

JOSE MARIA PANGANIBAN: A PATRIOT COMES HOME

Bicol's little-known Revolutionist

By Roberto Fernando



WHEN THE Philippine Congress, on December 1, 1934, changed the name of Mambulao, Camarines Norte to Jose Panganiban, it was paying a belated tribute to one of the staunchest champions of Philippine freedom.

Mambulao was the hometown of Panganiban. Here he was born on February 1, 1863. His parents were Vicente Panganiban of Hagonoy, Bulacan and

Juana Enverga of Mauban, Quezon. His father was the a clerk of court at Daet, the capital of the province. Jose was one of the three sons of Vicente.

Jose was a precocious child. He learned the cartilla and the caton in one month. He mastered the Catecismo in another month. It was his mother who taught him now to read and write.

He showed an early interest in reading. Once his mother found him under a tree reading *Don Quijote*. His father encouraged his intellectual propensities. He was kept supplied with good books. At twelve, he could speak and write Spanish and Latin. At fifteen he was acquainted with the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Divine Comedy*.

There is a story that once Jose's uncle refused to lend him a telescope. Frustrated, Jose assembled his own from bits of glass and cardboard. When the makeshift telescope was tested, the uncle found that it worked perfectly.

As a boy, Jose was thin and frail. However, his physical deficiencies did not prevent him from participating in the rough sports of boys. He learned horseback riding quite early.

When Jose was eight, Fr. Francisco Fernandez took him to Labo to learn Spanish. The following year, he was sent to the public school at Daet. In that school, he finished his primary education.

For his secondary education, Jose was sent to Nueva Caceres (now Naga City) and enrolled in the seminary of the Paulist fathers. He became the protégé of Fr. P. Santonja, the rector of the seminary and his teacher in the natural sciences. This priest sent him to Manila for further education. When Jose took his *revalida* at the University of Santo Tomas on February 4, 1883, he obtained *sobresaliente* and a degree was granted on March 1, 1883.

At the University of Santo Tomas he enrolled in the schools of medicine and agriculture. He finished his agricultural course in 1885.

IN MAY 1888, he was a junior at the College of Medicine. Because he was an *indio*, he was closely watched and suspected. The treatment was more than he could bear so he decided to finish the medical course at the University of Barcelona. He became a student here in 1889. However, because of illness which was aggravated by a fight with two Spaniards, Jose failed to take the examinations. He therefore did not get his degree that year.

In Barcelona, too, he fell into the company of the other Filipino propagandists. For a time, his parents threatened to cut off his allowance if he did not give up his political work.

Once in a cafe in Madrid, some Spaniards began mocking the Filipinos. They called them "a bunch of ignorant and flat-nosed people." The Filipinos challenged the Spaniards to a contest of intellectual skill. The Spaniards chose memory as the basis. A fresh copy of a Madrid newspaper was given to the Filipinos and one of them was told to read the editorial. The task fell on Panganiban, who read it for one minute and then repeated it almost word for word. Then the paper was given to a Spaniard. He failed to match Panganiban and the Spaniards were forced to admit defeat.

Panganiban kept his interest in intellectual matters even un-

der the most adverse of conditions. In his sick bed, he learned German well enough to translate Weber's **Die Religio und Die Religionen** into Spanish. He also learned English and Italian.

Panganiban won many honors. When General Domingo Moriones y Murrillo, governor-general of the Philippines from 1877-1880 visited the Paulist seminary in Nueva Caceres, Panganiban was chosen speaker. His speech and manner so impressed the governor that he pinned a medal on the boy.

When he was fifteen, he was already assisting the seminary physician and was even allowed to handle minor ailments. In April, 1878, when Bishop Francisco Gainza visited Mambulao, Panganiban wrote a poem in honor of his visit. Later on at the University of Santo Tomas he won second honor in a literary-scientific contest. He failed to win the first prize be-

cause the other contender was a Spaniard, Vicente Cavanna. The same happened to his **Anatomia de Regiones**, an important medical paper which he wrote in 1887. It was not adjudged the best because of the participation of some Spaniards and mestizos.

But later his papers on general pathology, therapeutics and surgical anatomy won all the first prizes. One of his professors, Dr. Cato L. Brea, was very impressed with his work. Upon his recommendation and Fr. Gregorio Echevarria's, the papers were printed and exhibited at the 1887 exposition at Madrid.

PANGANIBAN became interested in politics during his first months in Madrid. He wrote for the **La Solidaridad**. He did not quit politics despite the advice of his father, Fr. Santonja and his poor health.

The other Filipino propagandists liked his work. Ponce on July 1, 1899 remarked that Panganiban was "useful and very necessary to our cause."

As a speaker, he could move his audience by force of hard logic. Even the anti-reform press of Madrid felt disposed toward his oratorical abilities. Rizal appraised Panganiban in the following words:

Panganiban was a true orator of easy and energetic words, vigorous con-



cepts, practical and transcendental ideas and of elevated thoughts. He was eloquent, at once very seductive and convincing. Deeply informed of things Philippine, how many times he moved his audience depicting the ills of that land, the great agonies it suffers, the immense pains it feels.

The pen name of Panganiban was Jomapa or J.M.P. In his **El Pensamiento**, he advocated freedom of the press without which "it is hard for the government to interpret faithfully the aspiration of the constituents." In his **Los Nuevos Ayuntamientos de Filipinas**, which was published on July 31, 1890, he attacked the municipal reform in several provinces in the Philippines. In his **La Universidad de Manila: su Plan de Estudio**, he advocated academic freedom.

On April 25, 1889, he signed a petition drafted by the Hispano-Filipino Association and **La Solidaridad** and sent to the minister of war. It asked for the granting to Filipinos the same rights enjoyed by the Spaniards. Among these rights were representation in the Cortes, prohibition of deportation without due process of law, and abolition of the **censura previa**.

The other extant writings of Panganiban were: **Ang Lupang**

Tinubuan, Noches de Mambulao, Sa Aking Buhay, Bahía de Mambulao, La Mujer de Oro, Clarita Perez, and Kandeng o Recuerdos de Mi Pueblo.

LATER on when he was really very sick he dropped off. He wrote to Rizal, advising the propagandists to continue the campaign. He said: "Whatever we have begun should be carried to the finish even if it results in the sacrifice of our lives, our honor and our wealth... If I had the strength which I used to have, I would go with you wherever you go."

He died on August 19, 1890 at No. 2 Rambla de Canaletas, Barcelona. He was only 27 years old. The issue of **La Solidaridad** that came out on September 20, 1890 was a Panganiban issue. The next day he was buried in grave No. 2043 of the Southwest Cemetery of Barcelona. The funeral was attended by the Filipino community and by Cubans and Porto Ricans sympathetic to the Philippine revolutionists' cause.

On September 27, 1891, in view of the failure to renew the right to use the grave, the remains of Panganiban were removed to the Osario General of the cemetery. In 1956, Dr. Domingo Abella had the remains exhumed and after 65 years in a foreign country, Jose Panganiban finally returned to his native land.