

# Remembering DON SERGIO OSM

By GERONIMO R. LLANTO

IN A NATIONWIDE BROADCAST on the occasion of then Vice-President Sergio Osmeña's 60th birthday in 1938, President Manuel L. Quezon in lauding the celebrant admonished the youth when he remarked:

"I am afraid that the majority of the young people now living have forgotten or have never known how much the Vice-President has done for them; how much of the freedom and advancement they enjoy today are due to the vision and unselfish statesmanship rendered by this man to our common country.

Among Filipino living nobody can say that he has rendered better service to the country than Sergio Osmeña. His history is made. His merits are recognized."

Today, almost thirty years since, this admonition, coming as it did from a great president, carries with it added meaning perhaps to remind 'the majority of the young people now living' to venerate the man who had done so much for them for so long.

The life of the late Don Sergio Osmeña is a study of a political genius, an insight into the complexities of statecraft and a retracing of the growth of Philippine nationalism and the manifold progress of a country and people.

Don Sergio's long, lofty and luminous career was filled with golden achievements dedicated to the betterment and ennoblement of Filipino life. When he first entered the portals of public service, the embryo of modern political, cultural, social and economic institutions in the Philippines was just taking shape and whatever impression it may have created in the course of its development is reflected in his life and times.

Like Dr. Jose Rizal, Don Sergio Osmeña believed in the pragmatic development of his country and, like Thomas Jefferson, he applied the concept of methodical government in a practical working democracy without losing sight of the inalienable rights of his fellowmen. With these altruistic ideals in his heart, he piloted the Philippine ship of state through the rough sea of political infancy and nascent nationalism.

To the service of his country, Don Sergio infused his own sterling character, his spotless integrity and unflinching devotion to duty. He saw his people through their joys and sorrows, through darkness and light, through defeat and victory. His was a career full of worthy examples. That it can be duplicated or surpassed stands little chance. No greater laurel

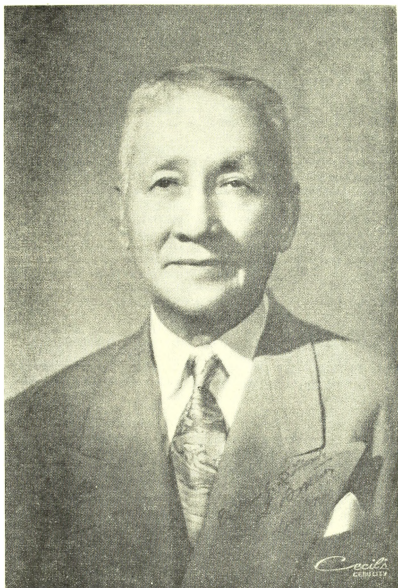
can be bestowed upon Don Sergio Osmeña than to have him enshrined in the hearts of all freedom-loving Filipinos everywhere and at all times.

Don Sergio was born on September 9, 1878 of humble and virtuous parents of moderate means, then residing at sitio Pangpango in Cebu. This sitio was the original site of the first Spanish settlement in the Philippines. As a child, he was raised in a tradition of plain and simple living. As a student, he was diligent, conscientious and scholarly. He first signs of brilliance when as an *interno* at the Seminario-Colegio de San Carlos he emerged at the top of the class which graduated in 1894. After graduating from the seminary, he went to Manila to take an oral examination at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran in order to earn the degree "Bachiller en Artes." He passed it with a rating of "sobresaliente" (*summa cum laude*). He was only sixteen then. For this feat of academic excellence he was further awarded a scholarship with free board and lodging at the University of Santo Tomas. At this pontifical university he pursued a course in philosophy and letters simultaneously with a formal study in law and jurisprudence. His studies were interrupted however, by the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896 and the war against the United States in 1899. Being young and underage, he remained inactive throughout the entire phase of the revolution against Spain. It was not until the second phase of the revolution in 1899 that he took active participation in the spirited resistance of his countrymen against the incursions of a new colonial master, the Americans. Taking on a singularly dangerous assignment as emissary of the Cebuano revolutionists to the revolutionary government in Luzon, Osmeña rendered service as liaison officer and staff worker in the cabinet of the insurgent Philippine Republic. From his own observations of the general conduct of hostilities however, he became convinced that while the people supported the ideals of the revolution the favorable outcome of the struggle was doomed to failure due to lack of arms, money and logistic support to the Filipino army. The American troops on the other hand were amply supplied and effectively equipped with modern war implements that further resistance against them would produce fatal consequences.

Later, with the capture of General Aguinaldo and the subsequent fall of the Republic, Osmeña returned to his native Cebu with a resolve to carry on the struggle this time through the pen and the newspaper. Together with Rafael Palma and Jaime de Veyra, he established the newspaper "El Nuevo Dia"

# EÑA: *Most Illustrious Carolinian*

DON  
SERGIO  
OSMEÑA



Most  
Outstanding  
USC Alumnus  
of 1953

at the turn of the last century. Because of its constant vigilance over the people's welfare, and its ultra-nationalistic leanings, "El Nuevo Día" earned the reputation as "organ of the revolution with white gloves." As journalist and editor, Osmeña viewed in perspective the depth and breadth of his country's problems and aspirations and ably projected them with vision and clarity before the minds of the American and Filipino reading public. His constructive editorials and persistent articles paved the way for a *modus vivendi* between his own people and the Americans based on mutual understanding and cooperation in the common task of nation building. It was not until this state of things was well on the way that "El Nuevo Día" finally bowed out of publication. Only then did Osmeña find time to delve deep into

his law studies in preparation for the bar examination. He took this examination in 1903 and emerged with a rating of 94%, the second highest obtained that year.

As a practicing attorney, he attracted the attention of American judges of the bench and other high government officials so much so that in 1904 he was recommended acting governor of his province in the absence of the regularly elected governor. The then Governor General Luke A. Wright appointed without hesitation Sergio Osmeña of Cebu in spite of the fact that he (Osmeña) was barely twenty-six years old. This auspicious act of Governor Wright wittingly or unwittingly launched the political career of perhaps the greatest Filipino statesman ever produced so far.

With the termination of his appointive term, Osmeña was prevailed upon to continue serving the country as provincial fiscal of Cebu and Negros Oriental. After a year in his post as provincial attorney, he was urged by the Cebuanos to run for governor of the province in 1905. He hesitated at first, knowing that the incumbent governor, Juan Climaco, his friend and former chief during revolutionary days, was running for reelection. But when the clamour for his candidacy could no longer be resisted, Osmeña finally consented but only upon the approval and good graces of Governor Climaco. The result of the election was decisive. Osmeña won handsily over his nearest rival, the incumbent governor.

As governor of Cebu, Osmeña was most energetic and progressive as well as promising. At the convention of provincial governors held in Manila in 1906, Osmeña was escalated to national fame when he was elected chairman of this body whose all-important task was to petition for more local autonomy from the United States government and to prepare the entire country for its first general election for representatives to the Philippine Assembly. The Assembly, first of its kind ever to be extended to the Filipinos, represented America's great experiment of self-government to a subject people. Because of the great significance attached to the establishment of the Philippine Assembly, Osmeña was again prevailed upon by his constituents to run for a seat in this national law-making body. Like a good soldier, he obeyed the mandate of his people and, like the man of the people, he was almost unanimously elected representative of the second district of Cebu. The Cebuanos did not err in electing him as their representative, for right on the first day's session of the Philippine Assembly on October 16, 1907, the 'gentleman from Cebu' was duly elected Speaker of that august body thus elevating Sergio Osmeña to a position of national leadership. Many names went up for nomination including those with revolutionary fame but none met with popular acclaim than Sergio Osmeña.

Commenting on the choice of Osmeña as Speaker of the assembly, the visiting Secretary of War William H. Taft, later to become President of the United States, remarked in his report:

"The assembly could have done nothing which indicates its good sense so strongly as the election of Señor Osmeña as its presiding officer. He is a young man not yet thirty, but of great ability, shrewdness, high ideals and yet very practical in his dealings with men and things."

The great President Quezon himself, who was one of the original members of the first Philippine Assembly in recalling his collaborations with Speaker Osmeña, had this to say:

"He (Osmeña) was practically the only man in that body who knew anything about legislative works, and the wonder of it all was that he had never been outside of his country, that he had never seen a legislative body at work; and yet, none of our assemblies from the first to the last has ever excelled the first assembly either in the ability of its members, in the char-

acter of the work accomplished, or in the patriotic spirit with which it served. It was all Sergio Osmeña. We were nothing but his collaborators."

Throughout the fifteen years of its existence, the Philippine Assembly was steered by no other Speaker but Sergio Osmeña. He guided the actions and deliberations of this body with maximum effort and efficiency in passing wise and timely legislations vital to the health of the nation. With his characteristic charm and consummate tact, he reconciled warring factions within its ranks, thereby maintaining decorum and sobriety at all times and uniting the people for a common aspiration — the eventual independence of the country from America.

So convinced were the American people of the capacity of the Filipinos to govern themselves that with the passage of the Jones Law in 1916 and the Tydings-McDuffie Law in 1934, complete control of the government by the Filipinos became an accomplished fact. In all of those years Sergio Osmeña played a determining role in guiding the destiny of his country in its journey towards political emancipation. True, he was not always the number one leader of his people from 1922 onward but this did not deter him from achieving the highest good for his country. As the Philippines top diplomat, he was largely responsible in gaining worldwide recognition of his country as a national entity separate from that of the United States long before the final proclamation of independence.

As President of the Commonwealth, Osmeña was instrumental in the early redemption of his country from the hands of the common enemy during the last war. He was responsible for laying down the mammoth task of relief and rehabilitation and the restoration of the normal processes of government once liberation was achieved, thus making possible the final proclamation of Philippine independence on July 4, 1946.

Down to the last day of his tenure as President of the Philippines, Sergio Osmeña was constantly vigilant of his country's welfare. His least official act was to rally and unite the people in common support of the administration of the incoming President, Manuel A. Roxas in the task of rebuilding a war-ravaged nation.

Even as he had already retired from public office, Filipino leaders of later years continued to consult him and seek his advice on vital matters affecting the country. Finally, when death caught up with him on October 19, 1961, Don Sergio Osmeña passed on to eternity and his name now belongs to the ages.

*The world may sound no trumpets, ring no bells,  
the book of life the sturring record tells.*

*Thy love shall chant its own beatitudes,  
after its own like working. A child kiss  
set on thy singing lips shall make thee rich;  
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;  
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense  
of service which thou renderest.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning