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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

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**IN MEMORIAM**

**THOMAS EDWARD SHIELDS**

**1862—1921**

**R. I. P.**



*J. H. Smith*

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# The Catholic Educational Review

APRIL, 1921

## THOMAS EDWARD SHIELDS ILLNESS—DEATH—FUNERAL

Very Reverend Dr. Thomas Edward Shields, Head of the Department of Education in the Catholic University and Dean of the Catholic Sisters College, died at his residence, in Brookland, D. C., February 15, 1921.

For several years Dr. Shields had suffered from valvular disease of the heart. He was fully aware of his condition, but he did not allow it to interfere with the performance of academic duty. During the winter of 1919-20, the disease assumed an acute form and he was obliged, for a time, to suspend his work. A few weeks of rest in the summer of 1920 seemed to have restored his strength. He resumed his lectures last October, and with characteristic energy undertook the execution of various plans which he had formed for the development of the Sisters College, especially in the Department of Music.

In January last, he suffered a relapse which confined him to his room for several days. During that time, however, he served as member of the Committee appointed by the Department of Education under the National Catholic Welfare Council to consider the problem of normal training for Catholic teachers, and he assisted in drafting the preliminary report of the Committee which was submitted to the Department at its meeting in Chicago, February 2.

On the same day, Dr. Shields lectured for the last time. His condition, complicated by an attack of influenza, grew rapidly more serious. His relatives were summoned from Minnesota, and he received the last ministrations of religion, with full consciousness and with priestly submission to the



Divine Will. Shortly after midnight, February 14-15, he passed away.

The funeral took place February 18. A Pontifical Mass of Requiem was celebrated in the Gymnasium by Rt. Rev. Bishop Shahan, Rector of the University, Msgr. Dougherty, the Vice-Rector, acting as Assistant Priest, Rev. Dr. McCormick as Deacon and Rev. Leo McVay as Subdeacon. It was attended by the Faculties, the members of the affiliated colleges, the entire student body, and a large number of friends, representing the clergy and the laity, who had come from various parts of the country to pay their tribute to Dr. Shields.

The sermon was preached by Rt. Rev. Monsignor Pace, General Secretary of the University; and the Absolution was given by Rt. Rev. William Turner, Bishop of Buffalo. The remains of Dr. Shields were laid to rest in Mt. Olivet Cemetery, in the northeast section of the City of Washington.

#### THE SERMON

With this solemn requiem, we commend to God the soul of a priest, a friend, a teacher. With prayer commingled of sorrow and hope, we mark the close of a career that was spent in the Master's service. In thankful remembrance of the lessons which Dr. Shields gave us in life, we gather for the final instruction—for the lesson which comes to us out of the stillness, with the majesty and power of death.

We who kneel here today, his colleagues or his students, bear witness to the value of his work and likewise to the greatness of our loss. This gathering, so fully representative of the various interests which centered about him or came within reach of his influence—representative of clergy and laity, of college and university, of teaching community and student body—is a grateful acknowledgment of the debt which we owe Dr. Shields—a debt which increased with each day that he lived and which now, at the end of his labors, becomes a more sacred obligation.

Those among us who were near him through academic relations, felt the closer contact of his strong personality. We noted the intensity of purpose, the energy and the hopefulness which he brought to his duties and to his own generous

undertakings. We saw him in the midst of difficulties, striving, persisting, forcing his way to success. We have seen him, for more than a year, struggling as only a brave man struggles, against the doom whose portent he was the first to understand. But now that he has laid down his tasks and entered into rest beyond our recall, we see, with sudden realization, the largeness of the place he has left and the meaning of his life for the University, for the Church and for Catholic education.

We here, on the scene of his labors, suffer the deeper bereavement. But beyond these precincts, beyond the circle of daily association, are thousands who mourn him. In every diocese and parish, in religious novitiate and scholastic council, in college, academy, and elementary school there are debtors to Dr. Shields—teachers who owe him the best that is in them, men and women who are living by his direction, children unnumbered who are growing to knowledge and virtue on the fruit of his thought and endeavor. They share in our loss. Their hearts are with ours. They unite with us in imploring for him a place of refreshment, light, and peace.

More plainly than they, we can see the material result of his efforts. It is before us in grounds and buildings and equipment—in structures already completed, and in those just begun, on which he looked as his eyes were closing forever. But the product of his mind went farther. It is open to all—in libraries and schoolrooms, and homes throughout the land. It is found wherever the literature of education is treasured and used. It reveals him as the tireless worker, the man of initiative and courage—a singular blending of ideal aims and practical insight. It secures him a position of honor among the foremost of those who are helping to solve our educational problems.

To his efforts also is due that better appreciation of the Catholic teacher which has opened a new era in Catholic education. With exceptional clearness he understood both the difficulties and the opportunities which affect the progress of our schools. In particular, he felt that the devotion of our teaching Sisters gave them a claim to more effectual aid and encouragement. In their behalf he pleaded with an earnest-

ness born of sympathy, with the eloquence of deed and personal sacrifice: and he pleaded to good effect. If today the service of our teachers is more fully recognized, if ampler provision is made for their training, and if, in consequence, our schools have been raised to a higher degree of efficiency, these results are due chiefly to the movement in which Dr. Shields was a pioneer and leader.

As we look back to the beginnings of his career, we see that it steadily converged toward one great object; that its various undertakings were guided by a single aim, that the very hindrances which rose in his way proved to be the source of clearer inspiration. We discern in his life the gradual unfolding of a plan which became more definite as time went on—more definite and more absorbing. It attained proportions which far exceeded its earliest conception. Even in his quick enthusiastic thinking, the full scope of what he intended was not at first visible. But with each step, it grew upon him. His horizon widened. New projects took shape in his mind. New problems arose and with them the thought that contained their solution. His career was a development, slow and painful at first, then rapid and vigorous, a living exemplification of the principles which he applied to educational theory and practice.

From long experience he had reached the conviction, which abided with him always, that the future of Catholic education, its worth and its success, depended on the preparation of Catholic teachers. Whatever else might be done to win support for our schools, to improve their facilities, quicken the interest of parents or increase vocations for the religious life, the center and pivot was and must be the teacher, her training and qualifications. This conviction roused him, filled him with eagerness, stirred him to a holy impatience. It became for him a directive principle, dominating his thought and deciding the course of his action. It became, finally, the standard by which he appraised every idea, proposal and movement, whether in the field of education or in the broader field of the sciences in which education takes root and from which it draws its vitality.