

PERE DIDON.

One of the Most Remarkable Figures of Modern France.

T. H. Benton has an interesting article in the Century magazine on Pere Didon, the great French preacher, who died recently. The writer is evidently a warm admirer of the famous Dominican. Indeed, he calls him "one of the most remarkable figures of modern France."

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did, something of the actor of genius, and this was emphasized by his vague resemblance to Coquelin, whose type, curiously enough, is to be met with in the person of another of the great Catholic preachers of the present day, Pere Monsabre. Of course, time had left its mark on the physique of Pere Didon. His face seemed to me heavier under the load of fifty years, but the black eye was still full of fire, and when that incomparable voice began to vibrate, warm and sonorous throughout the church, when, so to speak, he embraced all his hearers with his superb gesture, we felt that we were as much as ever under the spell.

I cannot say, however, that the potency of this charm made itself equally felt throughout the sermon. Pere Didon was preaching on the divinity of Jesus, and theology was not his special domain. One has but to read his vast work entitled "Jesus Christ" to perceive that he did not approach the question of historical criticism with sufficient solidity. It was necessary for him, in order that he might be himself, to have a subject which enabled him to treat of social questions, to bring into play the life of today. He excelled in moving and startling you; his most powerful means of conviction were not derived from reasoning, for he was not the best of dilettantes. The younger Damas, once an ardent admirer of his, referring to his earlier discourses, of which he praised the clear and elevated form, said: "The Christian alms fund finds its way out of them freely by doors and windows which open on every horizon." But when dogma was in play many of these windows closed themselves in spite of the preacher. Assuredly one of the finest moments in his career was during

his agitation of social questions and when he proclaimed that God had no reason to fear any investigation carried on by science. His efforts toward doing away with the misundestandings between Christianity and the culture of this period were frequently crowned with success, whereas, according to all indications, his purely theological discourses will convince those only who, like myself, need no convincing. I was confirmed in this belief by a most highly cultivated Jewish lady who sat by my side as he set forth his proofs of the divinity of Jesus. One thing struck her, however, and that was the sense of equity shown by Pere Didon in always looking at matters from the point of view of his opponent. As an instance, he demonstrated to us how, apart from the political side of the question, the Jews might have feared that the doctrines of Christ would sap the foundations of that monotheism of which they were the guardians. Pere Didon did not display a settled opinion against any person, but was moved by a perfect sincerity, a limitless desire to transmit to his hearers the ardent faith which held possession of him. The vast torrent of his eloquence sprang from his innermost heart. At times, though there are to be found in it traces of declamation and slight offences against good taste. In his predilection for what was modern he freely introduced into the noble and dignified language of the pulpit familiar and discordant words, sometimes borrowed from the current slang.

A journey to the East enabled Pere Didon to finish and to give the proper local color to a book which had occupied his mind for many years. In this volume Pere Didon combats "the lively prejudice which seeks to establish

an absolute divorce." "I will fight it," he says in his admirable preface— "I will fight it as long as there is a breath in my body, and I will never cease to bring into harmony my eternal faith and my modern culture." Herein is to be found that out-of-the-common personality of this nineteenth century Dominican monk, whose self set ideal was "to hold one's faith by the aid of a virile and independent mind," and to demonstrate "that modern civilization with all its tendencies toward injustice and the well being of the humble, toward peace and charity, is born of Jesus Christ."

The books of Pere Didon do not possess as much merit as his sermons, which themselves lose by being read, for gesture and voice have had much to do in giving them their prestige. It would, therefore, not be fair to judge this writer and orator, on parallel lines, with Pere Lacordaire, that illustrious rival of men like Montalembert and Lamennais. In regard to certain points, however, the comparison forces itself upon one. Their liberal ideas drew upon both the censure of the Church; both met it with the same submissiveness, which, for both, must have been an extraordinary sacrifice. The end of their two careers also bears an analogy. Pere Lacordaire having ended his by becoming director of the College of Soresze, Pere Didon as head of the College of Arcueil, known as the College of Albert the Great.

Like the other educational establishments governed by the Dominicans, Arcueil has always enjoyed a high reputation. In that fine country place, six kilometers only from Paris, Pere Didon rusticated in the midst of youths who really were his "children." Every Thursday and Sunday afternoon he received visitors. So frank, straightforward and spontaneous was he, so perfectly human in the broadest and most sympathetic sense of the word, that it was difficult to realize that the leader of intellects was at the same time as obedient as any of his brothers to the rule of St. Dominic, one of the most ascetic in the Church. The private life of a monk, even if he be a man of genius, must be humble, hidden and devoid of personality; there-

fore no biographical sketch of Pere Didon exists; of this I have made sure by applying to the Dominicans themselves, who, since the promulgation of the decrees against the religious orders, dwell in a large, plain house, of no special appearance, in the Rue du Bac.

PERE DIDON'S THEORIES. Among the cherished theories of Pere Didon which were cultivated at Arcueil are: To consider discipline as the stepping-stone toward liberty, to banish compulsion as much as possible, to discourage precocious development, and particularly the critical spirit, which has taken too deep a root in France. "There is no surer way of not knowing anything at forty than to know everything at seventeen," said Pere Didon. "The child must believe, the young man exists for the purpose of admiring; let, therefore, the severe and difficult role of critic be left to a maturer age."

Speaking of the role which reverence should play in the instruction of the young, Pere Didon once said: "I have but one dream, and that dream is to awaken in the soul of a pupil reverence, to strengthen it as soon as it appears, and to wed it to a faith at once stable and ardent." He goes on to show how necessary it is to instill reverence in the hearts of the young in order that they may respond to the duties of the day and the hour—reverence for the good, the beautiful, the true, reverence for action, for will, for energy, for humanity, for the divine.

Pere Didon was an unqualified optimist. "Freedom and justice," he said, "will triumph over all." "Pay no heed," he counselled, "to those who claim that the country is in an evil pass. Hearken not to those who say that nations which have received immortality from Christ the Redeemer can ever suffer destruction. Give no ear to men who would make of your state an Athens, an academy, a conservatoire, a theatre or a pleasure garden, who misapply the sacred gift of force, nor yet to those who prate of the exclusive domination of any one party. Never deny the enemy tolerance; rather respect him in the light of necessary opposition."

On March 13, 1900, news came from Toulouse that THIS STRONG AND POWERFUL MAN, scarcely sixty years old, was dead. A few days before he had lectured at Bordeaux and then on his way to Rome, where he was expected, he had called upon friends at the Dominican house of the simple funeral took place in Paris on the 19th, in the Church of St. Clotilde. The interment was at Arcueil. His death is a great loss to the cause of liberal education, at a time when a most serious battle is being fought in France on that ground. Priest as he was, he was always an acknowledged republican. His influence was great in many directions, and he had friends everywhere.

POPE LEO'S MODEL LIFE. An Illustration That Abstemiousness is the Factor Most Conducive to a Long Life. (By J. J. Walsh, Ph. D., M. D., in the New York Journal)

Abstemiousness is the factor most conducive to long life. During the last few days I have had the opportunity of seeing Pope Leo XIII. several times. The patriarchal old man is now nearly ninety-one years old. Several days of each week he goes to St. Peter's to bless the pilgrims flocking to Rome during this jubilee year. He is bent with age, but he raises himself with gentle but vigorous dignity from the chair on which he is carried to bless the assembled thousands as he passes from one group to the other. He joins in the prayers and intones parts of the chant that has the quaver of age, but is well heard, even in the distant parts of St. Peter's, when there are thousands beneath its dome. Those who know the vast edifice will realize how much this means. The Pope looks stronger now than when I saw him three years ago, and he seems to give promise of living to pass the century mark.

It seemed worth the while to know some details of the mode of life of this hale nonagenarian. I called on his physician, Dr. Lapponi, who courteously agreed to furnish information on the subject. Like the great majority of long lived, the Pope comes from a long lived family. While his mother died from pneumonia at forty eight, his father lived to be nearly ninety, and a brother Cardinal Joseph Pecci, died a few years ago at the age of eighty five. The traditions of the family on both sides show that its members were known as long lived. Beyond this the important fact in Pope Leo's life has been his extreme abstemiousness. Food and drink he has taken in such moderation that his daily diet seems scarcely more than that of some anchorite of early Christian days. Though he rises regularly, even at his present advanced age, at 5 a. m., he takes nothing to eat until between 8 and 9 a. m. Then he drinks a cup of milk with a dash of coffee in it, and eats a roll or some biscuits dipped in his milk. His principal meal is at 2 p. m. when he takes some clear soup—never a thickened broth, for this disagrees with him—a small piece of meat and some potatoes, with one other vegetable. Like all Italians he takes some wine at this meal, and prefers Bordeaux. He never eats sweets and but rarely fruit, although Italians generally consume fruit liberally. He takes a very light supper about 8 p. m., scarcely more than bread and butter, with an egg.

Most of the food the Pope takes is in liquid form. This is more or less necessitated by the absence of teeth in later years, but all his life he consumed more liquids than is usually the case. When there was question, some ten years ago, of his getting artificial teeth, his doctor advised against it. The reason was that a new set of teeth would probably tempt him to eat things that would disagree with his stomach.

In sleep the Pope is, if possible, still less indulgent than in food. Now, at the age of ninety one, he takes five to six hours—never more, and sometimes even less. Following the almost universal custom here at Rome, he always takes an hour's sleep after his midday meal. Yet frequently when work presses, his total sleep for the twenty four hours does not amount to more than five hours. When younger he took even less than this not infrequently.

He is an indefatigable worker, but is always very calm in the midst of his work. He has learned well the precious lessons of quietly putting off till tomorrow what he cannot do to day. In a word, when crowded with work he does not grow anxious over it if he is unable to accomplish all that he originally planned. It is worthy, not work, that kills, and Pope Leo does not worry. To this he attributes his wonderful vitality at his advanced years. He is still able to accomplish all the work of his responsible position and finds time for some purely literary work besides. The Pope's Latin poetry is known in university circles the world over.

The Pope's doctor is of the decided opinion that it is the Pontiff's abstemiousness and his freedom from worry that have most contributed to his long life. Constitutional ailments there is none, even at his advanced age, and there is no reason, barring accident, why he should not live to complete his century of years. Given the element of an inherited constitution suitable for longevity, abstemiousness is the factor most conducive to long life.

Rome, Sept. 25, 1900.

THE HOLY-DAY MASS.

A great many of our people need—and need badly—to be roused to a sense of their duty on holy days.

The Holy See, taking into account social conditions in this country, imposes only six holy days on American Catholics. Now, the law of the Church regularly ordains that feasts of precept are to be kept like Sundays. Our duty on them is two fold. We must abstain from servile work and we must hear Mass. The obligation is indivisible. If we cannot fulfil it in its entirety, we must fulfil it in part. Now, so far as abstinence from labor is concerned, the Church—kindly mother that she is—expects it from no man whose station in life is such that he cannot, without great inconvenience, observe it. The sacrifice of a day's wages, or the danger of losing his job, would be a grave inconvenience for a working man. But, if he cannot stop work, he must, unless excused for weighty reasons, hear Mass. Proper facility is given him for complying with this portion of his holy day obligations. The excuses that are commonly alleged to justify non-compliance are simply excuses. They are not weighty reasons. They are inspired by sloth. Despite our sympathy for the shop-girl and the factory hands and workers generally, we fall to see that the loss of an hour's sleep on five mornings out of three hundred and sixty five, is a hardship serious enough to justify them in ignoring a seriousness. Many of these people make no difficulty about staying up till midnight or later, whenever there is question of amusement, and turn out for work next day as usual. Set your alarm clocks, good friends, and get up for the early Mass on holy days if you cannot attend a later one. Do not be too lenient with your young people. If you think they need full measure of sleep, have them retire an hour earlier. For the rest, remember the saying of "Poor Richard," "We shall all have plenty of time for sleep by and by."—Providence Visitor.

NEWMAN OF THE NORTH.

The Ablest Protestant Theologian in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway Becomes a Catholic.

Writing from Denmark, a special correspondent of the London Catholic Times, himself a convert, gives some interesting particulars concerning the conversion of K. Krogh-Tonning, D. D., the famous rector of Old Aker parish, in Christiania, and admitted the most learned Protestant theologian in all the three northern countries, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. "At the beginning of the year," writes the correspondent, "he resigned his office, which was one of the most remunerative in the land, and half a year afterwards he made his submission to the Church.

"Dr. Krogh-Tonning is now fifty-seven years old. From his early manhood he has been an eminent theologian. He began as an orthodox Lutheran, but his development went on in what in England is called a Ritualistic direction. Twenty years ago he published an able work on Confession, in which he maintained that absolution which 'a word from God to the sinner' is as 'a word from the sinner to God' with the really in absolute conformity with the Lutheran symbols, though completely forgotten by the Protestants of the present day.

This is to be seen very clearly in his five volume book on Dogma, the greatest work ever published on the subject in Danish or Norwegian.

"As the single volumes appeared one by one, it became evident that he was gradually drawing nearer to the Catholic Church. The question of the primacy was the last obstacle that separated him from it. In particular he examined both dogmatically and historically the doctrine of the Church on grace, and pointed out convincingly that the Protestant charges about the semi-Pelagianism of the Catholic Church are completely false. This he specially set forth in two smaller works, written, the first in German, the other in Latin, viz., Die Guedenlehre und die stille Reformation, and De gratia Christi et de libero arbitrio.

"His scientific development was accompanied by the growth of grace in his heart. He used to pray: 'O Lord! teach us to know Thy will in truth, to do Thy will in sincerity, and to follow Thy will in obedience,' and the Holy Ghost has heard his prayers. After a time spent in study and pious meditations among the Jesuit Fathers in Aarhuus, in Denmark, he obtained the grace to follow the will of God, and he is now a very 'happy' child of the Catholic Church.

"Some of his friends had already 'gone the same way' before the learned master. Among them Cand. Theol. Sorensen, in Norway, and the writer of this little piece, who asks the reader to excuse his very bad English. "Niels Hansen, Cand. Mag., 'Former Protestant Rector.'"

THERE ARE NO CHILDREN.

Our Providence contemporary, the Visitor, tells a very interesting and significant story about an incident that occurred at a meeting of the Baptist Association held in Valley Falls last week. The ministers and the laymen were discussing the problem of church attendance in the rural districts. One of the speakers said that the best way to encourage church attendance was "to first get hold of the children." Just then "it was up to" Mr. J. B. Marsh, who is the state distributor of Bibles and tracts for the association, and he bluntly declared that the chief trouble with the proposed solution was that there were no children to get hold of. He asserted that it is "a rare exception to find a family in the country with as many as three children in it." Nobody was ready to contradict this statement, and so it stood. A Baptist clergyman, by name Cameron, volunteered the remark that "the American women won't have children while the 'dago' element is increasing and multiplying." This fact troubled him seriously. "What," exclaimed Dr. Cameron, "is to become of our country in the next generation?"

To this pertinent query the reverend editor of the Visitor offers a reply, and it is so pertinent that we quote it as follows: "One needs not be a prophet or the son of a prophet to answer this question. The children of the 'daggoes'—of the Irish—of the French Canadian—of the Germans—will possess the land. There is a passage in Genesis which American Bible Christians will do well to take to heart before it is too late. Moreover a little plain preaching on the ends of marriage, as God and nature declare them, will be of more benefit to the dying religion of Protestantism than the nebulous disquisitions on the higher criticism, broad views and spiritual evolution which are the stock in trade of fashionable preachers. The up-to-date woman has somehow come to think that, while it is ladylike to get married, it is 'so animal' to have children. She will accept the advantages of marriage but not the burden thereof. This is to violate the ordinance of nature. And a race which does this thing is doomed. Its epitaph will be one word: 'Suicide.'—Boston Republic.

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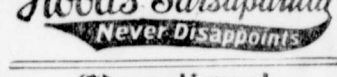
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