

From the
Managing Editor's
Desk—



THE PHILIPPINES AND ADOBO

The formal surrender of Japan to the Allied Powers on board the battleship *Missouri* two years ago was more than a signal that the second world war had been terminated. To the Philippines, in particular, the signing of the document of capitulation marked the end of a dream empire which, for four torture-filled years, had held this country in an iron grip. Those years will be remembered here as a period during which all freedom, grown dear through forty years of democratic tutelage, was held in abeyance: a period of hunger and want and misery which brought out the worst and the best in men.

We say it brought out the best in men because the most ordinary Filipinos, who for years had worn the drab garb of mediocrity, rose to epic heights of heroism and thought nothing of sacrificing blood and even life in the cause of freedom.

Looking back at V-J Day, however, how many of us can truthfully declare that as the last shot was fired, we vowed that never again, as long as life endured, would we allow liberty to be trampled underfoot? How many of us told ourselves then that the victory, bought with blood and sweat and tears, would be made tangible and remain unsullied?

A mere handful.

The rest of us merely shrugged our shoulders, occupied ourselves with the task of regaining the flesh that had been lost during the lean days of hunger and of rebuilding:

homes that had been razed to the ground, completely forgetting whatever vows we might have made to concretize the liberty that had been regained. We must confess, in all honesty, that liberty has been used in most cases to further purely selfish ends; and that even the declaration of Philippine independence has not aroused in the collective heart that sense of responsibility which should be a corollary to the privilege of freedom.

But what, you will ask, has all this got to do with adobo.

Simply this. Just as the perfect dish must be compounded with the most exact amounts of vinegar, pepper and garlic, so is a substantially democratic Philippines compounded with the most exact proportion of men's ideals and of ideal men. And just as the addition of foreign condiments will spoil an otherwise perfect dish of adobo, so will the introduction of graft and corruption and pragmatic methods of thought and of action destroy the very roots of a sound Philippine democracy.

The simplest progeny of Juan de la Cruz will readily admit that the system prevailing at present in the Philippines cannot be considered conducive to the development of a sound Philippine democracy. For Graft is considered the rule rather than the exception, and has borne strange fruit in the anomalies and frauds which continuously make the administration the goat of a free and militant press. Sound principles of government, which should not bow before political expediency, have been made to kowtow to party politics to such an extent that a man's qualifications to hold public office are gauged, not so much by what he is, as by what he has done, will do or might perform for the benefit of the dominant political party.

Filipinos may of course, shrug at individual instances of political favoritism or political craft, excusing them on the ground that "to the victors belong the spoils." But we wonder if they realize that each governmental sacrilege detracts just so much more from the substance of a democratic Philippines, subtracts just a little more from the collective well-being, and reduces the Philippines to that abject state it occupied during the occupation, when the common people were considered as a serfdom at whose expense a small and

powerful clique might and did fatten itself.

During the Occupation I had a friend with a certain degree of devil-may-care idealism in his system. His name was Ramon Cabrera. He believed in freedom and thought it nothing extraordinary that his life should be demanded in its cause. And because he believed in this freedom and because he felt that one life more or less did not matter as long as that freedom were regained by his people in the end, the Japanese killed him and buried him in a grave which he had refused to dig, for himself.

I had a professor who, in the days before the war, occupied himself with matters no more serious than a problem in Physics or a kiss from his wife. And because he believed in that same freedom, they tortured him till he was a ghost of the Teodoro Fernando whom we had known, so horribly mutilated was he with horrible aching sores where his fingernails had once been lodged. He had no more arms when his family saw him again, stark and cold in death, with no reassurance that his sacrifice would not have been in vain.

That freedom for which these two brave men and countless others immolated themselves on a thousand unknown altars—was it freedom fraught paradoxically with corruption and greed and avarice? We think not; for surely no sane man would have given up his life for matters so petty as these. We believe they died for a freedom that was clean and wholesome, a freedom in which their people would have the privilege of establishing their own democracy, unhampered by crooked government and a more crooked officialdom. We believe they died for a freedom which carried with it that national responsibility which is part of liberty's heritage.

As the second year after the death of the samurai system of serfdom draws to a close, it behooves us all to look deeply within ourselves and ask whether we have not betrayed the trust bequeathed to us by men like Ramon Cabrera and Teodoro Fernando. It is our task to see to it that the alien elements of selfishness and greed do not completely destroy the concept of real freedom in the Philippines, and reduce our adobo to a dish of tasteless meat.

—Antonio R. de Joya