AN EPISTLE OF A FRIAR-PRISONER, 1898-1900: FERNANDO GARCIA OSA'S ING MACUYAD A PAMAGSALITA DIQUIT QNG BIE NANG DELANAN AT PANGATIMAUA NING METUNG A MEBIJAG

By Lino A. Dizon


Reviewed by John N. Schumacher

This small book may be said to have two authors: Father Fernando García, parish priest of Macabebe in 1898, who wrote the Kapampangan original, published in the University of Santo Tomas Press in 1900 as a pamphlet of 22 pages, and Professor Lino Dizon, head of the Center for Tarlaqueño Studies at the Tarlac State University. Dizon has not only supplemented the Kapampangan original with an English translation, but written as well an informed and interesting context for its story. Father García’s “epistle,” as Dizon perceptively categorizes it, was written to his flock shortly after his arrival in Manila, but like St. Paul’s, on whom he evidently models himself, intended for a wider circulation. It is a small history of the painful journey of the friars taken prisoner in various parts of Luzon
by the Revolutionary Army, and for eighteen months forced to travel, a good part of it on foot and with many sufferings, to Sabangan (today part of Mountain Province), where with the coming of the Americans to Cervantes, they were able to escape and make their way to Vigan and Manila.

Unlike other such accounts, there is relatively little recrimination at the atrocities inflicted on the friar prisoners by some of the brutal barbarians who, as in all revolutions, managed to get positions of authority from which they abused their prisoners. Though he condemns some of the worst tortures, from which some friars died, he minimizes his own travails, concentrating rather on the charity shown him and others by numerous unknown Filipinos, weeping at the sight of the friars being so treated, and even risking themselves to give food or even a few centavos to relieve their plight. Thus the epistle is more one of gratitude and concern for his people than a condemnation of what he had suffered. Later, Father García would return to work in various parishes of Pampanga until shortly before his death in the monastery of San Agustín in 1924. He left behind him a considerable number of books in Kapampangan, both published and manuscript.

Not being competent to judge the accuracy of the translation, I can only say that the English reads well. Besides his work of translation, Professor Dizon has written a scholarly as well as interesting account of the whole episode of the friars' imprisonment. Basing himself on Spanish, Filipino, and American sources, he has provided us with a relatively brief but comprehensive survey of the friar-prisoners' experience that transcends the limits of Father García's own story. It will be useful to all historians of the Revolution, and is an incisive refutation of the textbook stereotype of alleged general Filipino hatred for the friars.

Useful maps and numerous illustrations enrich the well-produced book. This is a fitting first publication of the Juan D. Nepomuceno Center for Kapampangan Studies, and it is to be hoped that it will become known to all interested in Philippine history, not merely Kapampangan history.