

DRAMATIC MOMENTS IN THE CAREER OF BONIFACIO

by Encarnacion Alzona

During the time we were under foreign rule, it required a great deal of persistence, courage, and sacrifice to stand for one's ideas if they were contrary to those held by the rulers, for insistence upon them in defiance of the authorities invariably meant either banishment, imprisonment and torture, the scaffold, or confiscation of property and ruthless persecution, not only of the offender but also of his close relatives and friends. There was no freedom of the press, speech, association or assembly. The counterpart of that rule today is the Communist regime.

Such restraints are unknown to the present generation of Filipinos, thanks to our heroes who knew how to fight and even die for the dignity of our country. Today anyone who wishes to voice his grievances or express a dissenting opinion can write to the newspapers and perhaps the tabloids, be-

take himself to the radio station or to some government office, to his representative in the Congress, or stand on a public platform and air his views. One thing only he must bear in mind: There is a libel law in this country.

In Rizal's time the patriotic and articulate Filipinos had to be faraway from the jurisdiction of the Philippines, to be able to write against the colonial government. The reformists, like Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Graciano, Lopez Jaena, Mariano Ponce, and the rest, fled to Europe and there denounced the abuses of the Spanish friars, civil and military officials in the press and on the platform. Those who could not leave the Philippines resorted to the clandestine printing of handbills, risking their lives thereby. They had to hide their little printing presses and move them from place to evade the police.

After ardent years of peaceful and orderly propaganda, of writing newspapers articles, delivering eloquent petitions to the governors-general, and even to the king of Spain, what did they obtain? Nothing. The government officials were deaf to their pleas. If they listened at all, their reply was arrest, banishment, imprisonment and torture, or death on the scaffold or Bagumbayan Field.

Even Rizal with his legalistic mind in the end lost his faith in the efficacy of peaceful methods or relying on the promises of Spanish politicians and colonial governors-general. If the Filipinos wanted to be redeemed, he said, they should redeem themselves. Hence, before his deportation to Dapitan, he had begun to negotiate for funds with which to purchase arms and to enlist the adherence of wealthy Filipinos to the national cause. After him other patriotic Filipinos took up the tremendous task. Towering among them was Andres Bonifacio (1863-1897).

The story of Bonifacio has been told by many writers and students of the Philippine Revolution. Thanks to them we are now familiar with his humble origin, his struggle to educate himself, his favorite readings, his reckless daring and patriotic fervor. In the narration of his role in the Revolution there are dramatic mo-

ments of far-reaching consequence on the course of that popular movement.

On the night of 7th July 1892, the day the order for Rizal's deportation came to be known, Bonifacio was in the house of Deodato Arellano together with Valentin Diaz, Teodoro Plata, Ladislaw Diwa, Jose A. Dizon, and a few others talking about what they should now do in view of the banishment of Rizal, whom they considered their leader. [Bonifacio was a member of the short-lived *Liga Filipina*, founded by Rizal; nevertheless, he felt that in view of the turn of events, that association was no longer adequate to meet the need of the moment.] The new political situation, in his opinion, demanded a militant organization to prepare the people for the overthrow of Spanish sovereignty. The need of the hour was for red blooded men organized and willing to take up arms to redeem their native land. [Rizal's life and writings had prepared the minds of his countrymen for this militant movement.]

There and then they made a solemn vow to dedicate their lives to the expulsion of the foreign oppressors of their country, and following an ancient custom of the land, they made a blood compact. For a name they adopted **KATAASTASAN KAGALANG-GALANG**

NA KATIPUNAN NG MGA ANAK NG BAYAN, which came to be popularly called KATIPUNAN and its members *Katipuneros*. Naturally it was a secret society. Forthwith its leaders set out to win loyal adherents and collect much-needed arms in preparation for the day of reckoning. Unluckily before it was ready for action, news of its existence leaked out, and, alerted, the authorities lost no time in searching the houses of suspects making arrests and wresting confessions even from innocent persons. A veritable reign of terror ensued, brutal enough to silence and immobilize the weak-hearted.

However, Bonifacio was of a different mettle. Stouthearted, dedicated, an ardent patriot, he was like the famed warriors of old whose bravery redoubled once they were wounded. As our saying goes, *Ang bayaning masugatan ay nag-iibayo ang tapang*. He lost no time in summoning his fellow *Katipuneros* to a rendezvous in the secluded place called Pugad-lawin, in the barrio of Balintawak. There on the 23rd of August 1896, in the spacious yard a son of Tandang Sora (Melchora Aquino) one of our heroines of revolutionary fame, more than a thousand *Katipuneros* foregathered. It was in that place and on that day that occurred the momentous event to which our historians have

given the name, "The Cry of Balintawak"—the cry of emancipation of the downtrodden Filipinos that resounded throughout the Archipelago. We can visualize Bonifacio, 33 years old, in the full vigor of manhood, standing in the midst of those intense men poor, ill-clad, with only a *gulok* (bolo) and *sibat* (bamboo spear) for weapons. He asked them point-blank, in the plainest language that they understood, if they were determined to rise against the foreign tyrants. Hearing their vigorous reply of "Yes!" he asked them to tear up their cedula personal in token of their irrevocable decision, which they forthwith did with enthusiasm, and shouts of "*Viva ang Pilipinas! Viva ang Katipunan!*" rent the air. It was a dramatic moment. In Bonifacio they had found their long-awaited leader, bold and daring.

This was precisely what Rizal had foreseen and feared. That the Filipinos, exasperated at the deafness of the Spanish government to their pleas for reforms, for the expulsion of their oppressors, the friars, might take up the law in their hands and though miserably unprepared, would rise in armed revolt, and their blood would redden the soil of their native land. When they took this oath, the *Katipuneros* were yet unorganized, untrained in the art of modern warfare, and without

adequate weapons, without money. And they were to face professional Spanish soldiers armed with Remingtons, and Mausers. The fact that they were willing to plunge into battle, despite their unpreparedness, indicated that their situation had become unendurable, desperate.

It was the glory of Bonifacio to lead the *Katipuneros* in their first encounter with the government forces. That was the commencement of the armed revolt against Spain, of the Revolution of 1896.

Unfortunately Bonifacio's enemies were not only the Spaniards. As the revolt he started spread and his fame as a leader grew, he aroused the jealousy and animosity of some of his comrades in arms. He was the founder of the *Katipunan* and later became its head with the dignified title of *Supremo*, and already was being hailed by his admirers as the future ruler of the Philippines, as undoubtedly he hoped to be. But other leaders were emerging and winning military victories and loyal supporters. For example, Emilio Aguinaldo of Cavite. His successes on the battlefronts were drawing to his side more and more fellow Caviteños who already destined him to be the head of the independent Philippines. Despite the growing adulation of his followers, he affected a certain

modesty. He was soft-spoken and gentle, and furthermore, lax towards his erring soldiers who remained unpunished despite their scandalous immoralities, an attitude which made him popular among his men.

Not so was Bonifacio. He was a disciplinarian and from his men he demanded sobriety and exemplary conduct, which he believed necessary to attain the objectives of the Revolution. Read his *Decalogue* or the *Cartilla*, drafted by his comrade, Emilio Jacinto, which he adopted for the guidance of the *Katipuneros*.

Soon clashes between the two leaders and their followers arose. Cavite provided the stage for the final dramatic incidents in Bonifacio's revolutionary career. Imus, Tejeros in San Francisco de Malabon, now General Trias, Limbon in Indang, and Maragondon witnessed the lamentable incidents that stained the annals of the Revolution. These places were the stations, so to speak, where Bonifacio stopped on the road to his Calvary for his crucifixion. It will take too long a time to give here a description of the scenes enacted on these stages. Suffice it to say that they revealed the conflicting ambitions of the two revolutionary leaders, and Bonifacio was at a great disadvantage on account of the place where they were staged. He was in the

home territory of his rival Aguinaldo and regionalistic sentiment could not be avoided. Bonifacio had gone to Cavite reluctantly at the invitation of the Cavite *Katipuneros*. Once there it did not take him long to sense a feeling of antagonism towards him among Aguinaldo's followers. They wanted to force Bonifacio to recognize Aguinaldo as the supreme head of the revolutionary government and they hurled accusations that Bonifacio and his brothers were preparing a counter-revolution.

Very recently, this speaker had the privilege to read an unpublished manuscript with the title of *Apunters para la Revolucion Filipina, etc.* (Notes for the History of the Philippine Revolution, etc.) in the handwriting of Julio Nakpil, who died on the 2nd of the month of November (1960). The late author was a member of Rizal's *Liga Filipina* and a comrade of Bonifacio in the Revolution. According to this document, Bonifacio denied the accusation that they were plotting a counter-revolution, and he forthwith challenged Aguinaldo to a duel, saying "If you are offended by my behavior, name your seconds." But, instead of accepting the challenge like a man, wrote Nakpil, Aguinaldo ordered the arrest of the Bonifacio brothers when they

were preparing to leave Cavite and return to Morong (now Rizal Province).

Now in the grip of Aguinaldo's soldiers, Bonifacio were rendered helpless. His men from Morong, Manila and Bulacan had failed to arrive. During the arrest, Ciriaco Bonifacio was mortally wounded. Bonifacio was stabbed, and weakened by the bleeding, he could not walk and had to be carried in a hammock to the jail in Naik and then to Maragondon. This was on the 29th of April 1897. On the morning of the 10th of May following, the Bonifacio brothers were on the way to their Golgotha. By afternoon their executioners had finished their grim task, and the two brothers lay in hastily dug graves somewhere at the foot of the hills in the environs of Maragondon. Thus the Aguinaldo government removed from the arena a formidable contender for the leadership of the nation and silenced him forever, but not history. In the unpublished Nakpil MS. is a damning indictment of Aguinaldo.

The Filipino people have pronounced their verdict on Andres Bonifacio: He is a hero and not a traitor to be placed before a firing squad; and they have erected to his memory the grandest monument to a hero in existence in this country today.