

ISHIKAWA: The Caviteño Who Became a Japanese

by
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IN Pandacan, Manila stands a neglected plaza that arouses curiosity because of its name: Plaza Ishikawa. That plaza was not named after a Japanese but after a Filipino here, Jose Anacleto Ramos, a Caviteño.

Jose Anacleto Ramos was born in San Roque, Cavite, of Filipino parentage. He grew up in Manila, where his parents had a lucrative business in Intramuros, then the city's commercial district. He studied at Santo Tomas and later was sent to London, where he took a business course at the College of Saint Mary.

Upon his return to Manila, he took over his father's bazar, which he renamed "La Gran Bretaña. When he had accumulated enough cash, he returned to England to buy a good printing press which he could use for propaganda work. Back in the Philippines, he set up a printing company known as "La Ymplementa Nueva," which was to publish many propaganda pamphlets.

The Spaniards tried to trace the source of the subversive pamphlets but had no inkling that the bazar "La Gran Bretaña" was the focal distribution point.

Ramos' friendship with M. H. del Pilar was to draw him into intensive propaganda work; his wide circle of

friends included Rizal, who was a fellow student of his at Santo Tomas. Contrary to Common belief, the "Noli Me Tangere" was not published entirely in Spain. A few chapters of Rizal's controversial masterpiece were printed clandestinely in the composing room of "La Ymplementa Nueva" in Intramuros, under Ramos supervision.

When the Katipunan was founded, Ramos helped raise funds for the new Society. At a meeting in Quiapo attended by Dr. Bonifacio Arevalo, Dorotheo Cortez, Pedro Casimiro and other Katipunan leaders, the problem of where to secure arms for the secret society was discussed. Ramos suggested that they purchase arms from Japan and that he be sent to that country to negotiate the purchase. At that time, Jose Anacleto Ramos' activities were no longer secret; the Spanish authorities knew that he was one of the leading minds of the propaganda movement in Manila and his establishment had been raided several times.

The members of the Katipunan present at that meeting approved Ramos' suggestion. Forthwith, Jose Anacleto Ramos buried his papers, seals, arms and other documents and boarded a ship for Japan. This was in 1895.

In Yokohama

When he set foot in Yokohama, the Japanese, who were sympathetic to the Philippine cause, welcomed him with open arms. Ramos discussed his mission with the Japanese officials and they helped him purchase arms for the Katipunan rebels. Jose Anacleto Ramos sent these arms to the Philippines in an ingenious way; he had them packed in such a way that the crates seemed to contain only chrysanthemums; under the flowers were the guns that would one day be used in the fight against Spain.

While in Japan, the indefatigable Caviteño turned with renewed vigor to the writing of fiery articles assailing Spanish rule in the Philippines, which he signed James A. Robertson and published in the "Japan Daily Advertiser." His propaganda activities ceased only when he learned with dismay that Spanish rule had ended in the Philippines, only to be replaced by American domination.

In 1900, he wrote his friends that his work was finished, that he was homesick and wanted to return. His friends advised him not to return home because the American authorities knew that he was a rebel at heart and could make life hard for him.

It was then that Ramos decided to apply for Japanese citizenship and to assume the surname Ishikawa so that the American could not touch him. Another important motive that prompted him to swear allegiance to Japan was his desire to manifest his gratitude to the Japanese people and government for the assistance they had given him for four years.

On October 24, 1921, 21 years after he came home and lived peacefully under the American flag, the Ca-

viteño who became a Japanese passed away at the Mary Chiles Hospital.

Shortly thereafter, a tract of land in Pandacan, where he had spent his boyhood and early manhood days, was turned into a plaza named after him by the municipal council of Manila, a fitting tribute to a great man whose contributions to the Revolutionary cause deserve the admiration and gratitude of all patriotic Filipinos.



NEWS & NOTES

Roy Reyes Baban, son of Bro. Nicolas P. Baban of Iloilo-Acacia Lodge No. 11 and Sis. Florencia Reyes Baban of the Order of Eastern Star in Iloilo City, romped away with the second prize in the sixth annual oratorical contest on Rizal held at the Far Eastern University auditorium on December 4, 1960.

Young Baban, a high school student at Central Philippine University in Iloilo City, bested the orators from San Beda College and Ateneo de Manila. He also defeated the orators of the Bicol, Northern, Central, Southern Luzon, and Eastern Visayan regions.

Baban lost only to the orator of Mindanao after the Board of Judges broke a tie for the first place in favor of the latter. Baban's winning piece "The Vision of Rizal" won him a one-year scholarship amounting to ₱300.00 and a commemorative plaque for the High School Dept. of Central Philippine University.

(It should be added that Bro. Ramos was one of the first few Filipinos who joined Masonry in England. He was initiated, passed and raised in a lodge the Master of which was the Prince of Wales, later King Eduard VI. Ed.)