

In Memoriam

PETER MASTEN DUNNE, S.J.

(1889-1957)

Peter Masten Dunne, S. J., died in San Francisco, California, on January 15, 1957, shortly after completing his year as president of the Pacific Coast branch of the American Historical Association. Father Dunne was still able to read the presidential address to the association at its December 1956 meeting held in Eugene, Oregon. It was characteristic of the man to wish to pay this final tribute to his fellow historians.

He was born on April 16, 1889, in San Jose, California. His undergraduate studies were pursued at Mt. St. Michael's College, Spokane, Washington, Santa Clara University, and the theologate of the French Jesuits in Hastings, England. Graduate study in history at Columbia University was discontinued upon his appointment to teach his younger fellow-Jesuits at Los Gatos, California, 1926-1930. In the latter year he resumed work on his doctorate in history at the University of California in Berkeley, under the direction of Professor Herbert Eugene Bolton, who remained an encouraging and inspiring friend for the rest of his life.

The Ph.D. in history was conferred on Father Dunne by the University of California in 1934. This marked the beginning of nearly a quarter of a century of more intense research, writing, teaching, and administration. That same year of 1934, he was appointed to head the newly-created department of history at the University of San Francisco, a position he ably held for the rest of his life.

Father Dunne will be remembered best by historians for his scholarly publications on the work of the Jesuits in northern colonial Mexico, from Tarahumara to Arizona, and Lower California: *Early Jesuit Missions in Tarahumara*; *Pioneer Black Robes on the West Coast*; *Pioneer Jesuits in Northern Mexico*; *Black Robes in Lower California*, to list his more important and more detailed studies. His most scholarly biography is *Andrés Pérez de Ribas, Pioneer Black Robe of the West Coast, Administrator, Historian*.

A complete check of his publications would show some sixty articles and several other volumes. His scholarly articles and book reviews appeared in *The Americas*, *The Catholic Historical Review*, *Mid-America*, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu*, to mention the more important. Father Dunne was an advisory editor of *The Americas*.

Two volumes, one a general account of the Jesuit missionary efforts in northern colonial Mexico, and the other a series of letters of one of the early missionaries, are ready for the press. To the first of these two books, he gave the title "Northward the Blackrobes." It is more than a mere summary of his more detailed studies; it shows the general organization and policy, as well as spirit, of a group of men that numbered only three in 1591, when the advance began, and over a hundred when the 1767 exile removed them from the scene; it is the thesis of Professor Bolton in action, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution." The second volume is the translation and study of the letters of the eighteenth-century Swiss missionary and provincial superior in Mexico, Juan Antonio Baltasar.

In all these studies, he drew on the abundant manuscript and archival material that long research had made familiar, particularly that of the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, California. Of special help to him were the key documents on Mexican Jesuit history brought to that library by Professor Bolton from the Jesuits archives in Rome, from the state archives in Munich, from various depositories in Spain and Mexico. A crowded schedule of writing, lecturing, and administration did not allow Father Dunne much time to do firsthand research in numerous archives, or to inspect personally the regions in which the drama of his historical accounts was enacted; he wisely chose the more important documents to give a secure basis to his books and studied painstakingly the best and most detailed maps.

Gifted with a clear and engaging style and alert to the data and implications of a wide acquaintance with more general history, he succeeded in bringing home to his numerous readers the epic antecedents of the history of the West.

An exceptionally capable teacher for over thirty years in the classroom, Father Dunne inspired many of his students with his own enthusiasm for historical studies, and in collaboration with Father John Bannon, S. J., wrote a textbook on Latin America.

His numerous friends will cherish the memory of a scholarly historian who knew how to combine learning with all the qualities that constitute true nobility of soul.

ERNEST J. BURRUS, S. J.

*Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu,
Rome, Italy*