

The story of our people's fierce devotion to "Santo Rosario"

"LA NAVAL" PLUS 300 YEARS

By Santiago Artiaga, Jr.

THIS is the story of two galleons almost pathetic in their contest against fifteen enemy vessels. This is the story of a people, whose nation was to be made secure by the victory achieved by those two galleons. But above all this is the story of a Lady, a grand Lady, beloved of a whole people, who came to the rescue of a small band of devotees and turned the foe away and made him take "to flight with lamps extinguished."

For this is the story of "La Naval de Manila". A story fashioned by faith, interwoven with legend and made conclusive in old chronicles, dusty with age and voluminous with testimonies.

IN 1646 when the Filipino nation was young with the youth of the recently enlightened, there arose a threat to its existence. The waters of Baptism were barely dry upon its brow when an alien despot made bold to sail in its waters bent on conquest. It was no ordinary matter. It was a shadow cast, not only upon land where the Spanish sun never set, but on the very faith of our fa-

thers. From that contest would emerge a people steeped in the Rosary devotion; a people who annually would flock to the feet of the Virgin of "La Naval" to give public testimony of their trust in her.

Even as in 1646, bereft of all preparations, the two galleons of legend sailed away confident that their greatest power "was in their spiritual graces and the faith they had in their Mother in Heaven". The battles were five in number. The dates ranged from March to October, 1646.

The disparity between the forces was glaring. The enemy counted "with fifteen new vessels, powerfully armed and manned by eight hundred men". The Catholic Fleet "was made up of two old galleons "La Encarnacion" and "La Rosario", with small fire power, manned by some two hundred Spanish-Filipino forces had two other vessels in reserve but these were two measly brigs aided by two Chinese junks and a heavy and unmaneuverable "escort vessel" of doubtful category and more doubtful armament.

IT is not easy to describe a sea battle of the 17th century. How vastly different they were from our days of air reconnaissance, of submarines and radar-guided torpedoes and blow-by-blow communiqués from a Commander-in-Chief ten thousand miles away! Then, battles were the bloody and gory things that have formed part of the tradition of arms of all self-respecting nations. Contests, in which might and mind found expression in screaming ponderous cannon-balls, in sails raised and cut in the height of conflict, of treacherous "five vessels" creeping towards the foe and the wild exhilarating boarding of his vessel for the last and climatic "man-to-man fight".

It was so in 1646. The first report of the enemy's approach was received by the authorities at Manila, in March, 1646. The information was to the effect that a powerful enemy fleet was marauding around Philippine waters and fear for the nation's integrity was expressed in all quarters. Stung to the quick by this challenge to Castilian dominance of the seas of the Philippines, serious-minded high officers of the colonial government decided upon an almost rash venture.

The opponent was to be met at sea. There, where he had flung his insolence, would he be humbled. But with what? With two vessels—"La Encarnación" and

"La Rosario", for every Spanish vessel was the equal of four or even seven of the ships of any nation. Thus, it was that they sailed away — these fashioners of dreams, these early heroes in whose veins flowed the blood warmed in the sunny lands of Spain and the blood nurtured in the placid emerald isles of the Philippines to which one day the Malayan had come.

They sailed. Confident "more in their spiritual powers than in the safety of their vessels". In the long nights of the vigil, with the sails billowing in the virgin air of the Philippine skies, with the planks on deck creaking with the added weight of unaccustomed arms, they sailed away—these crusaders of 1646. And the clear, silent evenings were disturbed only by the lapping of the waves on the sides of the ships on the alert and by the incense of prayers that rose from both Catholic ships. For in each of them, a nook had been reserved for the the Virgin of the Most Holy Rosary.

"The men prayed the Rosary on their knees and in two choirs", for in spite of their bravery and their determination "they realized that their strength laid in her".

IN the midnight of the 15th of March, 1646, in the northern passages of Bolinao—so common an avenue for invaders of the

Philippines—just after the five bells of the hours, the alarm was given. The foe had been sighted. Five powerful vessels, five dots on the horizon, five insults to our love for her approaching inexorably in the inevitableness of battle. The men took their stations. A feverish waiting ensues as the cannons are divested of their coverings, sand poured over the slippery patches of the deck, and the water pails—ominous portent of feared fires—are made ready. A silence falls. It is the silence of the moment before the curtain is raised. Then, from the gathered men there comes a voice which the rends the silence. A voice vibrant and manly and yet filled with awe: "The First Mystery..." And the men answer: "Hail Mary, full of grace..." They come to that most fervent of pleas: "Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, Pray for us". Then, there is no silence, there are no galleons, there are no men... there is only a loving, throbbing faith as the men of "La Naval" pray and as the centuries listen.

It is only at two in the afternoon that the ships come within

of "La Naval". Two against range. This is the first battle five. A terrific cannonade from the enemy opens the fray. The Rosary galleons answer in kind. In the Catholic ships no man is idle. There is much to be done. Firing incessantly, praying incessantly, they fight till seven in the evening when "the enemy takes to flight with lamps extinguished". These will be repeated four more times. These lamps that are extinguished and which plunges the opposing fleet into a darkness that is as black as their heresy.

There is wild rejoicing on board the two vessels. Their prayers have been answered. Now, the Rosary is in thanksgiving. These, too, will be repeated; this praying in thanksgiving and this lighting of lamps before her altar—lamps whose light is a pale symbol of the white-hot flame of faith that sears men's souls, makes them pure and lays them at the feet of the Virgin of the Most Holy Rosary.

Both contenders retire from the fray licking their wounds. The enemy has lost its flagship. The two galleons are badly battered

"A man, Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "should keep his friendships in constant repair."

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Whenever I hear people discussing birth control, I always remember that I was the fifth.—Clarence Darrow.

but sail to greater glories, to write the next chapters of "La Naval".

It is at Banton and Marinduque, on 29th July, 1646, that the two fleets meet for the second time. The foe has brought to the fight seven new vessels. They have come gaily decorated, almost cocky, in the power of their armament and the superiority of their equipment. Had they not bottled up the "two chickens" in the narrow confines of Ticao? For two months the Spanish vessels were at anchor at the cape of Ticao not venturing to come out while the opponent held them at bay. It was when the alien privateers had turned towards Manila, that the Spanish vessels took to sail on July 25—the Day of Santiago, patron of Spain—and chased the enemy! To the foe this was impudence and he met it with ridicule.

Closing in for the battle, at about in the evening, the enemy displayed its flags and had a band on board. How little he knew what awaited him! The "La Encarnación" and "La Rosario" had something more. For on board they carried Her who was to be their Protectress and under whose mantle they would sail to victory. That battle lasted until the sunrise of the next day. But what a change was undergone by the enemy! Gone were its flags and silent its bands.

Pathetically it took to flight amidst the parring mockery of a Portuguese soldier who shouted at them: "Why don't you play your flutes? Display your flags, mine brothers!"

THE third battle is fought between the Islands of Maestre de Campo and Mindoro. It lasts from two in the afternoon to "the striking of the Angelus". Once more the enemy takes to flight and the chronicles begin to call the two galleons—"the galleons of the miracle". There is justification for such a name. Even before the second battle, while ringed-in in the Cape of Ticao he men in the ship of the General take a vow.

"The vow consists in going to Santo Domingo barefooted to give public manifestation of their gratitude to the Virgin and of instituting an annual feast in Her honor." Later, when the Admiral, in the other ship, is informed of this vow he replies "that he has made it even without knowing what was going on in the other ship." There is a unanimity of faith. This vow is significant.

It is the vow of "La Naval", a vow celebrated annually in October. This is the vow that is the expression of the people's devotion to the Virgin of the Rosary—the Virgin beloved in their national annals with the name of "Santo Rosario".

ON 24th September, 1646 the two contenders again meet near the islands of Luban and Ambil. For ten hours the battle rages. The enemy is persistent and the men of "La Naval" are confident. They have had time to fulfill their vow. They have visited Santo Domingo and the whole nation knows of their exploits. When they sallied forth again, at the first indications of the enemy's return, they answered with a loud, stentorian, "YES" when their Chaplain asked them if they desired to renew the vow.

The result is inevitable. The "foe takes to flight with lamps extinguished".

THEY meet the enemy, again, for the last time on 3rd October, 1646. It is the month of the Rosary. The miracle that is wrought then places the final note of confirmation on the wonders that had come about. One of the Spanish vessels at anchor is attacked by three enemy ships in front of Mariveles. Tied as she is, the veteran of so many battles, answers to the enemy fire, almost gleefully. It is as

if she realizes she is being given an added opportunity of proving the protection of the Queen. For four hours the fights on and the foe gnashes teeth as the Spanish ship opens gaping wounds on his men-of-war. Finally, he gives up and shamelessly runs away never again to bother the Philippine coasts.

THIS is the story of two galileans almost pathetic in their contests against fifteen enemy vessels. This is the story of a people whose faith brought them safety. This is the story of a beloved Lady, who came to the rescue of her devotees and turned the enemies of faith away.

This is something more. This is also the story of "Santo Rosario"—of the devotion of the Rosary in the Philippine lands; the story of the Crown of Roses recited in the Filipino home; of the Rosary at Fort Santiago; of the Rosary of the candlelit confines of Santo Domingo, the Martyred Church; the Rosary of the solemn processions—the Rosary that is part and parcel, flesh and bone, of Catholic Philippines.—From "Sto. Rosario".

IGNORANCE NOT BLISS

The author of this story swears to its truth and uses it to show the effects of Godless education. A newspaper reporter once wrote a story in which he mentioned Mary Magdalene. The Editor was irritated at the reporter for not mentioning who Mary Magdalene was, but his irritation increased ten-fold when he looked her up in "Who's Who in America" and couldn't find her listed!