate our pride. For this year marks also the hundredth anniversary of the death of the Right Reverend Edward Dominic Fenwick of the Order of Preachers, pioneer missionary in Kentucky, the veritable "Apostle of Ohio," the first Bishop of Cincinnati and the founder of the Dominican Order in the United States.

Edward Fenwick was born August 19, 1768. His birthplace was Saint Mary's County in Maryland, that section that embraced the original settlement of Lord Baltimore—the cradle of American Catholicism. Edward was the son of Ignatius Fenwick who served as a Colonel in the Maryland militia during the Revolutionary War and he was the sixth descendant of Cuthbert Fenwick, of an old English family, who had come to Maryland either in the original expedition of 1634 or shortly afterward. The Maryland Fenwicks were an honorable and influential family and they took a prominent part in the public affairs of the colony until the Penal Laws of 1689 forced the withdrawal from public life of all Catholics.

Still a small boy at the outbreak of the Revolution, with his father taking active part in the struggle for his country's freedom, little Edward knew from his early years the hardships and horrors concomitant with warfare. His early education was probably received at his home from private tutors since the Penal Laws proscribed Catholic schools in the English colonies as well as in the mother country. During these penal years English and English colonial youths could obtain a Catholic education only in Catholic schools on the Continent. Thus in the late fall of 1784 Edward Fenwick entered the Dominican college of Holy Cross at Bornhem in Belgium. This college had been founded in 1658 by Cardinal Thomas Howard, an English member of the Order of Preachers. It served not only as a means of preserving the English Dominican province but also as a school for the Catholic training and education of English youths.

Edward Fenwick completed his classical studies at Holy Cross in 1788, after which he enjoyed a brief vacation traveling through Europe. He was now at the parting of the ways. As the scion of a prominent and rather well-to-do family he could return to his native Maryland with the prospect of a successful career in profession or business or as gentleman farmer. The Colonies having won their independence from England, the Penal Laws were no longer in effect. After a century of subjection and persecution American Catholics could face the future with joy and optimism. Nevertheless the faith of Edward Fenwick—his chief heritage from ancestors who for its preservation had suffered persecution, exile and loss—actuated him to turn his back on these alluring promises of the world, to take up his cross and follow his Saviour. In September, 1788 he was clothed

in the white Dominican habit, receiving the religious name of Dominic, after the saintly founder of the great Order. On March 26, 1790, he made his solemn, perpetual profession. He received the orders of subdeacon and deacon from Bishop Ferdinand M. Lobkowitz in Ghent and on Feb. 23, 1792, he was ordained to the priesthood, probably by the same prelate and in the same city.

By this time the grim shadow of the French Revolution had extended until it reached the section in Belgium in which Holy Cross was situated. So alarming were the depredations of these eighteenth century "Reds" that it was deemed prudent for the Fathers to seek safety in England. Young Father Fenwick was left in charge of the College, it being thought that his American citizenship would probably receive more consideration from the Revolutionists. It did not save him entirely for the college was partly burned and Father Fenwick was for some time a prisoner. After many hardships he was released and he finally made his way to England.

In the meantime a House had been established at Carshalton, in Surrey, a few miles from London, and during the next few years a school was maintained there, Father Fenwick doing his share of teaching at this institution in addition to working on the missions. The state of the public mind in England was not at this time favorable to Catholic schools and although the college at Bornhem had been reopened the confusion occasioned by the French Revolution made prospects there rather gloomy. The time therefore seemed most propitious to Father Fenwick for the fulfillment of a project which had ever lain close to his heart—the establishment of the Order of Saint Dominic in his native land. Many obstacles lay in the way, the chief ones being the paucity of English Dominicans and their extreme poverty. The English Dominican superiors were consequently reluctant to spare any of their number. After patient work and many disappointments and setbacks, however, Father Fenwick finally secured the necessary papal approbation and his superiors' consent, also several co-laborers for the new vineyard. With one companion he sailed from London in September, 1804, landing in Norfolk late in November.

Father Fenwick had hoped to found a college in his native Maryland, but in this he was disappointed. The Right Reverend John Carroll, Bishop of Baltimore, whose diocese then included the entire country, requested him instead to labor in the newly developed land of Kentucky. Maryland already possessed two

colleges, Georgetown and Saint Mary's, while the rapidly growing church in Kentucky was almost without priests. With his characteristic obedience and humility, Father Fenwick accepted the will of his Bishop. While awaiting the arrangements for the establishment of the Order in Kentucky and the arrival of other members from Europe he labored on the Maryland missions. In September, 1805, Fathers Wilson and Tuite of the Order of Preachers arrived from England and shortly after started overland for Kentucky. In July of the following year Father Fenwick arrived in Kentucky. He purchased for the new community a farm of five hundred acres, near Springfield, in Washington County. This was in the heart of the largest Catholic colony in Kentucky and was a central point for the other Catholic settlements. In the little house on their farm the first Dominican convent in the United States was formally opened. It was called Saint Rose, after Saint Rose of Lima, a Dominican Tertiary and the first native canonized saint of the New World. The Province was named Saint Joseph's, in honor of the holy patriarch and foster father of Our Lord. The Church in Kentucky which since its beginning a number of years earlier had had but few, sometimes only one priest, welcomed the Friars with great joy and from the beginning their pastoral ministrations bore abundant fruit.

The idea uppermost in the minds of the Dominicans was the foundation of an institution of higher learning. From their arrival in Kentucky, while doing excellent missionary work they kept their ideal ever before them. Overcoming the obstacles of poverty and small numbers they resolutely began the building of a college. At the same time they planned the erection of a church which was to surpass any other ecclesiastical edifice in the country, excepting the new cathedral in Baltimore. The church was completed in 1809 and the college—called Saint Thomas Aquinas—was already in use, although lack of funds retarded the completion of the latter until 1812. Kentucky's pioneer religious establishment was now in full working order, albeit greatly undermanned.

Father Fenwick, although possessed of considerable administrative ability—as he proved in the planning and the establishment of the new province—was nevertheless of such modesty and humility that he desired rather to obey than to command. Accordingly he had petitioned his superiors in Rome to appoint as provincial of the new province, Father Samuel Thomas Wil-

son, a talented English Dominican who had taught Fenwick at Bornhem and who had been his chief associate in the founding of the province. This request was granted and in October, 1807, there arrived from Rome the documents appointing the learned English priest the first superior of Saint Joseph's province. Fr. Wilson continued also as head of the new college and of the Dominican novitiate, which had been established at St. Rose. Fr. Fenwick was now free to do the work closest to his heart—that of itinerant preacher, veritable shepherd, seeking out the stray souls in the western wilderness and reconciling them to God.

In the year 1808 Fr. Fenwick first crossed the Ohio river into the state of the same name. At this time, however, it was but an occasional journey, his own field still lying south of the river, in Kentucky. Ohio had grown rapidly since its admission as a state in 1802 and some Catholics were among the newcomers. In the year 1816 four young Dominicans were raised to the priesthood at St. Rose and with Kentucky well supplied with missionaries Fr. Fenwick was able to devote his entire time to the missions in Ohio. Reports have been handed down—both in writing and in tradition—of the unceasing labors of the Friar Preacher while ministering to his widely scattered flock. He almost lived on horseback. Back and forth over hundreds of miles of territory he went, no journey being too long or too difficult that he might bring the consolations of religion to the faithful or the light of faith to those groping in the darkness. About the end of 1817 he was overjoyed to receive an auxiliary in the person of his nephew, Rev. Nicholas D. Young, O.P., who had just been ordained at St. Rose. In 1818 the first church in Ohio was built near the town of Somerset. It was called St. Joseph's and the present Dominican church and Priory of St. Joseph stand on the land of the original church. Shortly after there were completed the church of St. Patrick outside Cincinnati and that of St. Mary at Lancaster. The labors of "The Apostle of Ohio" were beginning to bear abundant fruit. Adjoining the church of St. Joseph there was erected a small, log structure to serve as a convent for the Fathers on the Ohio missions. This was the beginning of the convent of St. Joseph, the second convent of the Dominican Order in this country.

The rapidly growing section of Ohio and the Northwest had grown to such extent that it could no longer be well directed by the Ordinary of Bardstown, Kentucky. Bishop Flaget re-

quested the reigning Pontiff, Pius VII, to erect a new diocese with the see at Cincinnati. For Bishop he nominated Fr. Fenwick and one other priest, but Archbishop Marechal of Baltimore, Metropolitan of the province, eventually recommended only Fr. Fenwick as being best fitted for the new episcopal see. On June 19, 1821, Pope Pius VII, by the Bull, "Inter Multiplices" erected the new diocese of Cincinnati and appointed Fr. Fenwick its first Ordinary. Fr. Fenwick was raised to the episcopacy on Sunday, Jan. 13, 1822. The consecrator was Bishop Flaget and the ceremony took place in the Dominican church of St. Rose, which church Fr. Fenwick himself had built.

The new Bishop was faced with extreme poverty. He was entirely without funds and his diocese was as yet unorganized and very poor. The people of the Dominican parish of St. Rose, although themselves of small means, undertook to raise something to help the new Bishop establish himself in his diocese. They contributed about five hundred dollars, which sum while small in itself helped the Bishop to reach his see and to begin his episcopal ministrations. The same spirit of charity in sharing its mite was exhibited by the convent of St. Rose in giving Bishop Fenwick whatever sacred vessels and vestments it could possibly spare. A small beginning indeed for the great diocese into which Cincinnati has since grown! Several Dominicans accompanied Bishop Fenwick to his episcopal city, among them being the Provincial, the Very Rev. Samuel T. Wilson, who was to be the Vicar General of the new diocese.

What is to-day a trip of a few hours in comfortable trains was then a difficult and sometimes dangerous journey requiring a number of days. It was made in an old-fashioned cart, drawn by two horses, over rough roads. The company arrived in Cincinnati Saturday, March 23, and rented a vacant, one-room house as shelter for the night. On Sunday, Mass was probably said in this house and in that of Michael Scott, one of the pioneer Catholics of Cincinnati. The first church in Cincinnati had been built outside the city limits. This was due to the bigotry of the people or to poverty, or probably to both reasons. Contact with the confessors of the Faith had softened the antagonism of the inhabitants, and Bishop Fenwick now secured land in the heart of the city and upon it was built Cincinnati's first Cathedral, a small brick building, called St. Peter's.

Bishop Fenwick's new dignity did not lessen his personal labor or travels. His zeal kept him constantly on the move for

the good of souls until the day of his death. Throughout the states of Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin he journeyed in the exercise of his priestly and episcopal ministrations. His travels in Michigan convinced him of the necessity of obtaining as soon as possible the erection of that state into a diocese, with the see at Detroit.

The extreme poverty of his diocese and the impossibility of securing sufficient money in it or in other parts of this country prompted Bishop Fenwick to take a trip to Europe in search of assistance for his extensive vineyard. He paid his visit to Rome, arriving just after the death of Pope Pius VII. Pope Leo XII who was elected soon afterward admitted the Bishop to a special audience the day following his coronation, and promised the missionary Bishop every help and encouragement. The Bishop during this journey obtained for his diocese the services of several young Europeans, notable among them being Rev. Frederic Rese, later first Bishop of Detroit. Bishop Fenwick visited many of the Continental cities, being warmly received everywhere. In Lyons, one of the principal cities of his journey, he was given a most hearty welcome by the new Society for the Propagation of the Faith. This great body for the advancement of religion not only gave him eight thousand francs for his diocese but promised yearly contributions. It may be mentioned here that Bishop Fenwick was later the means of founding a similar organization in Vienna, the Leopoldine Society, which, like the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, did so much toward the upbuilding of Catholicism in the United States. American Catholics, when asked for contributions for missionary work, whether in poverty-stricken sections of Europe or in new missions in pagan lands, should recall the valuable help given by European Catholics to our own struggling church but a century and less ago.

The growth in the number of the faithful plus the receipt of twenty-six hundred dollars from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith of Lyons induced Bishop Fenwick to begin the construction of a new cathedral. Ground was broken next to the original church of St. Peter and on Dec. 17, 1826, the new cathedral of St. Peter was dedicated. From all accounts of the times we learn that the new edifice was admired by all. It was of Gothic architecture, accommodated eight hundred people and it was widely praised as surpassing older structures of its kind.

The interior was decorated with beautiful paintings, given to Bishop Fenwick by Cardinal Fesch, uncle of Napoleon.

While continuing and encouraging the active ministry among the faithful, Bishop Fenwick did not fail to provide for the future of his diocese. He knew well that a native clergy is necessary for the substantial, permanent growth of religion. Europe had done nobly in supplying both clergy and money for the new missionary diocese, but the time was approaching when the diocese should sustain itself. On May 11, 1829, the Bishop opened the new diocesan seminary at Cincinnati, which for over one hundred years has provided a steady supply of priests for the diocese and other parts of the country.

Another agency for untold good throughout the entire Middle West was the establishment of a diocesan paper, the *Catholic Telegraph*. The first issue of this paper appeared Oct. 22, 1831, and it too for over a century has been a valuable instrument for explaining Catholic doctrine, refuting calumnies against the Faith and affording to Catholics a reliable medium for learning the current news concerning the Church. It may be noted in passing that the *Catholic Telegraph* is to-day the oldest Catholic paper in the United States.

Another measure for the good of the diocese was effected by Bishop Fenwick in 1829 when at his invitation the Sisters of Charity of Mother Seton's community took up their residence in the diocese. Soon after he succeeded in obtaining the services of Dominican sisters from St. Catherine's in Kentucky for the parishes of Somerset, Zanesville and Canton. The Bishop had made previous attempts to establish nuns in the diocese, but they had failed owing to poverty, small numbers and sickness.

Still another factor for the permanent welfare of the diocese was the establishment of a diocesan college, the Athenaeum, which was opened on Oct. 17, 1831. The teachers were priests of the diocese and the student body numbered many non-Catholic youths. By this means ignorance of the Faith and prejudice against it were gradually broken down among the separated brethren of the state. The Jesuit Fathers, whom Bishop Fenwick had long tried to bring into the diocese, finally accepted the invitation of his successor, Bishop Purcell, and in 1840 they took charge of the college. Its name was changed to that of St. Francis Xavier and as such it has flourished ever since. We may well admire the foresight, the courage and the ability of

this pioneer bishop who builded so well for both present and future in spite of meager facilities and much discouragement.

Bishop Fenwick's activities and exertions were not confined to his own diocese. Truly Catholic and truly Dominican, he gave of his strength and talents to the whole of the Lord's vineyard, while taking excellent care of his own particular portion. He took a prominent part in the First Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1829. Extant documents of Archbishops Carroll, Marechal and Whitfield attest the esteem in which they held the able and industrious, though modest Bishop of Cincinnati.

It is evidence of Bishop Fenwick's solicitude for the souls of his Indians of the Northwest that his last journey in the East was taken in their behalf. Under his direction schools had been opened for the children of these red men in the states of Michigan and Wisconsin, and as the upkeep of these schools was far beyond his slender means the Bishop journeyed to Washington to petition for a share of the appropriations granted for educational work among the Indians.

The Bishop was home but a few days from this business when he began the visitation of his vast diocese that was to be his last journey. Advanced in years and worn with labors, he nevertheless had the true apostolic spirit, which drove him forward on his holy work until he literally dropped in his tracks. On June 14, 1832, he left his episcopal city, never to return alive. He began his journey northward, visiting many of his Ohio parishes before entering the state of Michigan. When he reached Detroit he found the cholera raging in that city. During his visitation of the other parishes in Michigan and those in Wisconsin he found the same condition prevailing. Numbers were dying of the dread malady and the Bishop assisted in the last moments of many. Fr. Richard, the venerable missionary in Michigan, and Bishop Fenwick himself were attacked by the disease, but with them it did not at first appear serious. The Bishop, concluding his visitation of Michigan and Wisconsin, returned into Ohio. At Canton he administered the sacrament of Confirmation, it being his last episcopal function. It was at Canton that he heard of the death of the saintly Fr. Richard, and with a premonition of his own approaching end, he remarked to Fr. (afterward Archbishop) John M. Henni, "My son, I will soon follow him." He left Canton and started for Wooster, to visit the Catholics there, en route to the churches lying further south. The cholera, which had already begun its deadly work,

now increased rapidly and the fever caused acute suffering. He arrived in Wooster at sunset and went to bed almost immediately at a local hotel. His condition became so serious that the people in the hotel feared to go near him because of the dreaded fever. A Catholic lady, Miss Eliza Rose Powell, who had traveled in the stagecoach with the Bishop, called two local doctors and all night they tried to stay the fever of the stricken prelate. Their efforts were in vain and at noon on Wednesday, Sept. 26, 1832, the Right Reverend Edward Dominic Fenwick passed to his eternal reward.

Owing to fear of the cholera the body was buried at once. Fr. Henni, who had been summoned from Canton the previous evening, arrived later on Wednesday, but saw only the mound of earth which covered the mortal remains of his late bishop. Bishop Fenwick had died as he had lived—zealous, indefatigable, a true apostle of Jesus Christ.

Bishop Fenwick's body was removed in February of the following year to Cincinnati and laid under the cathedral which he had built. Fifteen years later, on March 13, 1848, the body was again moved, this time to the splendid new cathedral built by his successor, Bishop Purcell. In 1916, under the direction of the late archbishop, the Most Reverend Henry Moeller, the bodies of Bishop Fenwick and Archbishop Elder were transferred to a new mausoleum, erected in St. Joseph's cemetery. There, in the land which he had evangelized so well, the body of Edward Fenwick awaits the resurrection.

The name of Edward Dominic Fenwick ranks high in the annals of the early American Church. The second native son to be raised to the episcopal dignity, he was a worthy companion of the noble Archbishop John Carroll, the first American to receive the plenitude of the priesthood. True disciple of Jesus Christ and worthy son of Saint Dominic, Edward Fenwick served faithfully and well his God and his fellow man. On this, the centenary of his death, we offer to his memory the tribute of filial affection and sincere admiration.

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