

Miag-ao - 1829-1864
P. Francisco Perez, O.S.A.
(The Old Man of Miag-ao)

"El viejo de Miag-ao." (P. Francisco Perez, O.S.A.) in: *El Diario Español*, Madrid, December 9, 1877.

'*El viejo de Miag-ao*,' is the appellation by which Father Francisco Perez, O.S.A. is known by the inhabitants of the island of Panay.

"He was born in Villavieja in the province of Orense in 1778. He had begun his studies for the priesthood but was obliged to interrupt them when the 1793 Convention in France demanded that Spain should recognize the Republic. King Carlos IV preferred to sign a coalition with Great Britain and the Convention war was on: Francisco Perez was called to the colors. He served under Don Antonio Recardos, in charge of the army at Catalonia who conquered Roussillon and won many battles over the French. In 1794 Recardos died and Francisco Perez was witness to the last moments of this bizarre general. From then on there were reverses of fortune, so that by June 1795, Bilbao was lost and the French had reached Miranda de Ebro. These war experiences were to prove very valuable to Francisco Perez in later life.

"When peace was declared at the Treaty of Basle he left military service and entered the Augustinian college in Valladolid. He made his vows on September 16, 1799. By 1803, he was a priest. Early in February 1804, in the company of 24 other Augustinian religious, he

embarked at Cadiz in the Frigate *Cuatro Hermanos* bound for New Spain. He arrived at Vera Cruz on the 16th of April of the same year, and at Mexico City the 16th of May. In July 1804, he left Acapulco destined for the Philippines." ²⁶⁶

According to the *reseña* which was done in Cadiz for the members of the Mission, *reseña* which was later confirmed in Mexico, "Father Francisco was 'tall, white, pock-marked, with black hair and a long nose.'" ²⁶⁷

In the Philippines his first parish was *Sibalom*, Antique, where he served from 1806 to 1807. Then San Joaquin, Iloilo for 9 years (1807 to 1816). From there he went to Dumalag, Capiz which he administered from 1816 to 1820. Next was Dumangas, Iloilo where he stayed also for 9 years, and lastly Miag-ao, Iloilo for 35 long years (1829 to 1864). ²⁶⁸

Father Francisco Perez came to Miag-ao when he was 51 years old. He undertook the spiritual administration of this town continuously until his death at the age of 86.

"From the very beginning he took care of this last parish with great charity, a genuine zeal for souls and patriotism without limit. One of the first tasks of this 'Viejo de Miag-ao' (old man of Miag-ao) was to prepare his parishioners against the incursion of the Moros. With this aim in view he began to train them in the use of arms, to study the tricks and cunning of the Moro corsairs and the method of pursuing them without fear or haste. Such was the enthusiasm he awoke among his parishioners that these men defeated their adversaries and on six occasions they were forced to shamefully retreat and take flight."

To quote a writer who preferred to remain anonymous, "Another enemy of no minor importance came to obstruct the work of the good father. The giant of modern times Napoleon I had placed on the throne of San Fernando his brother Joseph Bonaparte. Decres, Minister of the Navy of this conqueror of Austerlitz, a man of recognized talent had knowledge of the work and secret communications which the Spanish government had sent to our chief of the squadron Alava. . . Decres yearned to unite France with this precious province. He prepared with all secrecy one Mission, but the navy that had for objective the island of Panay found it being vigilantly guarded by the parish priest of Miag-ao. His hopes frustrated, he turned his direction towards Luzon; there he was also followed by the tireless Fray Francisco Perez and in a small bay in Tayabas he was captured.

"But Fr. Francisco Perez was also a peace-loving teacher. With true enthusiasm he showed us Miag-ao, his town, which counted then with 37,326 souls, having contributed with the surplus to found the neighboring town of San Joaquin. In these two towns there was good health and cleanliness without equal. There where half a century earlier crime was rampant, the work was represented by 4,000 looms, introducing to commerce the precious cloth of *nipis* and *siramis*, wide fields of sugar cane, ground sown with wheat, ship stores at the quay side, and a great number of people engaged in maritime industry. With true pride Fray Francisco Perez showed everyone that which he called his work. A magnificent church, a convent, a cemetery, a school for children of both sexes, eight bridges, buildings all of stone which one seldom sees in such numbers in any one place in Europe, six great highways in a perfect state of endurance and conservation and that which matters most:

the judicial statistics of the province showing Miag-ao as one of those towns in which few had need of the goddess Temis to intervene.²⁶⁹

"As important data we would like to emphasize that in the 1877 *ortijo de quintas* (drawing of lots for military conscription) 'of 814 young unmarried men presented, all 814 knew how to read and write, more than 600 had enough knowledge about geography and arithmetic; and only 9 lacked instruction because they had to watch their livestock in the mountains.' "²⁷⁰

(Note: One proof of how literate they were, in order to avoid conscription [one out of every five with the same family name] they varied the spelling of their names retaining the same number of syllables but changing the vowels and consonants, e.g. Magallanes to Fadollone, or adding an extra syllable as Morales to Moraleda.)

"Despite a population of 650,000 and only 20 soldiers of the *tercio civil* to maintain order, conditions in Iloilo and Antique in the mid-1800's were peaceful. Our anonymous writer credits Fray Francisco Perez, O.S.A. for this state of tranquillity. It cannot be denied, however, that by the end of 1884 only 20 years after the death of the said priest, the people of the towns administered by the Augustinians in these two provinces were the first to rise against Spain. (This was known in Antique as the *Inaway sa Igbaong, Baong* then being the whole southwestern Panay which included Guimbal, Miag-ao, San Joaquin, Dao, Hamtik, San Jose de Buenavista and San Remigio.) What was note-worthy about this revolt was that the rebels had a perfect hierarchy of command, well-trained officers and totally-disciplined subordinates."²⁷¹

R. MORALES MAZA

His Eminence, Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, D.D.

Archbishop

the first

Very Rev. Fr.

First Prior Provincial of the Augustinian Province

of Santo Nino de Cebu



THE AUGUSTINIANS IN PANAY

and to the memory of

Rev. Fr. Miguel Manrique, O.S.A.

Rev. Fr. Rafael Lopez Martinez, O.S.A.

two Spanish Augustinians who spent the best years

of their missionary life in Panay.

The University of San Agustin

Iloilo City

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