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ANDRES BONIFACIO, 1863-1897

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It is easy to understand why neither Spain nor America has been very kind to the memory of Andres Bonifacio: Spain because Bonifacio initiated the armed movement which ultimately overthrew her rule over the Philippines, and America because the idea alone of a subversive movement like Bonifacio's would not have been contributive to the stability of her own regime.

However, it is not easy to understand why the founder of the Katipunan and father of the Revolution, which made possible the eventual restoration of Philippine independence, has not as yet been duly recognized by his people, who are now enjoying the fruits of that independence, for what he was —
✓ their main liberator and a

leading architect of Philippine democracy.

This year will mark Bonifacio's centenary, having been born on 30 November 1863, in Tondo, Manila, of a poor couple. □ The oldest of six children, he found himself at a young age saddled with the responsibility of supporting the family because of the early death of both parents.

The best information available to date is that he reached only the primary school, although there is unverified claim to the effect that his formal schooling reached the third year of secondary instruction. Regardless of whether the claim is true or not, the fact is that Bonifacio was a voracious and assiduous reader, and so what he lacked in formal education he made up for in cons-

cientious and wide reading in serious literature.

So, between eking out a difficult living by making canes and paper fans and working in two foreign establishments and instructing himself, he was being made painfully aware gradually of the rottenness of the society he was living in and of the necessity of drastic action to improve the situation. Originally he may not have entertained thoughts of revolution; the Filipino propagandists in Spain originally were assimilationists (M. H. del Pilar himself did not advocate separation until the last months of his life); it was only after Rizal was deported to Dapitan and the *Liga Filipina* was dissolved that he and a few other patriots organized the *Katipunan* on 7 July 1892, obviously as a last resort.

The staying power and growth of the *Katipunan* as a secret revolutionary organization may be attributed chiefly to the superior qualities of Bonifacio as an organizer and leader. That it was discovered sooner than expected may be attributed no longer to some fault in or-

ganization but to deficiency of character and to conflict in loyalty of certain members of a society where ultimate loyalty should have been, but unfortunately was not, to the national community then in the process of being formed.

The strike for freedom announced to the world by Bonifacio and his *katipuneros* in August 1896 could not have surprised any observant student of the times, because the restiveness of the native population in Manila and in the provinces was too obvious to escape the attention of the perceptive observer. The people's answer to the call to arms was spirited and spontaneous, and if the revolutionists only had more and better arms at the beginning of hostilities, they could have subdued the Spanish forces and overthrown the colonial regime within the first few months, before effective reinforcements could arrive from Spain. As a result of the protracted conflict and inevitable setbacks for the inadequately armed insurgents, there arose a conflict in leadership of the revolutionary organization which ended in

the unfortunate and unnecessary elimination of the founder of the movement, on 10 May 1897, under dubious circumstances.

The forced exit of Bonifacio in the manner it happened was to a great extent his own fault. He was naive or unsuspecting enough to accept an invitation to go to a rebel territory where he was not sure his authority was recognized, hoping he could settle factional disputes there. He discovered, to his sorrow, that he had played into the hands of his rivals. Not expecting the humiliating treatment given him, he reacted

quite sharply to the insults, but his action drew a reprisal, from which he was helpless to protect himself and his brother.

The stature of Bonifacio will grow greater as the Filipino nation emancipates itself gradually from the colonial mentality that has afflicted it these last four centuries and as it asserts its independence and integrity in its dealings with itself and with other nations. Bonifacio can be the hero only of a self-respecting and enlightened people; not of a nation of intellectual slaves and spiritual obscurantists.

BETTER ALIVE THAN DEAD

All who are not lunatics are agreed about certain things: That it is better to be alive than dead, better to be adequately fed than starved, better to be free than a slave. Many people desire those things only for themselves and their friends; they are quite content that their enemies should suffer. These people can be refuted by science: Mankind has become so much one family that we cannot insure our own prosperity except by insuring that of everyone else. If you wish to be happy yourself, you must resign yourself to seeing others also happy. — Bertrand Russell.