

THE SOUL OF THE REVOLUTION

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If Apolinario Mabini, the Sublime Paralytic, was the brains of the revolution and Emilio Jacinto the heart of the Philippine libertarian struggle, then Andres Bonifacio, oftentimes known as the Great Plebeian, was undoubtedly the soul of the resistance movement against Spain. He was the great commoner who breathed life into the revolutionary cause when his companions wavered.

When Dr. Jose Rizal branded the revolution as ill-timed and lacking in preparation because the so-called cultured elements and plutocracy did not support it, the Katipuneros were on the verge of giving up their dream of overthrowing Castilian sovereignty in the archipelago. However, Bonifacio urged his comrades in arms to continue fighting. In answer to the Great Malayan's contention that the revolution was doomed to failure without arms, ships and the support of the plutocracy and cultured elements Bonifacio countered. "Hunder! Wherever did Dr. Rizal read that for a revolution you must first have arms and ships? Where did he read it?"

To say that Bonifacio rose from the ranks to become one of the foremost leaders of the revolution is not to indulge in a vacuous platitude. As a young child he had to overcome poverty in order to obtain an education. Bereft of his parents at the age of 14, the Katipunan founder had to give up his studies in order to support his three younger brothers and two sisters. This he did by making paper fans and wooden canes and selling them on the streets.

Anecdotes

This writer was lucky enough to have had several interviews with Espiridiona Bonifacio Distrito, sister of the Great Plebeian, shortly before she died of a

brain hemorrhage on May 27, 1956. Aling Nonay, as the old woman was called, lived with her six children in a veritable firetrap in anak Bayan, Paco, Manila. She had been suffering from paralysis for several years when death mercifully relieved her from her pain. Her first husband, Teodoro Plata, together with Bonifacio and Ladislao Diwa, formed the original triangle of the Kataasang, Lagalanggalang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan ("The Most High and Respectable Association of the Sons of the Country"). When Bonifacio became president of the Supreme Council (Kataasang Sanggunian) in January, 1895, Plata was his secretary of war.

Aling Nonay described her Manong Andres as of regular build, about five feet, five inches tall, of Kayumanggi or brown complexion, and with deepset eyes, tall nose and firm lips. "He was typically Filipino", she disclosed. "He was always advising his brothers and sisters to be good, obedient and industrious." (Andres had three brothers - Procopio, Ciriano, and Troadio and two sisters, Petrona and Espedriana. Andres, Procopio and Ciriano gave up their lives for the cause while Troadio went abroad shortly before the outbreak of the revolution and has not been heard from since then.)

Bonifacio ate just about anything, according to Aling Nonay. "He was particularly fond of fish and vegetables," she said. "Although he had a good appetite, he ate sparingly during the days following the First Cry at Balintawak. Perhaps, it was because he had so much on his mind and he was so worried about the outcome of the revolution."

Industrious

Andres was very industrious. Aside from managing the little business of the family (the Bonifacio sold quality canes from ₱50 to ₱100 each), he took a job as a messenger in a commercial firm dealing in local articles to augment his earnings. Because he was enterprising and energetic, he was later promoted to the position of agent. He was also a warehouse keeper for Fressell and Company.

"It was Manong Andres who taught us how to make paper fans and canes," Aling Nonay related. "I remember the times I made inferior quality fans. He never scolded me patiently pointed out the right technique of cutting the paper and fitting it on the bamboo stick to make a good abanico.