

Cardinal Frühwirth

By BRO. BASIL SHEEHAN, O. P.



ON the 21st of August, an event, of singular interest to every Dominican, took place at Rome. It was the celebration of the eightieth birthday of His Eminence Francis Andrew Card. Frühwirth, Grand Poenitentiary of the Holy Roman Church and faithful son of St. Dominic.

Almost the entire four score years of the venerable jubilarian's life have been devoted to God's service. From earliest childhood he had resolved to become a priest, and at the age of twelve entered the minor ecclesiastical seminary of Graz, in his native province of Styria, to begin his studies. Even at this early period the young boy manifested those traits of application and aptness for study, which were to characterize the entire life of the student, friar and cardinal. As the youth advanced in his course he became daily more firmly convinced of the excellence of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. With him to see the truth was to follow it. Accordingly on Sept. 15, 1863, laying aside the cassock of the seminarian, he took the habit of St. Dominic, in the convent of St. Ann, receiving the name of Bro. Andrew of Piscaria. From the very beginning of his religious life, the young novice encountered difficulties. He was handicapped by ill health and it seemed that the austerity of the rule of Dominican strict observance, introduced into the convent a few years before by the Most Rev. P. A. V. Jandel, would tax his frail constitution beyond endurance. But the obstacle served but to steel his high resolve. He had put his hand to the plow and he would not turn back. Accordingly after an edifying novitiate, he pronounced his vows, Sept. 15, 1864. From this time he threw himself whole heartedly into the study of philosophy, theology and kindred subjects preparatory to the priesthood, which goal he finally attained July 5, 1866.

The extraordinary talents and excellent character of the young Dominican had not escaped the vigilant eyes of his superiors, and that he might have an opportunity further to develop his God-given gifts, they sent him to the College of St. Thomas



Fr. Andreas Card. Frühwirth

at the convent of Sancta Maria supra Minervam at Rome, to complete his studies. July 14, 1870 he successfully passed the examination for the degree of Lector in Sacred Theology.

In 1872, Fr. Frühwirth was made sub-prior of the convent at Graz, where for two years he had been engaged in teaching. During this time he victoriously manifested his ability as a canonist, in a litigation between the Episcopal Curia and his Order, over the ownership of the church of St. Ann.

So quickly did the young priest's fame spread through the Province, that in 1876, the Fathers of the convent of Vienna elected him, then only thirty years of age, as their prior. This was the first of an almost uninterrupted series of honors and dignities, bestowed upon the friar. Besides the indispensable qualities of scholarship and piety, Father Frühwirth brought to his office, a sound business capacity. Under his able administration the convent, heavily burdened with excessive taxation, was placed upon an efficient basis and rendered self-supporting. As the number of his subjects increased, Father Frühwirth gradually introduced the strict observance of regular life, thus laying the foundation for the restoration of the Bohemian Province, later happily effected under the generalship of Fr. Cormier.

The success which crowned Father Frühwirth's term of office, naturally led to his reelection in 1879. However he had served less than a year of his second term when he was elected Provincial of the Province of the Empire, the name given the convents of the Austro-Hungarian and Bohemian Provinces, temporarily collected into one by Father Jandel. The whole country was still suffering from the ravages of Josephinism, and consequently the observance in the convents of the province had become lax. The new provincial bent all his efforts to bring up the community observance to the traditional Dominican standard. With the permission of the Most Rev. Fr. Larroca, then the Order's superior, he erected at Vienna a Studium Generale.

When his term of office expired in 1884, Father Frühwirth returned to his professorial duties, this time at Vienna. In the following year he successfully passed the ad gradus examination at Rome. As Socius to the Provincial of the Province of the Empire he attended the General Chapter of the Order held at Louvain in 1885, and shortly after was appointed Regent of Studies in the Studium Generale at Vienna. He was elected

Prior of that same convent in 1889 and had served only one year in office, when upon the death of Father Thomas Anselmi, he became Vicar of the Province. At the next provincial chapter, held in 1891, he was for a second time elected provincial.

Father Frühwirth had at this time resided at Vienna for fifteen years, during which time he had become a prominent figure in the life of the city. His fine erudition and rare traits of diplomacy won for him the esteem of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. His talents and accomplishments were requisitioned even outside his Order. By his skill and adroitness in legal procedures, he brought to a close, in favor of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers, a controversy, which had been pending for years, whereby their church and convent, to which was attached an ancient and valuable library, were exempted from state taxes. Cardinal Gangebauer, Archbishop of Vienna, admitted him into his diocesan council, that he might make use of his knowledge of canon law in settling delicate matrimonial questions. The Apostolic Nuntios to the court of the Emperor and high government officials made him their friend and confidant. Though pressed on all sides by administrative and temporal issues, the eminent Dominican was not forgetful of his first and most important duty, as an ambassador of Christ and a son of St. Dominic,—the salvation of souls. He spent long and fruitful hours in the confessional, and by his fatherly advice brought hope and comfort to untold numbers of Christ's strayed sheep.

Evidence of the high repute enjoyed by Father Frühwirth in the eyes of the authorities both of Church and State, was his nomination as a candidate for the vacant episcopal See of Lagenfurt in Corinthia. This was the more remarkable, since for centuries no member of a mendicant order had been proposed for the episcopate in that locality. However Divine Providence had decreed that the Dominican Order was not yet to be deprived of the valuable services of her honored son, so the office was bestowed upon another.

In what remarkable manner the Order was to enjoy the fruits of Father Frühwirth's talents, events soon revealed. At the General Chapter of the Order convoked at Lyons, Father Frühwirth was elected Master General, Sept. 19, 1891. In the subsequent sessions of the chapter, the new Master General won the hearts of all present, by his affability and kindness and ex-

cited high hopes that his government would inaugurate a new era of increased activity and usefulness for the Order.

On the feast of All Saints, 1891, Father Frühwirth issued the first of his great encyclical letters to the brethren of the Order. In erudite and well chosen language, the General proposed the virtues of St. Dominic as particularly worthy of imitation by every true Dominican. He laid stress upon the important part which the virtues of poverty, humility and mutual charity must play in the life of every Dominican and emphasized the necessity and excellence of religious observance for attaining the end of the Order, the salvation of souls by teaching and preaching. He exhorted them to be assiduous in the cultivation of the Sacred Sciences, and showed particular solicitude on the question of the education of novices. He also informed them, that in accordance with the custom inaugurated by his predecessor, Father Jandel, he had on Sept. 19th, consecrated the entire Order to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In a special letter addressed to the Sisters of the Order, Father Frühwirth thanked them for the prayers and good works they had offered for the success of the recent chapter, and begged them to persevere in their prayers in behalf of the Apostolic work of the Fathers. They were exhorted to guard against any relaxation of regular observance, and to continue their solicitous care for their own spiritual development.

The encyclical letter on "Sacred Preaching" issued March 2, 1923, is without doubt the most remarkable of his communications to the brethren. It is a masterpiece and has been deservedly called the "Golden Summa" of preaching. Drawn up for the instruction and advice of members of the order which is dedicated in a special manner to preaching, it is an admirable guide for all those who have been chosen to announce the word of God to the people.

Father Frühwirth did a great service to historical science, when he caused the Acts of the General Chapters from 1220 to 1844 to be edited and published in nine volumes. This valuable work received high commendation from the learned world, and gave a new impetus to historical studies within the Order. Father Frühwirth also founded the "Analecta Ordinis Praedicatorum," a publication now in its thirty-third year. It is published in Latin, and is the official organ of the Master General, through

which his official acts and those of the Holy See relating to the Order are communicated to Dominicans all over the world.

During Father Frühwirth's term of office, Pope Leo XIII ordered a new and critical edition of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, and naturally entrusted the task to the great Order of which St. Thomas was a member. No work could have been dearer to the heart of the scholarly Dominican General. With whole hearted zest he entered into the great task entrusted to him. As the first step toward the realization of the monumental work, Father Frühwirth established a permanent organization known as the "Editors of the Works of St. Thomas," and composed of some of the most able scholars of the Order. The work made such rapid progress under Father Frühwirth's direction, that before he retired from office, the first six volumes of the famous Leonine Edition of the Works of St. Thomas had been published.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the triumphs achieved for the Church and for the Order by the prayers and labors of the saintly Master General during his term of office. Through his instrumentality, many names have been added to the list of Dominican Blesseds. He made possible the regular convocation of the Order's General Chapters every three years as prescribed by the Constitutions; and purchased many ancient monuments of the Order in Rome and the adjacent parts of Italy. Under his direction the Order increased in numbers, in the development of its spiritual life and in the scope and importance of its activities. When we reflect that this progress was not without much labor and anxiety on the part of Father Frühwirth, we are not surprised at his confession in the last letter he wrote to the Order as its supreme head, that he was never for a moment free from serious and vexatious cares. But like all holy men, he bore his burden patiently and always showed a benign and paternal affection to his subjects. His term of office expired on May 21, 1904, and the next day he was succeeded by Most Rev. Hyacinth Cormier who had previously been his Socius and was at that time Procurator General of the Order.

Relieved of the tremendous burdens of administration, Father Frühwirth devoted himself to the study of the early history of the Order. But his retirement was destined to be of short duration, for in 1905 the Holy See sent him as Apostolic

Visitor to the famous convent of Klosterneuburg, near Vienna. Two years later, Pope Pius X created him Nuntio to the Court of Bavaria and titular Archbishop of Heraclea. He was consecrated by His Eminence Cardinal Merry del Val, Papal Secretary of State, on November 30, 1907, and left immediately for his post at Munich. The extraordinary tact and diplomacy, with which the venerable prelate discharged his duties won for him the commendation of His Holiness Pope Benedict XV, expressed in a letter, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. In a secret consistory held on Dec. 16, 1915, the Nuntio was created Cardinal.

After nine years of faithful service at the Bavarian Court, Cardinal Frühwirth left Munich in November, 1916, and repaired to Rome, where despite his advanced age he has continued to take an active part in the executive work of the Holy See. Old age has in no way impaired the venerable cardinal's intellectual powers and capacity for work, so on January eighth of the present year, His Holiness Pope Pius XI, appointed him Grand Penitentiary of the Holy Roman Church, one of the most important positions in the Roman Curia.

The great dignities bestowed on the humble son of St. Dominic have in no way altered the simplicity of his life. Religious regularity and evangelical poverty continue to pervade his life of daily toil and prayer.

To their venerable brother in St. Dominic, the novices of St. Joseph's Province extend their heartfelt felicitations, and offer a prayer, that the faithful servant may continue to "flourish in the Courts of the House of our God" and may still "increase in a fruitful old age."