



In Memoriam

MAXIMIN CHARLES PIETTE, O.F.M.

1885 -- 1948

On Saturday, November 6, 1948, death claimed a distinguished historian and an indefatigable member of the Academy of American Franciscan History, when it took the Rev. Maximin Charles Piette, O.F.M. Father Piette passed away in the Hôtel Dieu, Montreal, Canada, a few hours after he entered that hospital suffering with a heart attack. Though his health had been precarious, particularly since late 1947, he had continued to apply himself with resolute and edifying dedication to his historical pursuits. A Resident Member of the Academy since its foundation in 1943, he had gone to Montreal in July to supervise the publication of his *Le Sécret de Junípero Serra*. Just a few days before being fatally stricken, he had corrected the final proofs of that work, which will shortly appear as an *opus postumum*.

Born in Longueville, near Mechlin, in Belgium, on October 8, 1885, he was the son of Jacques and Antoinette Liesse Piette. After completing his preliminary studies in the Franciscan College, he was received into the Order of Friars Minor on September 17, 1904, in the Province of Our Lady Mediatrix of Graces, in Belgium. He made his final profession as a Franciscan in 1907, and was ordained priest on August 21, 1911. Shortly after his ordination, he was assigned to teach in the schools of his Province, a work in which he continued until the outbreak of the First World War. From 1914 to 1918 he served as chaplain in the Belgian Army, being decorated by his country for his outstanding service and bravery. With the termination of hostilities, he again returned to the classroom, first as professor, and then as a graduate student at the University of Louvain, from which, in 1925, he received the degree of Doctor and Master of Theology. At this time he published the first of his important works, *John Wesley dans l'Evolution du Protestantisme*. This study (later published in this country and England by Sheed and Ward under the title *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*) was crowned by the French Academy, and brought international fame to its author. To this date it is recognized as the authoritative study of the founder of Methodism, and has been praised for its fairness and balanced judgments by Catholic and Protestant historians alike.

Coming to the United States, he enrolled in the Graduate School of Harvard University. Harvard conferred upon him the Master of Arts degree in 1928. When he returned to Europe, he was appointed Professor of Theology and History in the Studium of his Order in Brussels, and Prefect of Studies in his Province. Amid the many duties of teaching, he found time to devote to writing, and in 1932 he published *L'Union des Eglises. Les Raisons, ses Obstacles* (later published in English under the title *The Union of Churches. Arguments For and Against*). Important as his teaching and writing activities were, Father Piette made what many consider an even greater contribution to scholarly interests when in 1918 he founded the publishing house "La Lecture au Foyer" in Brussels. He directed its activities during the war and the post-war periods, remaining at its head for twenty-one years.

In 1939 he came again to the United States, and there then began a new chapter, of characteristic application and great fruitfulness. For many years he had been gathering material for an ambitious undertaking, a study which he proposed to call *The Religious Evolution of North America During the Colonial Period*. That work, alas!, never was finished. It led, however, to a series of studies which perhaps, in the evaluation of posterity, will be of more lasting importance. Intrigued with the personality of Junípero Serra, Founder of the Missions of California, he set about the task of studying the available material on that heroic figure. The result was the publication, in 1946, of *Evocation de Junípero Serra*, a preliminary work, of 433 pages, about the documents and sources. Early in 1949, there will appear a two-volume study of the life of Serra—the posthumous work to which he devoted the strength of his last few weeks—entitled *Le Secret de Junípero Serra*. The *opus magnum*, however, that for which these two other studies were but a preparation and, so to say, an introduction, is *The Letters of Juniper Serra*. In this four-volume work he has gathered together, in the original Spanish and in English translation, all the known correspondence of the Apostle of California. Doctor Piette lived to see, and to correct, the first proofs of this work, but the Angel of Death bade him lay down his pen before completing his final revisions. The labor is now being carried on by his associates at the Academy of American Franciscan History, and a tentative publication-date has been set for September, 1949. When the series is given to the scholars of the world, it is expected that it will rank as a work of the first magnitude for the civil as well as the ecclesiastical history of the United States.

The brotherhood of historical scholars is the poorer for the passing of Father Maximin Piette, and the Order of Friars Minor is bereft of an outstanding son. The Academy of American Franciscan History in a special way mourns the loss of its distinguished member, and bespeaks the prayers of its friends for the repose of his soul.

Requiescat in pace!