PERCY GARDNER

1846–1937

THE publication, as recently as 1933, of *Autobiographica*[1] makes the task of the writer of this notice at once lighter and more difficult. Lighter, because he is absolved from the labour of collecting and repeating biographical detail; more difficult, because anything in the way of an estimate of the man may come to be read in the light of his own words in the preface to that work:

> I have a conviction which has steadily grown, that my life has been only in a less degree of my own planning; I have always felt the urging and control of a Spiritual Power who has led and guided me, and enabled me, in spite of very moderate powers, to accomplish certain ends, which at the time I did not realize, but which in looking back I see clearly.

In view of so definite a statement one approaches with some diffidence the task of composing an account, at once objective and sympathetic, of the part which Percy Gardner played in certain movements with which he was connected during his long life of over ninety years.

Born on 24 November 1846 at Hackney, of Nonconformist parents, Percy Gardner was the third of a family of three brothers and three sisters, four of whom were to make a name as authorities on archaeology or history. He evidently owed something to the influence of his two maternal uncles, one of whom was widely read, indeed, very learned, in modern literature, the other a deeply religious man, who gave up his profession as a member of the Stock Exchange to become an Evangelical missionary. It was a Puritan milieu, but not sombre; and he soon attained a broad view on religious subjects, largely, he says, owing to the influence first of Charles Grant (still remembered, perhaps, as the author of *Tales of Naples and the Camorra*), who befriended him at a preparatory school, and later, of J. R. Seeley, a

[1] *Autobiographica*, by Percy Gardner, Litt.D., Oxford (Blackwell), 1933.

master at the City of London School, where the boy went for some two years. Leaving school in 1862 at the age of fifteen, he entered his father's business as a stock-broker. The atmosphere of the City was uncongenial to a lad of his intellectual tastes, and in 1865 he obtained permission from his father to escape. He matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, of which Seeley was then a Fellow. Not content with taking firsts in both the Classical and the Moral Sciences Tripos in the same year, 1869, he read International Law (winning the Whewell University Scholarship). His college eventually elected him to a Fellowship in 1872. Meanwhile he had passed a rather unhappy time, groping about, battling with such depression as few men worth their salt fail to experience in their twenties, and suffering bad health, which was relieved by his first holiday abroad, when he paid a visit to Rome. It was now, partly owing to the influence of F. D. Maurice (though he disclaims being a disciple), that he joined the Church of England. In 1871, on the casual suggestion of a friend, he applied for a post in the British Museum, and was appointed to the Department of Coins, to which Stuart Poole had succeeded as Keeper in the preceding year.[1] He was not the first or the last to enter the British Museum without any special training or apparent aptitude, but merely as a means of earning a livelihood; but it was speedily clear to him that he had found his vocation; and he was wont to regard this step as an instance of divine guidance. It was an interesting period in the history of the Medal Room. Poole was a man of wide sympathies and full of ideas; though he seems to have done comparatively little research himself, he could stimulate others; and it was due to him that the great *Catalogue of Greek Coins* was undertaken. Barclay Head, the greatest numismatist that Eng-

[1] Gardner speaks (*Aut.*, p. 25) as if the vacancy to which he was appointed was in the Department of Antiquities, but that he was placed under the Keeper of Coins. The latter Department, however, had had a separate existence since 1861.

land has produced, and the gentlest and most lovable of scholars, was an elder colleague of Gardner. These three began the Catalogue, and were jointly responsible for the first two volumes, *Italy* (1873) and *Sicily* (1876). The stately series of volumes, the chief work of reference on the subject, has continued to appear, until but a small portion of the field remains to be covered. Gardner's other contributions to this series were *Thrace* (with Head, 1877), *Thessaly to Aetolia* (1883), *Peloponnesus* (1887), as well as two volumes out of the geographical sequence, to be mentioned below. Cataloguing in those days could be done at great speed; the Medal Room was a quiet place, little known to the public or the ordinary antiquary; nor was it considered necessary to gather information from every collection in Europe and America, or to write an introduction which should be practically an exhaustive monograph. Relations with foreign numismatists, notably J. P. Six of Amsterdam, Friedrich Imhoof-Blumer of Winterthur, and W. H. Waddington (the last a frequent worker in the Medal Room), were close and fruitful. Gardner and Imhoof-Blumer collaborated in that most useful work, the *Numismatic Commentary on Pausanias* (1885–6), the Swiss scholar providing the minute and accurate collation of material which was less to Gardner's taste than what he would describe as the broader treatment of the subject. But probably Gardner's best contribution to numismatics was his *Types of Greek Coins*, which appeared in 1883 and, like his *Samos and Samian Coins* (1882), was crowned by the French Academy. The former was the first attempt to state the general principles on which Greek coins should be used to throw light on the development and significance of Greek art. Later, after he had retired to Oxford, Gardner fell somewhat out of touch with recent developments in numismatics, and became inclined to distrust the methods which were dictated by the increasing specialization which seems fated to involve every branch of science. He hardly realized the mass of material with which the present researcher has to struggle, and which he must sift before he is able to make

the broad generalizations which were once so easy. Confidence, for instance, in the methods of dating by style, which were first worked out in the British Museum, has sometimes received rude shocks from the evidence of hoards and die-sequences, subjects which were hardly thought of in the old days; although the main principles remain established. There is a curiously inconsistent passage in *Autobiographica* (p. 28) which stresses the danger of taking short cuts, the pre-eminent need for caution, and for constant verification of results. This warning Gardner issues in connexion with his *History of Ancient Coinage*, which he published in 1918, and which he admits was somewhat out of date. The feeling that one is being left behind is never pleasant; but the teacher who thinks those who have gone forward have ignored his teaching and taken the wrong turning must be unhappy indeed.

It must not, of course, be supposed that Gardner's chief work was limited to publications which were meant to appeal to students untrained in numismatics. Some of his Catalogues have already been mentioned. He also made two or three gallant excursions into ill-explored fields. His study of the *Parthian Coinage* (1877) and his Catalogues of the *Coins of the Seleucid Kings of Syria* (1878) and of the *Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India* (1886) long held place as the most orderly presentments of these difficult series. If they have been superseded, that is mainly due to the discovery of materials unknown to him.

It was not only with numismatists that Gardner had happy relations; it could not be said of him, as it was of another, that 'er verbirgt sich im Münzkabinett'. He mentions Mommsen, Curtius, Brunn, Michaelis, von Wilamowitz as scholars with whom he was in correspondence, and who impressed him with their learning, accuracy, wide outlook, and freedom from jealousy or self-seeking. The insistence on 'Prioritätsrecht' is indeed probably confined to the smaller men, and refusal to help the researches of others is more often due to laziness than to jealousy.

In 1877 Sir Charles Newton took Gardner with him to Greece. Complaints are sometimes heard of the niggardliness of the allowance made to the British Museum staff for travelling abroad; in those days the young man not only had to go at his own expense, but to forfeit his salary for the time. Gardner saw the German excavations at Olympia, and the treasures recently unearthed by Schliemann at Mycenae. Newton's and Gardner's accounts of what they had seen excited interest in England and must have done something towards promoting the foundation in 1879 of the Hellenic Society. The mention of Mycenae, however, suggests to Gardner (*Autobiographica*, pp. 36–7) a regret that the tendency in the universities now is to study the prehistoric art of the Aegean rather than historic Greek art. The tendency towards the prehistoric undoubtedly exists, not merely in the Aegean field, and is to be explained, partly by the decline in the study of languages, especially Greek, partly by the attraction towards what appears to be comparatively virgin soil It has, however, produced in these islands a school of 'prehistorians' which is the admiration of continental workers in the same field. Gardner was equally distrustful of the tendency of some of his pupils to wander off into non-classical fields, such as the Renaissance.

He became the first editor of the organ of the Hellenic Society, the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, which he conducted with skill for sixteen years. There were, as he says, occasional difficulties with contributors, in one case leading to a breach which was never healed.

The Disney Chair of Archaeology at Cambridge, which Gardner held from 1880 to 1887, did not entail residence; but when in 1887 he succeeded William Ramsay in the Chair of Classical Archaeology at Oxford, he had to give up his posts both at the British Museum and at Cambridge, and settle at Oxford. He says that he made a mistake in not going to Oxford rather than Cambridge in the first instance, although when he got to Oxford he found it necessary, after some years, to publish a very severe criticism of

the School of Literae Humaniores, in *Oxford at the Cross Roads* (1903). Now, at any rate, in 1887, he was in the university of his preference, to which he was to be a candid but loyal friend.

He was to teach there for no less than thirty-eight years. At first his was the voice of one crying in the wilderness; although the Chair he held had been established two years before, there was practically no provision for the study of archaeology. There were still many members of the University, and not all of them among the seniors, who classed archaeology, which they called playing with potsherds, along with other useless and undignified pursuits, such as biology, which meant dissecting rabbits. Gardner's quiet determination succeeded in establishing archaeology as a respectable subject, though not so much officially recognized as he would have liked; he cleaned up and freed from incompetent restorations the sculptures in the University Galleries; he started the collection of casts of sculpture. The men who have carried on the work of the school of archaeology at Oxford and the Antiquities Department of the Ashmolean Museum stand on his shoulders. As to his teaching, he records that during his tenure of the Chair he gave personal instruction to 757 men and 129 women, not to mention those who merely attended his lectures. He observes that though many of his pupils have distinguished themselves, very few have followed his own particular line of study. While not complaining, he confesses to disappointment when they seem to miss the mark. After all, it may be said that if there had been no misses in so large a field, something must have been wrong with the nature of the target; and the fact that comparatively few have followed in his footsteps, apart from the scarcity of the opportunities which this country offers for a career in archaeology, is in some ways a testimonial to his teaching.

For he was in many ways a good teacher. He had an essentially methodical mind, which showed itself in all his ways—his desk was always a miracle of tidiness—and his

lectures, like his writings, were admirably lucid. If he had a fault, it was that he repressed enthusiasm in himself. As he used to say, it was a mistake to admire a work of art too passionately, since to do so would disturb the balance of your judgement. Possibly that was the Puritan coming out in him; and the effect of holding himself back, for fear of his emotions, was sometimes to quench the spark of enthusiasm in his pupils. But those in whom it could not thus be quenched were all the better for his discipline, which may be described in the words in which he himself characterizes his book on the *Principles of Greek Art* (1913, an elaboration of his *Grammar of Greek Art*, 1905): 'its cautious and comparative character indicates the numismatist who has learned to search for certainty above all things, to build his edifice with undeniable fact, and to distrust speculation.' These phrases may sound commonplace, but to Gardner they meant something.

Of Gardner's other publications on archaeology, it is necessary to mention *New Chapters in Greek History* (1892), *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas* (1896), and *New Chapters in Greek Art* (1926). The first was intended to make known the results of recent excavation in Greece, and was successful in its aim. The others he himself describes as not involving much research, but the last included reprints of articles over which he had taken a great deal of trouble, such as that on the statue of Agias from Delphi (which he personally regarded as the high-water mark of his achievement) and that on the female figure which the Ashmolean Museum acquired from the Hope Collection. In regard to the latter, however, it would perhaps be just to say that Gardner showed himself not to be fully in touch with the more recent developments of method in work of this kind, and consequently did not quite hit the mark.

On matters concerning the wider interests of the University Gardner intervened once or twice. In 1896 he opposed the admission of women students to full membership of the University, and never later found reason to retract

anything that he wrote on the subject. In 1903 he published *Oxford at the Cross Roads, a Criticism of the Course of Literae Humaniores in the University*, in his own opinion 'one of the ablest' of his works. It was not a success at the time, perhaps because its indictment of the existing school was too uncompromising; but it is still well worth reading, in many ways a wise book, and sometimes almost prophetic. For instance (p. 70):

> We are threatened with a terrible danger, that each nation will, on patriotic grounds, not merely promote with all its might the use of its own language, but even try to produce a civilization of its own, not resting, like all existing civilization, on a more or less Hellenic basis, but based on national history and full of the feeling of race;

and again (p. 92):

> We have seen occasionally in history a city or a nation . . . determined to start anew and to recast the whole scheme of society in accordance with certain principles or ideas. Such attempts have succeeded only in small part or for a moment, because the notions as to human nature which occupied the minds of the leaders were utterly insufficient, mere hasty guesses and prejudices in the place of reasoned knowledge.

Although the reforms in the curriculum which this little book advocated were not found acceptable, Gardner was able to give the School of 'Modern Greats' a welcome, though a rather chilly one. He retained the opinion that the established course of Literae Humaniores is more thorough and for most students more educative. He might have added that the light of archaeology has certainly filtered through gradually widening chinks in the structure of that school since he wrote his tract.

The interest which Gardner had always felt in philosophy, and which had attracted him as an undergraduate to the Moral Sciences Tripos, never left him, and in the eighties it took the direction of inquiry into the psychological basis and historic origin of the Christian religion. His first publication, which was anonymous, was *Faith and Conduct* (1887). *Exploratio Evangelica* (1899) was the outcome of twelve years of steady work, carried on in the intervals of

his duties as Professor. With characteristic power of detachment and tidiness of mind he was able to work almost daily on this book without interrupting the course of his other publications; one notices that his *New Chapters in Greek History* and his *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas*, as well as the first and second editions of the *Manual of Greek Antiquities* which he compiled with F. B. Jevons (1895, 1898), belong to those twelve years.

An estimate of Gardner's theological activity, which it would be impertinent in me to attempt, I have been fortunate enough to obtain from Dr. Inge:

> No appreciation of Percy Gardner would be complete without some notice of his profound and lifelong interest in religion, theology, and ethics. He was brought up in an old-fashioned Evangelical home, and remained throughout his life a devout Christian. He was a regular attendant at divine worship on Sundays, and kept up the custom of family prayers in his house. But his studies at Cambridge, where he obtained a First Class in the Moral Sciences Tripos, and his diligent reading of Comte, whose positivism for a short time attracted him, led him far away from the traditional orthodoxy of his home.
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> The strongest philosophical influences which affected his beliefs were those of American pragmatism and the parallel anti-intellectualist trend of Bergson and the French Modernists. He was a personal friend of Baron von Hügel, and read such writers as Blondel, Le Roy, and Laberthonnière. In 1909 he thought that 'the most significance for the future belongs to a way of thought which prevails in many schools, the chief characteristic of which is a profound disbelief in the speculative faculty of the human intellect, and a growing emphasis laid on the practical and volitional side of man'. He even allowed himself to speak of 'the purely intellectualist view of Plato' (*Modernity and the Churches*, pp. 17 and 19). He was doubtful about the historical truth of the Gospels, but never went nearly so far as Loisy in separating the Jesus of history from the Christ of the Church's worship.
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> His first important book on theology was *Exploratio Evangelica*, an able study of Christian origins, now necessarily superseded in part by the work of later scholars. This was followed by several smaller books—*The Growth of Christianity* (1907); *Modernity and the Churches* (1909); *The Religious Experience of St. Paul* (1911); *The Ephesian Gospel* (1915); *Modernism and the English Church* (1926). Of

these, the essays on St. Paul and on the Fourth Gospel are in my opinion the most permanently valuable.

Gardner was President of the Modern Churchmen's Union from 1915, when Dean Rashdall died, to 1923, when he resigned. His understanding of the Catholic Modernist movement, which was ultimately destroyed or driven underground by authority, combined with his personal Puritanism, were useful in this Society, where the Liberal Catholic and the Liberal Protestant elements are not entirely harmonious.

Gardner's literary output slowed down after 1926, the year after that in which he retired from his Chair. But the *Principles of Christian Art* appeared in 1928, the *Interpretation of Religious Experience* in 1931, and *Autobiographica*, as we have seen, in 1933. He used to exhibit with satisfaction a list of his publications, showing that from 1871 every year had seen the appearance from his pen of something on Greek numismatics or archaeology.

Gardner had married in 1874 a sister of J. S. Reid (who likewise married a sister of his). He thereby forfeited his Fellowship at Christ's, but was elected to an Honorary Fellowship in 1897. Mrs. Gardner died in 1933. All who enjoyed the privilege of the friendship of that quiet, admirable lady will appreciate the words in which her husband's debt to her is acknowledged in the preface to *Autobiographica*.

From 1936 his health gradually failed, although until very near the end his mind could be very clear and his comments on current events very shrewd. A letter of congratulation which reached him on his ninetieth birthday, signed by a great many old pupils and friends, gave him great pleasure. He died on 17 July 1937.

The study of archaeology, in Oxford and elsewhere, owes him a great debt. It is unnecessary to mention here the academic honours which he received, but he was probably prouder than anything else of his corresponding membership of the Prussian and Göttingen Academies and of the French Institute; and he was naturally much interested in the British Academy, to which, though not one of the original Fellows, he was elected in 1903. He served on the

Council in 1905–8, 1910–13, and 1914–17, and was regular in his attendance at annual and other meetings, until prevented by increasing age and deafness.

GEORGE HILL