

PERE GARDEIL,—AN APPRECIATION

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ON October 2, 1931, Père Ambrose Gardeil, a great Dominican, died in Paris. Born in 1859, he made his religious profession at the age of 20, and labored as a member of the French Province of the Dominican Order for 52 years, studying, teaching, preaching, writing. Though he is known to the world chiefly through his writings, the principal work of his crowded life was teaching, and it is primarily as a teacher that he achieved uncommon and conspicuous success. True son of St. Dominic and brother of St. Thomas, he needs no eulogy for the importance of his work is well known and appreciated wherever the wisdom of the Angelic Doctor is studied and treasured. He needs no monument for he leaves his living image in the students whom he guided to intellectual maturity. But, in an age of mediocrity, it is well to review the work of a truly great man, to pay tribute to his memory and, perhaps, to aspire to his imitation.

When we bring the light of inquiry to the career of a man who is truly great, luminous shafts are thrown back as from the gleaming facets of a perfect gem. So in the life of Père Gardeil we can find much to admire and to imitate, that here must be passed over in silence. Our tribute to his memory will be confined to an indication of the high perfection he attained in the chief work of his life, study and teaching. To him belonged the high title, Master of Sacred Theology. No greater tribute can be paid than that we offer to the memory of Père Gardeil—he was an ideal Master of Sacred Theology.

The standards and ideals of this high office were established at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century by men who were intellectual giants, scholars and teachers supreme, and it is heartening that in our day when many universities and their meaningless degrees are being severely, and justly, criticized, men may be found worthy to be called Master according to the exalted standards maintained in their integrity from the golden age of higher learning. It is not enough that the Master of Sacred Theology in the Dominican

Order be a profound student, a trained thinker, and an ardent seeker after truth; all these he must be, and more, for his work is not merely to know but to communicate knowledge, not merely to think but to train and inspire others in that neglected art; in short, he must be an intellectual leader whose own perfection is the chief means to be applied in the formation and perfection of others.

The whole life of Père Gardeil was regulated by these standards, and the fact is attested not only by the numerous men, students of his, who are now successfully carrying on the work he began in them but by his written works, the fruit of ceaseless and untiring labor.

Père Garrigou-Lagrange, one of his most distinguished students, writing in *Revue Thomiste*,¹ that superb review of which Père Gardeil was co-founder, reveals to us from his own privileged experience the secret of his great master's success, a secret that was really nothing else than an intimate comprehension of the mind and the learning process, with an almost inspired power of adapting his action to the demands of that process, and of directing it to its only object, truth. We are told of the declaration of his pupils, at the theological college of Flavigny, that he had really opened up to them the treasures of the Second Part of the *Summa Theologica* by his commentary on the fundamental principles underlying the entire work. Anyone who has studied or taught the *Summa Theologica* will appreciate the significance of the students' tribute, since the *Summa Theologica*, a consummate work of art, demands the highest type of pedagogical artistry in the one who teaches it. The conception of the work is so grand, its extent so vast and its style so compact that a professor who cannot "see the wood for the trees" will succeed only in making himself ridiculous, while inspiring in his pupils a distaste they may never be able to overcome.

In the face of these very real difficulties, Père Gardeil was able to elicit such a tribute from his students because he understood the nature and functions of the mind and comprehended his task of formation in all its vital and dynamic possibilities. The human intellect proceeds naturally from principles to conclusions, from premise to inference. Conclusions associated with their principles are, therefore, grasped by the students as the natural issue of a vital process; without this association with principles, on the other hand, there is no reasoning, no specifically human process, but only a tenuous apprehension whose permanence depends far less on a vital spiritual action of the intellect than on the memory, always treacher-

¹ Nov.-Dec. 1931, p. 797.

ous at best. On this psychological basis St. Thomas developed his educational theory in which the learning process is essentially active, and the role of the teacher is to arouse, inspire, assist and direct intellectual action. Thought, not mere information, is always the goal. Making the Thomistic theory the norm of all his teaching, Père Gardeil believed that a living explanation of the *Summa Theologica* must necessarily stress the fundamental principles as the key to the entire work since only by directing attention to principles as the source of conclusions is the real process of thought aroused and encouraged. He made principles stand out as does the steel framework of a building, so that on them his students could, as it were, build their edifice of knowledge with their own minds. Long years of study and reflection were required to achieve the unification of knowledge that this implied, but Père Gardeil possessed a mind that could never be satisfied with half-measures. Penetrating the thought of St. Thomas to its very roots, he was able to present it from this point of view, namely, from principles to conclusions. His pupils were taught not merely to know but to think. Here is real education, exemplified in the practice of a Master.

Père Gardeil could, however, insist on this attention to principles, the source of true knowledge as opposed to mere information, without being fanatical about it or losing sight of the relative importance of other aspects. No one realized more clearly than he that St. Thomas, keenly alive to the needs of his own day, wrote the *Summa Theologica* to meet the demands of the thirteenth century. The grand outline, even in its finer elaboration, is, indeed, eternally valid, dateless, supra-temporal; the magnificent universality of conception, extending to the nicest detail, guarantees that there will never come the day when the *Summa* will be out of date; yet a discerning eye will find, in many of the articles and most of the objections, turns of thought and expression that make St. Thomas' reasoning and conclusions particularly applicable to the age in which he lived and wrote. Moreover the problems of the thirteenth century are seldom the problems of the twentieth; even where they are identical they are couched in terms vastly different, or have implications unrealized and often undreamed of seven centuries ago. Père Gardeil had no peer in making St. Thomas actual for our times, in clothing his thought in terms suitable to the modern mind, in showing points of contact between medieval and modern problems upon which the genius of the Angelic Doctor can cast a welcome light, and finally in illuminating those numerous places where St. Thomas has in germ the solutions that we seek in vain elsewhere.

The revival of the Dominican Order in the nineteenth century originated in France under the inspiration of Père Jandel, Père Lacordaire and their associates. Père Gardeil was one of their direct successors, eminently fitted by nature and by training to continue their work and insure its permanence. Their standards became his standards; in upholding them and widening their scope and application, he was one of the prime influences in the intellectual development of his Province, which, truly, can boast a magnificent record. In spite of continued political disturbances that several times brought about the exile of the Friars and threatened to disrupt their entire work, his labors as a teacher were not interrupted. From Flavigny and later from Le Saulchoir, where he was the first Regent of Studies, his powerful influence radiated far beyond the bounds of his own province till younger men took over the task and he came to the celebrated convent of St. James in Paris, there to write and publish the books that were the mature fruit of his last years.

Much of his written work appeared in *Revue Thomiste*, and has never been published in book form. Using the pages of this review as his medium he was actively engaged in the apologetical controversy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here again he demonstrated his exceptional power of making the thought of St. Thomas actual to modern needs. Never a reactionary, he yet strongly protested against the ill-advised attempts to jettison the traditional apologetics in favor of the method of "immanence," pointing out definitely the inadequacy of the new method as well as the false metaphysic that was its source and foundation. In 1912 he published "*La Crédibilité et l'Apologétique*", an invaluable book, in which he set forth his matured thought on the difficult and insistent problems of Apologetics based solidly on the principles of St. Thomas. "*Le Donné révélé et la Théologie*," appearing in 1915, showed again his passion for first principles as the source of a dynamic conception of theology. He made clear in this masterly work the relation of the science of theology to the subordinate sciences and to the "*loci theologici*," besides penning an illuminating treatise on the necessity and relative value of theological systems within and under the science of theology. With calmness and assurance he pointed out the true and inevitable position of St. Thomas as the "ever actual Master of Theology."

Père Gardeil's last book, "*La Structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique*," considered by many his masterpiece, was the result of his devotion, toward the end of his life, to the problems of high theology