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1629 events from Fr. Medina's History

Sources: Fray Juan de Medina, O.S.A., Historia de la Orden de S. Agustín de estas islas Filipinas, Manila, 1893 [but written in 1631]; translated in B&R 24: 160-168.

Chapter XLII

Of the election of our Father Fray Juan de Henao.

...
 Father Fray Hernando de Cabrera, an admirable minister of the Tagalogs, of whom we have already spoken, asked for leave to go to Spain. Together with the Father Master, Fray Pedro García, he took passage on the flagship **San Juan**, a new ship whose first voyage this was. Aboard it was Don Fernando de Silva, who had governed these islands, four procurators for the city of Manila, who were being sent to look after the property of the citizens, on account of unfair dealings by those of New Spain in the returns made for it [i.e. for goods exported from Manila]. Further, two Fathers and a Brother named Fray Juan de Peña took passage with them. Two of our religious embarked aboard the *almiranta*—Father Fray Lorenzo [sic] de Figueroa as procurator of the creole Fathers, and a Brother named Fray Francisco de San Nicolás.

They left the port of Cavite on 4 August. They experienced considerable suffering, for the *vendavals* were blowing vigorously, and those winds make it difficult to get out of the bay. At last it was God's good pleasure to give them weather which enabled them to make their voyage. In this line, on the return voyage to Mexico, the ships do not sail in company, but each one takes the direction which is most expedient for it, relying on God, who will aid them.

[The *almiranta* turns back]

The storms were frightful. The *almiranta* suffered the most terrible voyage that ever ship has suffered. For after a few blasts they had to cut down the mast, and, when they reached 36°, they lost their rudder. In such plight they agreed to return, suffering destructive hurricanes, so that, had not the ship been so staunch, it would have been swallowed up in the sea a thousand times. Finally God was pleased to have it return, as if by a miracle; and as such was it considered by all the inhabitants of Manila.

The other vessel, being a new and larger ship, on perceiving the storm, went to a lower latitude. It continued to plow the sea, to the great discomfort of all, for it was six months on the voyage. The Father Master, Fray Pedro, died on that voyage, with such an excellent example that there was no-one aboard the ship who was not edified. Father Cabrera also died with great piety, and like a devoted religious, as he was. The Brother lived. Even the chaplain aboard the ship died. In all, the dead numbered 95 persons, who could have peopled a world. Those who arrived were in such condition that it was necessary to let them regain their strength in the port of Valdebanderas. The procurators on both sides had this lot, which was plainly that which occurred to all. But against the will of God there is no-one who can go; what is important is, that His will be always done.

...

[The ships of 1630]

In the present year [1630] the vessel **San Juan** returned, the ill fortune of which was feared, because the *almiranta* had put back to port. It gave report of its voyage, whereupon the Order voted what was important.¹

They appointed a procurator who went to Spain. This was the Father Reader, Fray Pedro de la Peña,² who was prior of Macabebe in Pampanga. He took passase on the flagship **San Luis**. In the *almiranta* embarked another father, from Valencia, named Father Fray Vicente Lidón. These vessels left the port of Cavite on 4 August. They put back to the same port to lighten, and set sail again as heavily laden as before. They experienced no better voyage than the last ones had; for, besides putting back, they did not lack misfortunes. The flagship cut down its mast on the high sea, and was all but lost. The other vessel also suffered greatly, and between them both they threw overboard more than 140 [dead] people, while the others were about to die of hunger, for the voyage lasted 7-1/2 months.

[The ships of 1631]

New Spain no longer expected them, and therefore despatched two small vessels from Perú, in which came the visitor of the islands, Don Francisco de Rojas. Both vessels suffered greatly. They lost their rudders, and their arrival was a miracle. It is quite apparent that the Lord is very merciful toward the islands. We surmise that these vessels arrived, one in July and the other in August of 1631. The worst thing resulting to the Order in what happened to the vessels was, that no-one would take passage on the ships, so that the province came to a condition of the utmost peril. For, if procurators are lacking in Spain, there is no hope of getting religious; and the religious who are here now are dying daily. For never have I seen a triennium when there were not more than 20 deaths [reported], and sometimes even 30; while few are invested with the habit. Thus, perforce, the province is always in need of men.

1 Doubtless masses for the deaths of Father Pedro García and Father Cabrera.

2 He died the following year, aboard ship.

Nevertheless, I, who had always been desirous of going to Spain, at last obtained my wish this year of 1631, under the greatest strife and opposition that can be told; but I will not speak of them, as they are personal, although a not small history might be made of them. Finally, I embarked in the flagship (where I went as vicar), in which no other priest embarked. The ship was a new one, and had been built in Cavite, during the residence of Governor Don Juan Niño de Tavora, who named it **La Magdalena** for his wife.

It was always said that the ship had no strength and ought not to make the voyage. The people said this among themselves; but, when they spoke of it to the Governor, they praised it, and said that it was the best vessel in the world, for the contrary grieved him greatly. It was laden, and then its weakness was evident, so that they had to change their tune to that very governor. It was said that it would be made alright by putting in some stiffening—namely, three planks on each side, very thick and heavy—whereby it seemed that the vessel would be strengthened. Accordingly, the people embarked, a thing that ought not to have been done.

On Thursday, at dawn, we were about to set sail; and when they weighed the anchor that held the ship, it listed to starboard so rapidly that, had not the point of the largest yard caught on the shore, the ship would doubtless have keeled over. To see how many men perish there and so much property lost, was a day of judgment—an event such as no-one remembers to have heard told before. The artillery was fired at intervals from the fort of Cavite, whereat the Governor and many vessels came up. I was the first to escape from the ship, but as by a miracle; for I jumped into the water from the lantern, clothed as I was with my black habit. By God's help I was enabled to reach a small boat, in which I escaped, as above described. May the Lord's will be fulfilled. With this I have been in danger of death 7 times from the water while in the islands, whence the Lord by His mercy has miraculously drawn and freed me...¹

¹ Ed. note: Fr. Medina was able to make the voyage 3 years later, but he died at sea in 1635.