

## "The Vision of a Great Example"

By BENJAMIN P. DIONISIO

**I**T IS A QUIET MORNING ON December 30, 1896. The sun, lazily dispelling the mists, spreads its slowly emerging rays over grass-carpeted Bagumbayan. The macabre stillness is pierced by a fusillade of rifle shots. A condemned patriot finds peace at last in death and goes the long way of his ancestors to meet somewhere in that dim eternity the supreme Judge of all. That man whose memory lingers on in the hearts of friend and foe alike is the Filipinos' national hero.

Time has marched swiftly since then. Forty-eight years in the reckoning. Events that transpired after that December morn were to justify the faith and hopes of the Great Malayan. The revolution of 1896 held at bay the haughty oppressors of the race. The Republic, memorable and yet short-lived, was proclaimed to the world by Gen. Aguinaldo. The Americans came to the Philippines and against them our war-worn and ill-equipped soldiery continued the uneven struggle. We lost in the fight and had been under the United States until the outbreak of the war when Japan expelled her from our country. And now, America once again seeks to reconquer our country in order to use her, not in self-defense or to uphold any high principle or ideal, but as the stepping stone to her imperialistic exploitation of East Asia.

After two years of war, our busy buy-and-sell *Rialto* offers us intimate

scenes of the laxity and retrogression that is slowly undermining the secure foundations of our society. Vendors selling their wares at exorbitant prices; idlers—young and old, schooled and unschooled—lolling about when the others have buckled down to constructive endeavour.

If Dr. Jose Rizal were alive today would he not voice the same indignation as he had during his time over the moral lassitude of our people? Would he not wish to offer his life once more at Bagumbayan in order to stir his people from the downtrodden ways of crass individualism and selfish patriotism? His was a life richly and nobly lived—the life of a great man, of a creative genius, of a sincere patriot. In it are mirrored abundant instances of his creative zeal and indomitable will—examples which should put the present generation to shame.

Even while he was engrossed in his studies abroad, he endeavoured to strengthen the fragile threads of Filipino nationalism. He despised individualism, believing that only understanding and common action among our people can save them from the evils of Spanish exploitation. Thus, on one occasion, he exploded: "So many intellects were lost in themselves for lack of union and because of excessive individualism. Each one went his own way, paying no attention to diversions or strikes. There were no two beings alike. In the midst of the bustle of the big city,

and in view of the gradually decaying state of the fatherland, we were like grains of sand in the whirlwind following a cab."

Besides writing his great novels, he organised several societies dedicated to further his country's progress. During the international exposition in Paris, he organised the *paisanos* who attended the event, and also laid the groundwork for the *Asociacion Internacional de Filipinistas* with prominent European scholars as active members. While in Hongkong, he conceived *La Liga Filipina*, which fostered compact unity, mutual defense, mutual protection, a progressive educational system, and benevolent reforms. Not only this. He laid out plans for a Filipino colony in Sandakan, a British territory southwest of Sulu, where he envisioned a haven for his oppressed countrymen.

Many times during his extensive travels abroad he was at the point of marriage but, at the last moment, he would falter and then forget. There was Gertrude Beckett in London, O-Sei-San in Japan, and Consuelo Ortiga y Rey in Madrid. Was he not human after all, ruled by the same passions, and dominated by the same pulsating heart? But to the great realist that he was, there was only one love—his oppressed and unfortunate *Filipinas*—for whom he was to make the supreme sacrifice. Love for the native soil meant everything—indeed more than life itself—and anything that stood in its way was to be brushed aside, every hardship to be suffered and endured, every difficulty to be hurdled that the goal may be attained and its fruits enjoyed.

It is well to remember his words, eloquent then and yet still alive with

truth and directness today: "A good citizen will aid with his head, his heart, and if need be, with his hands the progress of his country." This message finds resonance in the inaugural speech of President Jose P. Laurel: "There is need of awakening—the moral consciousness of our people so that they may be able to face their new responsibilities with added vigour and enthusiasm. We should evolve a new type of citizen who would be ready and willing to subordinate himself to the larger and more vital interests of the State."

The challenge of constructive work stands out ever prominently. Rizal accepted it, undaunted by fearful odds and unperturbed by the distracting illusions of everyday life. The challenge of death came, too; and this he could have ignored had he no other consideration than his individual welfare. But he feared nothing because he was selfless, his whole being was his people, his country; and if he died, he knew that death would kill only the narrow, mortal individual, while the great passion for the native land would be enhanced by that transient accident of his martyrdom. True he fell without seeing the dawn of a new day, but truer still is the fact that his people, inspired by his creative patriotism, have marched onward to capture their place in the sun. We are free, as he had dreamed we should be; and we are at war, fighting to perpetuate that freedom. The "vision of a great example" should shame us out of our individualism, our selfishness, our indecision in this moment of grave crisis. Shall we let the challenge go unanswered?



tion, have shown strength of character, ability, courage and abnegation which were never before seen in them. And it is because their trying experiences bring forth their latent virtues and reveal their hidden qualities.

Francisco Baltazar writes of weaklings with disdain in his *Plorante at Laura*. A man used to a life of ease, he says, is sickly and weak of heart. He is not beaten by a problem, but by the mere contemplation of the difficulties of the problem.

*Self-reliance* shines in the life of Mabini. Success, as his life proves, is attainable if one develops self-reliance, though he be both poor and is handicapped by physical infirmity. Through an unconquerable will, Mabini rose above great odds to positions of command. He finished his law course with honours in spite of poverty; stricken with paralysis in his later years, he discharged his duty as prime and foreign minister of the Revolutionary Government with distinction.

Teodoro M. Kalaw pays this tribute to Mabini: "Agree with me in that a great part of his life was a life of poverty, of sufferings, of abnegations... Mabini triumphed over his century, not only as a patriot and statesman, but as a man as well. Fate prosecuted him from his birth, and he triumphed over Fate."

*Humility*, taught by all religions and all creeds, "tempers a man's virtues and makes him whole."

One must not, says Modesto de Castro, remember his worth, his knowledge, his beauty or goodness; one must never lose sight of his faults so that he can conquer his pride.

*Self-control*, from the points of view of Villamor, is essential because a "self-denying man is capable of performing the most noble deeds. Moderation and prudence in our acts are virtues which fit men to act commendably in all phases of life"

He continues: "Moderation in the

use of words is exceedingly important because . . . most of the disputes among men, arise from the use of offensive language. The use of good or bad expressions is full of significance in life. Words and expressions contain the germs of good or evil that men transmit to their descendants even to the last generation. . ."

*Frugality* was one of Mabini's strongest virtues. In spite of the means for luxurious living that his high position in the Revolutionary Government afforded him, he remained frugal and simple.

The famous jurist Cayetano S. Arellano, although he could well afford to be extravagant in his later years, remained simple and frugal to the end of his life.

*Purposeful living* is summarised by Jose P. Laurel thus: "Purpose and attitude are all important. Without the will to work, industry degenerates into the drudgery of the slave; but blessed by the driving inspiration of a willing heart and a duty-conscious mind, labour is the supreme means of self-fulfillment for the individual. It opens limitless fields wherein to give his talents full play; it justifies his existence in this world."

Perseverance had a supreme moment in Philippine history when Plaridel declared "Let us not hesitate even if we must meet barriers and thorns on the way. What are these little inconveniences compared to the great misfortune of our country?"

Of Rizal's perseverance, Villamor says: "His difficulties and sufferings stimulated (it), and the many obstacles which he encountered on his way stirred his energy and fortified his character. In this way he was able to complete his two literary books which gave him literary renown."

Mabini had a phrase for perseverance—"constant endeavour and honest effort."

*Punctuality* is a rule in offices--it