

THE YOUNG MAN AS A REVOLUTIONARY

Historical Notes

This Week

Vol. 11, No. 50, p. 9, 32-33.

Dec. 9, 1956.

LATE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, when the Philippines was filled with the heady libertarian ideals and principles of the propaganda movement generated by the ilustrados in the homeland and in the Peninsula, a young man from Bulacan - Gregorio del Pilar, nephew of the exiled propagandist, Marcelo H. del Pilar, prepared himself for a valiant role in the revolution that would sweep the country only a few years afterward.

Del Pilar had started early in his boyhood to participate in the struggle for freedom. In his hometown in Bulacan, the old capital of Bulacan province, the parish priest, Father Felipe Garcia, as was his wont after mass on Sundays, would distribute pamphlets to his parishioners. After the mass was over one Sunday, and the priest was gone, a boy in his teens, together with some young men surreptitiously substituted their pamphlets for those of the priest. On the following Sunday, Father Garcia, took the package of pamphlets from the sacristy and distributed them with this injunction: "read these pamphlets, my brothers, and afterwards let others read them. In this way you shall gain indulgence and you shall be good before the eyes of religion."

These pamphlets he unwittingly propagated were the works of the Filipino propagandists - words filled with abuses of the Spaniards and crying for reforms.

In later years, the young Del Pilar was to prove his courage and devotion dying to defend his commander-in-chief on a northern pass.

Born in Bulacan, Bulacan, on November 14, 1875, to Felipa Sempio and Fernando H. del Pilar, brother of the propagandist, Gregorio was fifth in a family that was poor but of illustrious forebears. In his veins flowed blood of the Gatmaitans, ancient chiefs of Bulacan, and Chinese blood on his mother's side.

Gregorio received his early education from Romualdo Sempio and Monica Estrella, of Bulacan, and continued his studies in Manila, at the school of Pedro Serrano Lak Laktaw, on what was then Jolo - now Juna Lana - Street, and at the Ateneo de Manila. Marcelo H. del Pilar, who had then fled to Spain to carry the propaganda campaign abroad, sent Arellano books and pamphlets on the propaganda movement. These, in turn, were distributed by Del Pilar among the secret societies in the country.

When the revolution broke out, Del Pilar immediately joined the forces of Bonifacio in Balintawak and was admitted to the Katipunan. He was initiated into the war on January 1, 1897, in the Battle of Kakaron de Sili, in Sta. Maria, Bulacan. It was here that the bullet nearly hit his head. The bravery and sagacity displayed by Del Pilar in defending the town earned him the rank of lieutenant.

On August 31, 1897, his next battle, the assault at Paombong, in Bulacan, added to his fame and prestige. Here, his platoon captured fourteen Mauser rifles, and thirteen more in the following battle at Tambong, in Malolos. The encounter at Paombong, though not a gory one, was well executed, if not well conceived; Del Pilar disguised his men as a women, and for a man in his early twenties, the deception was thought a splendid idea. He was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel.

When the fact of Blak-na-Bato, which ended the revolution and provided for its leaders to go abroad in voluntary exile, was signed in 1897, Del Pilar went to Hongkong, with Aguinaldo. His life thereafter was linked with that of the Supremo Chief of the revolutionists.

While the revolutionists were complying with the Pact, the Spanish government, meanwhile, failed to institute reforms, and paid only a portion of the indemnity, as promised in the pact. Instead of being granted amnesty as agreed upon, revolutionists were arrested and persecuted. This letdown engendered hatred and distrust among the people, and the revolution inevitably dragged on.

When he returned in Cavite with Del Pilar and other exiles abroad the McCulloch on May 19, 1898 - during which he conferred with the American consuls E. Spencer Pratt and Wildman - Aguinaldo called his countrymen