

# Rafael Roces, Jr.: A-1 Journalist

by TEOPISTO GUINGONA, Jr.



Not so many years ago, a man lived and died — who in his life disputed endlessly for the rights of man... and in his death accomplished with honor the mission of the press. Let me tell you his story.

Rafael Roces Jr. was born rich. He was born rich with the things of this world. But the real wealth of his spirit was still to be tapped in the early maturity that came to his life.

Rafael Roces Jr. liked basketball. He captained his team to many victories. But the greatest victory he ever won was his continuing victory over himself.

The family of Rafael owned many lands. And so he left the Ateneo to study the science of agriculture in order ultimately to conquer nature and make it produce in the then semi-virgin lands of Bukidnon.

But his spirit longed to conquer,

not the forces of nature, but other forces much more potent — and much more destructive, than those. He longed to conquer — or at least to resist the forces of deceit, of untruth, and of oppression that were seeking to destroy the world around him. And so he looked for a weapon with which to fight.

Rafael could not find in the plow and in the tractor a weapon with which to fight the elusive forces of falsity and greed. He found it only in the written word, in the power of the pen, in the inky, black and white appeal of the printed page. And so he turned to journalism.

He travelled to America where he learned the true power of a libertarian press. And when he returned... he began to fight, to fight for truth, to fight those who would suppress truth, to challenge the demagogues who

would wreak havoc with the people's civil liberties — in a word — to resist!

Rafael Roces Jr. wrote a column which with delicate humor, he called "Thorns and Roces". Here was his weapon, fashioned with his own hands and forged on the anvil of his own restless, quick and brilliant mind.

This scion of a wealthy, influential family, this child of comfort could have sat back in his easy chair and, after the accepted fashion of the bored heir, watched complacently as the world with all its misery, all its injustices, and all its oppression passed relentlessly by.

But Rafael chose to sit forward on his office chair and plunge right into the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor—of the political victim against the political gangster, of society's slaves against society's tyrants, parrying with the shield of his solid, sincere and unyielding prose every treacherous thrust against civil liberties and civil decency.

Rafael resisted oppression even before the yellow invaders from the north began to tramp down the streets of his beloved city. And when the invaders did come, when they sought by all forms of threat and force to stop the free flow of information and substitute lies made in Japan for truth, Rafael prepared to resist underground even as some of his fellow-newspapermen, who had so courageously fought on his side in the peaceful battle for freedom, prepared to go

over to the enemy and write foul dispatches for Domei and the Japanese Propaganda Corps.

Rafael's lithe, slim figure led the fighters of the Free Philippines movement, striking deep into the echelons of untruth which the Japanese were driving into the confused battleground that was the Filipino mind. He edited the paper that traded blow for blow with the Hoddobu, he gathered and dispatched information that sped the return of forces of freedom and mustered arms and supplies for the guerrillas who held sway in their own Free Philippines in the hills.

Rafael moved swiftly but intelligently and the Japanese sent scores of agents who for long failed to discover the head of the troublesome movement. But finally he was tracked down, on suspicion. Thrice his unbending spirit refused to yield to the most excruciating tortures that the Japanese could devise. And thrice he was returned home.

But one day a fellow fighter broke down. And the fourth time they came knocking at his door and took him away, and he never came back. Some months later, his thin, emaciated body yielding easily to the prodding of rifle butts, but his spirit still resisting, Rafael was shot at the North Cemetery.

Today, those of his fellow newspapermen who so quickly turned over to the enemy are back writing again, some having picked up again the

fight for decency and justice, others having surrendered unashamedly to the importunities of despotic publishers.

If an invader should come again, shall they yield again? — Or shall they remember Rafael — and resist?

This is the message of the life and death of Rafael Roces Jr. The newspaper is not only a passive instrument of information, not a lifeless channel of facts or distortions, not a blunt record of what has been and what might be. The newspaper is a weapon of resistance against the injustices that the fall of Man brought down on this earth. Its strength is measured by the strength of the hand that wields it. And the strength of the hand that wields it is measured not only by the fluency and the power of the words that flow from it but by the indestructibility of the spirit that guides it on.

Newspapermen are not mere paid hirelings of the rich and impersonal publishers. They are leaders of thought and the magnitude of their leadership depends more on the greatness of their spirit than on the grandeur of their expressions. Have we this kind of leadership today? Or have we men who strike at the tyrant with one hand and stretch out the other for the pay-off?

How many of our so-called independent newspapermen are currently on the pay-roll of corrupt politicians? How many of those whose columns

belch forth vituperative phrases against the oppressor today also sang the praises of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere only a few years ago? How many, how many men have we among our newspapermen?

Our press has failed us in the fight for truth and justice. As a fortress of our rights it has begun to crumble from the weakness of the men who have manned its battlements. As a beacon light of guidance it has grown dim because newspapermen have lost the fire of truth.

Too long, have we left this weapon idle, in weak hands, while vultures and wolves gambol in the palaces of our country, ravage our treasury, and make a mockery of our people's civil liberties. Too long have we suffered in silence while the organ that should have thundered out our indignation hummed instead the weak, inane tunes of cheap politicians and high society. Too long have we floundered in misery and darkness while they who should have championed our cause, and given us enlightenment and leadership, have pandered instead to our oppressors or indulged in intellectual pastimes which could feed neither our minds nor our stomachs.

We need men of courage to man those crumbling battlements. We need a score of Rafael Roceses to take up this potent weapon and drive out the vultures and wolves, if not out of our country, at least out of positions where they can ravage our people's civil liberties.

**"Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness"**—so goes an old Chinese proverb.

In a small California town a young Negro, studying to be a teacher, took a part-time job at a filling station to help support himself and his wife until he got his degree. But some customers objected; they wanted to buy gasoline only from white men. The owner was about to fire the boy when a woman neighbor asked:

How many customers will you lose if you stand by this fellow?"

"About 18. Maybe 20."

"If I get you 20 new customers, you will keep him on?"

"You bet I will."

Not only did this aroused woman bring 20 new customers, but five more for good measure. She was a Christopher, one of a growing band of men and women united in the purpose to help change the world into a better place.

What is a Christopher? He is one who believes in individual responsibility for the common good of all and sets himself a specific job to do; an average man or woman ready to work and make personal sacrifices. It is literally astounding to learn the results that are being achieved single-handed by little people of faith and zeal.

Although under Catholic auspices, the movement embraces all faiths among its followers. The movement has no chapters, no committees, no meetings; there are no membership



lists and no dues. From a central office in New York occasional bulletins are mailed out to more than 100,000 interested persons; that is the sole unifying contact. Each believes that alone and unaided he has a part of his own in the war between good and evil. And he must believe in the power of himself, as an individual, to change the world.

How singlehanded efforts multiply into power was symbolized at a patriotic meeting of 100,000 citizens jammed into the Los Angeles Coliseum one starless night. Suddenly the chairman startled the throng:

"Don't be afraid now. All the lights are going out."

In complete darkness he struck a match.

"All who can see this little light say 'Yes!'"

A deafening roar came from the Audience.