

**MAXIMO S. VIOLA**  
(1857-1933)

Patriot and Financier of *Noli Me Tangere*

Known as the man who saved for posterity the *Noli Me Tangere*, the first of Rizal's two great novels, Dr. Maximo Viola was born on October 17, 1857 in Barrio Sta. Rita, San Miguel, Bulacan. He was the only child of Isabel Sison of Malabon, Rizal and Pedro Viola from San Rafael, Bulacan.

Viola finished his early education in San Miguel. He took his pre-medical studies at the University of Santo Tomas, where he witnessed the prejudice of Spaniards against the Filipino students. In 1882, he sailed to Spain and enrolled Medicine at the University of Barcelona, where he met other Filipino students particularly Jose Rizal, with whom he developed close friendship. Soon, he became an active member of the Propaganda Movement.

In 1886, Viola finished his course in Medicine. In March 1887, Viola played an important role in the life of Jose Rizal, he financed the publication of *Noli Me Tangere*, which original manuscript had already planned by his friend to destroy because of financial inability to pay its publication. Thus, the first 2,000 copies of the novel were printed. In deep gratitude, Rizal gave him the last galley proofs and the first published copy, on which he wrote, "To my friend, Maximo Viola, the first to read and appreciate my work-Jose Rizal, March 29, 1887, Berlin."

In May 1887, he toured Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Switzerland with Rizal. It was during the trip that he personally met Ferdinand Blumentritt, one of Rizal's foreigner friend and supporters.

Dr. Viola returned to the Philippines in 1887 and began his medical practice. In 1890, he married Juana Roura, a native of San Miguel, by whom he had five sons. However, two of them died in infancy.

In the latter part of June 1892, he had a reunion with Rizal in Manila and learned about the sad persecution of his friend, who had to report before Governor General Despujol. His association with Rizal included him to be watched by the Spanish authorities so that he could not stay long in the city. His home in Bulacan had been subjected to thorough inspection by the Spanish Guardia Civil.

When the revolution erupted in 1896, Viola went underground to evade the harassment of the Spanish authorities. The Spanish authorities, because of his father's support to the revolution, had demolished their family house in Santa Rita, Bulacan. He was also incarcerated, initially in a Manila military prison and, later, in Olongapo. During his imprisonment, he came to know and assist Dr. Fresnell, an American doctor who was unfamiliar with tropical diseases. Fresnell later helped him secure his freedom.

Viola's firm character and heart for his countrymen was always manifested in peaceful means. As president of the *Liga de Proprietarios*, he aided the owners of rice lands in San Miguel, Bulacan in opposing politicians who were courting the tenant's votes at the expense of the landlords. His fight against the politicians, among whom was Manuel L. Quezon, reached the Court of the First Instance of Malolos, Bulacan, which the court dismissed owing to its political nature. When the Manila Railroad line was being extended to Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, Viola once again rallied the concerned landowners in preventing the prestigious British Company from taking over their land without appropriate reparations.

A kind-hearted physician, Dr. Viola treated his indigent patients for free and often resorted to simple remedies so that they would not have to spend. For instance, he would disinfect common snakebites by using matchsticks instead of prescribing expensive solutions.

Dr. Viola found time for his favorite hobby, designing and building furniture. In the 1920's, he proved his competence as an amateur designer by winning awards for his furniture pieces displayed in several shows in Manila.

He wrote memoirs of his friendship with Rizal in later years. These came out in three parts in the Spanish newspaper *El Ideal*, dated June to 20, 1913. Their English version, done by eminent writer A.R. Roces, was published in the *Manila Times* on the December 30 and 31, 1950 and January 1, 1951 issues.

On September 3, 1933, Dr. Viola, aged 76 died in Barrio San Jose in his hometown. Later, another house was constructed on the same lot where an heir of Pedro Viola lived.

In 1962, a marker in honor of Dr. Viola was installed in San Miguel, Bulacan.

#### References:

Eminent Filipinos. Manila: National Historical Commission, 1970.

Quirino, Carlos. Who's who in Philippine History. Manila: Tahanan Books, 1995.