

In Memoriam

A Portrait of FAIGAO... *Simply as Man*

by **Mrs. Esperanza Velez-Manuel**



Faigao Taking a Degree

THE LATE Atty. Cornelio Faigao, whom I shall always remember with fond affection, was one man for whom I had a very great respect. I admired his intelligence; I envied him for his literary style; I relished his humor and wit; but above all, I depended on his integrity.

He was a kind man who would not willingly hurt people. Though he issued his broadsides of wit and satire at men and institutions, even at himself, always his kindly tolerance smiled benignly on the foibles and caprices of his race. There was a smile that never left his face — a smile that was warm and generous, never cold nor sardonic nor cruel. He was one of his fellow-men and he laughed with them. But never at them.

This explained, of course, his generosity. He gave, though he could ill afford it at times. Yet this sharing was embarrassing to him; he did not wish people to dwell on their gratitude. I shall mention here only one of the many incidents of this endearing trait — to the surprise of a friend a fifty-peso bill dropped out of a bon-voyage card from him. Wasn't it just like him to find a way?

The wonderful spirit of resignation also possessed him, which made him accept the things that came his way, the good and the bad, the bitter and the sweet. Refusing to stoop down and bicker with his colleagues over assignments, he received his

measure without a murmur and went his way. Political storms assailed him, sickness weakened him, the envious maligned him, but his feet were planted firmly on the ground. Disappointments, frustrations, and adversities stormed his fortress but he faced them all with the same unruffled poise, the same confident gaze.

His humor was one of his most outstanding traits. In fact his friends looked to it when they asked him his opinions concerning the political circus or consulted him about their own problems. And they were not disappointed. He was Sir Oracle, who, when he opened his lips for a sparkling witticism or a scholarly thought, had to garnish it with a casual jest or sly banter. It was this inexhaustible fund of comic superiority that made life not merely bearable but pleasant to him and his friends. No wonder many came and came again to partake of it, and went away — mulling over a bit of compounded wisdom and wit, to be stored with the other Faigao-isms.

I, for one, never ceased to marvel at his output. Often I would ask him how he ever managed to accomplish his newspaper work, and still produce poems and essays, aside from his teaching duties. How many times did I gently chide him for his deception: the unhurried pace and the slow, careful speech hiding from view the remarkable source of energy that found expression in the

printed word, while the rest of us harassed, frantic mortals who exude vitality and business, have nothing to show for our much ado! Yes, he made us ashamed of ourselves, especially for our inadequacy and helplessness.

And so this was my friend, on whose shoulders hung lightly the mantle of fame and national respect; who belittled himself and made light of his achievements so that often the mantle was invisible to us; who stood square on principles without any blast from the trumpet.

It was my good fortune to visit him the Sunday before he finally left us. One last privilege was given me: to bask in his company. I found him still sharp and witty and cheerful. The atmosphere was pleasant: the conversation, congenial. Not one of us guessed the last curtain would soon fall.

The next time I saw him, peace had settled on his brow, never to desert it again — as it often does frequently in a lifetime.

A little while we would fain have him linger yet. Or was it time for him to receive his award of merit?

Now I do not think of him as teacher, journalist, poet, or home-spun philosopher. He is simply man whose presence I once enjoyed, in whose goodness the earth rejoiced. His memory I shall always cherish with prayers. And with hope — for you and me. §