

GK Saturnino Cortez, KC

Speech delivered by Grand Knight Saturnino Cortez of the Gumaca Council No. 3609 of the Knights of Columbus during the literary program held at the Balintawak Lodge Temple, Gumaca, Quezon on June 19, 1967 on the occasion of the joint celebration of Dr. Jose Rizal's 106 birth anniversary and of St. John the Evangelist and St. John the Baptist.

I feel very much honored for the privilege of speaking before so distinguished an audience as the members of the Free and Accepted Masonry. Almost eight years ago, I had the good luck of speaking here for and in place of the then mayor Dr. Cesar A. Angulo. I never thought that as Grand Knight of Gumaca Council No. 3609 of the Knights of Columbus, an association of men whose road to God is believed by many to be at variance with that which the Masons tread on their way to the same God, I would again step on this same platform as your guest speaker. I had this thought all along because when I invited all heads of religious, social and fraternal associations of this town on the occasion of my investiture as Grand Knight of Gumaca Council No. 3609, none honored my invitation. So when your Worshipful Master, together with Worshipful Brothers Makayan and Mendoza asked me to be your guest speaker this afternoon, I accepted the invitation without hesitation to show our people, at least in our town, that all men who believe in Christ as true man and true God can live and work together for a common cause and that they are one in honoring the greatest Filipino hero, Dr. Jose Rizal.

This afternoon's affairs has a triple significance in that we honor today the 106th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Jose Rizal, the greatest man the Ma-

layan Race has ever produced, the anniversary month of the birth of St. John Evangelist and Baptist who, at the river Jordan baptized Jesus Christ, and as Engineer Makayan said making for the first time ecumenism a living reality by bringing together under the same roof men and women who all believe in Christ though their methods in practicing their faith are as diverse as they are so that they could listen to the wisdom of the ages and profit thereby.

Rev. Kersey has given us a resume of the life and deeds of St. John whose teachings were imbibed by all Christians and accepted even now as messages from God. This afternoon, I shall delve into the life and labors of Dr. Jose Rizal, the man who showed the world that the Filipinos are possessed of a high culture by the brilliance of mind made manifest by the keenness of his pen, the man who put in black and white the sufferings of his people from the tyranny of the Spanish *conquistadores* and the oppression of a selfish clique that wanted the Filipinos to remain subjects of bigotry and ignorance, the man who through his speeches, and writings moved a people to rise in revolt.

Jose Rizal was born on June 19, 1861, in Calamba, Laguna, the seventh of eleven children of Francisco Mercado and Teodora Alonso who were

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of substantial means. He was therefore blessed with the opportunity to receive the best education both in the home and in exclusive private schools of the time, making it possible to cultivate his innate talents and capabilities which resulted in his excelling other students, foreigners and countrymen alike, in all fields of education and learning. It was of no wonder that at the early age of 16, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts and a diploma of Agricultural Surveyor at 17 from the Ateneo Municipal. Meantime he was also taking up painting and sculpture with private tutors, excelling in both. His talents, however, showed most brilliantly in literature and poetry. At the age of 8, he wrote "Sa Aking mga Kabata," a poem that attracted notice from local lords. By the time he left the Ateneo for Sto. Tomas University in 1877, he had been credited with having written 20 beautiful poems among which were titled: "Felicitacion," "Por La Educacion Lustre La Patria," "Un Recuerdo A Mi Pueblo" and "El Heroismo de Colon." At Sto. Tomas University, he wrote a winning piece "La Juventud Filipina." He also wrote several allegorical plays and dramas some of which were staged at the Ateneo Municipal. All together he wrote 40 beautiful poems, the most famous of which was "My Last Farewell" which he wrote in his death cell on the eve of his execution on December 30, 1896. He excelled not only in the academic field but even in physical quarrels involving Spanish youths of prominence necessitating his leaving the country for Europe.

He enrolled at the Universidad de Madrid upon reaching Spain and obtained his Licentiate in Philosophy and Letters after two years. While taking up these courses he also pursued courses in languages (principally in French and English), painting,

sculpture, arts and gymnastics in other schools. In 1884 he spoke on the occasion of the celebration of the triumph of Juan Luna and Felix Resurrecion (two Filipino painters) in Madrid. His speech attracted the admiration of Don Miguel Morayta, a Mason and an influential Spaniard in politics and letters at the time, so much so that Morayta invited Rizal on several occasions where he was asked to speak, thus started Rizal's acquaintanceship with great men of Europe. He left Madrid in 1885 for Paris where he became the assistant to an internationally known ophthalmologist, Dr. Luis de Wecker. Later he went to Heidelberg, Germany, where he worked with another equally famous ophthalmologist, Dr. Otto Becker. He left for Berlin where he published his novel "Noli Me Tangere." Here he also worked with Dr. Ernst Fuchs, another famous ophthalmologist. From Berlin he went to Ghent, Belgium, where he published "El Filibusterismo," a sequel to "Noli Me Tangere." In the first book he pictured the misery of the Filipinos under the tyrannical rule and oppressive influence of the religious on those they governed and suggested reforms. In the second, he became revolutionary in his thoughts as it seemed he had lost hope for reforms through peaceful means and hinted that the people may revolt. Here he appealed to passion and the emotion instead of to the mind.

While in Europe, he travelled a great deal and at the same time he wrote articles of politico-social and socio-religious nature emphasizing that the Spanish conquistadores were to blame for the sad plight of his country and countrymen. These articles won for him the enmity of the Spaniards who governed the Philippines and the religious who influenced those in the government. Thus when he

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doomed to be a tragedy from the start, and a tragedy worse compounded by the irresponsible response of the government.

After the slaughter, all the questions were asked: how is it possible that in this day and age, grown men should be led like so many lambs to slaughter, with pebbles as their shield and bolos as their might — girded for battle by the exhortations of a feeble old man who evoked the vision of a material heaven for all who believed and listened.

Surely this is not an isolated case.

Surely, we must not say: but that is merely the Lapiang Malaya — who are just a minority of our people.

How many of our people turn, not to doctors or surgeons, but to a barrio medicine man, who mumbles incantations and makes cabalistic marks on foreheads and arms — to ward off sickness.

How many others indeed are the instances to prove that aside from the Triune God, we keep hallowed in the niches of our mind, lesser gods and spirits we dare not offend? How many supernatural entities do we

people our woods and forests, our rivers and hills? What *kapres* and *tikbalangs*, what *anitos* and *diwatas*?

Far more relevant than ecumenism to our times is religion, and the challenge to make it a practical, and working guideline for our lives.

Each, within his own Christian denomination, we must learn to understand still more clearly and appreciate fully the imperishable tenets of our creed.

With a fair, clear understanding of our faith, we can be, both by precept and by example, worthy exponents of our Christian religion — not only for the edification of the many but also to give meaning and depth to our own inner lives.

Remembering that it is not what divides us that motivates our actions, but the things that unite us, the enlightened sector of every community must rise to take the lead in demonstrating how concerted action, among a people united under a common ideal and purpose, can "move mountains."

The Masons being the cream of our nation's manhood, has clearly the obligation to show the way. Δ

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returned to the Philippines in 1892, he was immediately exiled to Dapitan where he remained until 1896. At Dapitan he met a beautiful Irish-American lady by the name of Josephine Bracken, an adopted child of Mr. Tauffer, whom Rizal operated on to regain his sight. The two became in love with each other and applied to be married, but Rizal became a Mason in Europe and no priest would marry them unless Rizal retracted Masonry. Here we come to most controversial portion of the life of Dr. Jose Rizal. We of the Catholic faith believe that Rizal retracted and abjured his attacks against the Church. There

is a group of our countrymen who still believe that Rizal did not in any way renounce Masonry and all his other acts contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church. Be that as it may, it is not for us here to prove who of the two contending groups is right. Suffice it for us that all Filipinos irrespective of creed, recognize him as the greatest of all Filipino heroes and that we are all together in commemorating his birth anniversary.

In July, 1896, Rizal was allowed to leave the Philippines for Cuba, but before he reached Spain an order from Manila was received recalling him to Manila. He was immediately im-

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prisoned at the national penitentiary at Montjuich, Madrid. He was returned to Manila in chains and incarcerated at Fort Santiago. On December 26, 1896, Rizal was tried by a military tribunal and was convicted of rebellion and ordered shot at Bagumbayan on December 30, 1896.

Today, on the 106th birth anniversary of Dr. Jose Rizal, the Filipino people must commune with him. We must recall his life's obsession — to see his country and people free, enjoying a life of peace and plenty. We who are here now, may ask, has Rizal's dream for his people been achieved after more than 20 years of self-government? You alone can answer the question. You are witness to the declining peace and order throughout the country. You are witness to the glaring headlines of our daily papers depicting the prevalence of lawlessness even in our metropolis. You feel the sufferings of our people, of the lack of opportunity to earn a decent living, of hunger and disease in remote places of our community, of the rampant corruption in the government, of the low standard of our morality both in high and low society today. The blind defiance to government authority of the members of the "Lapiang Malaya" resulting in the death of 33 of our countrymen is a sign that a sector of our people, specially the poor and unlettered are losing their faith in our government, in the people that run our government. Today, the generation whom Rizal said were the hope of his country are on trial. You have to account for these as you commune with Rizal.

Before I close, ladies and gentlemen,

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Our family has discovered a new book. It is called the Bible. We've been reading it together, and we predict it has a big future. You don't hear people talking about it yet, the way they did about *Valley of the Dolls*. But take my word for it, this one is going to catch on. It's dramatic, mysterious, touching, enlightening — and inspiring.

—Joseph Shallit.

allow me to read a portion of an article in the "Variety" of last Sunday's Manila Times Issue:

"It is a sad fact yet true that the dwindling confidence of the people in the government is a situation which is the making of some of our politicians and leaders. If Rizal were with us today, he would not hesitate to say what he once said: 'Politicians without principles and convictions defend with the same enthusiasm contrary ideas.' He, too, would say again that 'in the arena of politics stern necessity and interests prevail.' And more so that politics has no heart nor brains but claws, venom, and vengeance when it rages between tyrants and oppressed peoples.'

Much is expected by a people from its government. To Rizal this was a one-sided proposition. For while a government has its responsibilities to the people, the relationship is more of a symbiotic nature. When the sincerity of a government to the people, or of the people to its government, is in question Rizal's verdict was simple and clear: 'Like government, like people.... Like master, like slave.... Every country gets the fate it deserves.'

Finally, Rizal who had promised a country's growth, a country's progress in the enlightenment of its people, also once said, 'History affords not a single example to show that a people has been made to retrograde along the line of enlightenment.'

Ladies and gentlemen, I leave you with these thoughts of Rizal. Δ