

Arthur Henry Dundon, A.M., Ph.D.

1832—1899

“Where be your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table in a roar?”

Professor Dundon was born sixty-five years ago in the southwest of Ireland. His father was a well-to-do tradesman, able to give his son a good education, first at a preparatory classical school and afterwards at Queens College, Cork, from which he was graduated at the age of twenty. He subsequently pursued his studies for about a year in the city of Paris.

Returning to his own country, he entered mercantile life, for which he was well adapted. His quick perception, his intuitive knowledge of men, and his mind trained to forecast the future, would doubtless have enabled him to achieve a large fortune. But while always anxious for wealth, not for his own sake but “for the glorious privilege of being independent,” his hunger for literature in every form impelled him to abandon his business and seek employment in a more congenial field.

He went to California to examine into the affairs of a deceased relative, and while in San Francisco was appointed to the chair of English Literature in the College of Santa Clara. Remaining in this position but a short time, he came East and became principal of a parochial school under the supervision of the Rev. Father Kelly, a brother of Eugene Kelly, the banker. He was appointed principal of a public school in Jersey City, in which position he served until he was elected Vice-President of the Normal College. In the meantime, in 1866, he became instructor in political science and history in the new Evening High School established in Thirteenth street.

His excellent work in the High School attracted the attention of Mr. William Wood and Mr. Isaac Bell, then the two leading members of the Board of Education; and this was perhaps the chief reason for his selection to the more elevated position above mentioned. That he inspired the ambitious young men of his classes is proved by the fact that many of them won fame and fortune as orators and statesmen. Edmund Burke was his model for the best prose form and Charles James Fox his example for passionate and persuasive eloquence.

Professor Dundon's work at the head of two great departments, Latin and English, is too well known and too recent for any comments at the present time. Suffice it to say that in his relations with students, tutors and members of the Faculty, he was always genial and generous, witty and humorous, and addicted to paradox and epigram. In the words of Hamlet he was “A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.” And yet withal, he was tender and sympathetic even toward dumb creatures; and suffering humanity never appealed to him in vain.

“He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.”

THOMAS HUNTER.