

VERY REV. E. G. FITZGERALD, O. P., S. T. M.

To encourage study and teaching of philosophy and theology and to offer, even in this life, a fitting reward to those who dedicate their talents to these twin subjects, the Dominican Order instituted, with the approbation of Rome, the degree of Master in Sacred Theology. It has been conferred on many illustrious sons of St. Dominic; men who gave their lives to teach sound Catholic doctrine; religious who upheld, both by lectures or accomplished writings, the teaching of the Angelic Doctor.

Quite recently a son of St. Joseph's Province of the Dominicans in America was the recipient of this sublime dignity. The Friar Preacher thus honored was the present Prior of the Dominican House of Studies at Washington, the Very Reverend E. G. Fitzgerald, O. P.

Father Fitzgerald was born in Washington in 1875, and received his early instruction from the Sisters of St. Dominic in the parochial school of the Dominican parish there, completing his course in the classics under the direction of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at St. John's College. Heeding the call to the religious state, at seventeen years of age he entered the Novitiate of the Order then at old St. Rose Priory, in Kentucky, where he took the three vows of religion on October 10, 1893. After another year of study in that historic Convent he was sent to St. Joseph's, in Ohio, to finish his course. He was elevated to the Holy Priesthood on April 5, 1898. Chosen by his superiors for the arduous task of teaching, we find him in that year a student at St. Stephen's Biblical School in Jerusalem. In this celebrated center of learning he spent two years under renowned Dominican professors and was admitted to the Lectorate in Theology in 1901. Returning to America Father Fitzgerald was assigned to the teaching staff of St. Joseph's College, Somerset, Ohio, which was at that time the House of Studies of the Eastern Province of Dominicans in the United States. Here the young lector remained until 1905, when the House of Studies was transferred to the new Convent erected at the Catholic University. Coming to Washington at that time, he continued his teaching until 1908. In that year he went to Rome to undergo the examinations preparatory to receiving the degree of Master.

After successfully passing these examinations, he came home and in 1910 was elected Prior of St. Vincent Ferrer's Priory in New York City. Such were the capabilities he displayed in the discharge of this office and in the management of the large parish served by the Fathers attached to the Priory, that he was reelected by his brethren for another term as Superior. Shortly after the expiration of this second term, in 1916, he was chosen Prior of the House of Studies at Washington. Here he resumed the lectures he had interrupted to take up the duties of Superior at St. Vincent's. At the close of his first term of office at Washington, Father Fitzgerald was selected for another period of three years as Prior of the House of Studies, a position he now holds.

In October, 1921, the Provincial Chapter of the Order was held at Washington for the selection of a Provincial. The fathers gathered there petitioned the Master General of the Friar Preachers to confer the degree of Master in Sacred Theology upon Father Fitzgerald, whom they felt had merited the distinction and honor by his faithful service as professor for so many years. Acceding to the wish of his brother-Dominicans, the Master General commissioned the Provincial, Very Rev. Raymond Meagher, O. P., to bestow this high office upon Father Fitzgerald.

The simple but impressive ceremony took place in the chapel of the House of Studies on Sunday, December 18, 1921, immediately following High Mass. In the presence of His Lordship Rt. Rev. Thomas J. Shahan, Rector of the Catholic University, a large gathering of professors from the University, relatives and friends and the community of the House of Studies, Father Fitzgerald received, from the hands of the Provincial, the ring and biretta, the insignia of the Mastership, and was formally installed in his new and exalted position.

From what has already been said regarding Father Fitzgerald's activities as a teacher, it may be noted that many years elapse before a professor is even eligible for the degree of Master in Theology. In the Order of St. Dominic the Lectorate is necessary before a member can teach, while the Mastership may be conferred after thirteen years or more spent in the lecture hall of a house of studies of the Order or a university. This sublime dignity is a compensation for loyal service during

many years and an encouragement to even greater achievement. From the time he receives the degree as Lector, a professor may be considered as passing through a probationary period. At the end of seven years of teaching he may, if his superiors so decree, undergo the rigid oral and written examinations held in Rome. The former covers a range of a hundred theses in philosophical and theological subjects; the latter requires the submission of a book written by the candidate and treating of some phase of sacred science. If the candidate is successful in this examination he is granted the Baccalaureate and is considered "on the way" to the Mastership. At the completion of an additional six years or more of magisterial labors he may be postulated for the lofty position of Master in Sacred Theology by the fathers of one of the Chapters of the Province. This petition is forwarded to the Master General in Rome, by whose authority the degree is granted. Should the General of the Order see fit to bestow the distinction, a letter of institution is sent from Rome and the Provincial or some other distinguished member of the Province is deputed to preside at the ceremony of installation.

The Mastership, like the office of Preacher General, carries with it the right to an active vote in the Chapters of the Province. Unlike the Priors, who enjoy a vote only during their term of office, Masters and Preachers General may exercise this privilege for life.

Such in brief is the meaning of the recent honor conferred upon Father Fitzgerald. The occasion of his institution as Master was one of pride and joy to his community. The Novices especially, among whom he has been for such a long period, congratulate him upon his new distinction and wish him many, many more years of fruitful service for God's Church and the welfare of the Order of Preachers.

—Bro. Richard King, O. P.