

- The noblest Filipino in public life the Philippines has ever produced.

PRESIDENT OSMEÑA, MODEL POLITICIAN AND STATESMAN

"I have not come to you to promise you the moon, the sun and the stars... It would be childish of you to believe me if I made such false and empty promises... The people know my lifetime of public service and I hope you will give me further opportunity to serve...."

That was the shortest presidential campaign speech in the annals of Philippine politics, delivered by the then Commonwealth President Sergio Osmeña, Sr. at Plaza Miranda three days before the 1946 elections. The simple address was characteristic of the humble and silent man that Don Sergio was. It was the only campaign speech he delivered in his re-election bid in that first postwar balloting.

Yet he was an eloquent speaker, having been a journalist, provincial fiscal, governor, diplomat, speaker of the Philippine assembly and of the house of representatives, senate president protempore, vice president and president of the Commonwealth in the span of 48 years before that election.

Don Sergio was a contrast to the boisterous, self-praising, and vitriolic politicians of today. He believed in the dignity of silence, showed that there is majesty in modesty, and became famous for his tranquil personality and dignified demeanor.

In the early 1920's, when he was senate President protempore and Manuel L. Quezon was the senate president, two opposition senators assailed

Osmeña's character in the session hall. Democrat Senators Emiliano Tirona and Teodoro Sandiko took delight in charging that Don Sergio, during the early days of the American occupation, came to town from his mountain hideout dressed as a woman to avoid capture by American soldiers.

To this vilification, Osmeña only smiled enigmatically. He was temporarily presiding over the session and he could have easily defended himself and crushed the attackers with the magic of his Castilian oratory.

It was Quezon, who rose and effectively silenced Tirona and Sandiko. The senate president bared the now commonly-known fact that Don Sergio actively served General Emilio Aguinaldo's forces, editing revolutionary circulars and delivering vital messages across enemy lines. Quezon lauded Osmeña for courageously asserting the Filipinos' right to independence in the *El Nuevo Dia*, a newspaper founded and edited by the then 24-year-old Osmeña which practically became a revolutionary organ succeeding *La Solidaridad*.

In 1943, Don Sergio supplied contemporary world history with the noblest of character and greatest generosity ever shown by any statesman. He was then vice president of the Commonwealth government in exile in the U.S. President Quezon, whose term was to end automatically on Dec. 31, 1943, lay sick at Saranac lake and the allied forces were at the lowest ebb in war fortunes in the Pacific.

With characteristic self-abnegation, Osmeña sought to relinquish voluntarily and without fanfare his constitutional right to succeed Quezon. He silently urged the U.S. Congress, through President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Senator Millard Tydings, to pass a special legislation extending Quezon's

term for the duration of the war. Thus, Quezon remained President up to his death on Aug. 1, 1944. Then and only then did Osmeña assumed the Presidency.

Yet Quezon was Osmeña's off-times adversary for political supremacy. Don Sergio was the Philippines' first undisputed leader following the establishment of American rule in this country, a time when the nation was undergoing greatest trial in self-government.

Rising to national prominence as chairman of the first provincial governors' convention in 1906, Don Sergio became speaker of the first Philippine assembly in 1907 when he was only 29 years old. This was the highest position for a Filipino during that regime. He guided the nation in the exercise of political rights and paved the way for real independence. He nurtured Philippine-American relations while at the same time showing intense nationalism.

His nationalistic spirit and sound instructions to Filipino resident commissioners in the U.S., Quezon being one of them, led to the enactment of the Jones Law.

It was Don Sergio, Quezon, Rafael Palma and other statesmen who founded the Nacionalista party in 1906 with Osmeña as its first president. In 1922, a rift split the N.P., resulting in Quezon's assumption of the N.P. presidency and political supremacy.

Even in the first Philippine bar examinations of 1903, Osmeña and Quezon were rivals for the top places. Osmeña garnered second place with a rating of 95.66 per cent, scoring perfectly in two subjects (penal code and criminal procedure). Quezon came out fourth with an 87.83 per cent.

Don Sergio exercised political power with sobriety, grace and decorum. He restrained himself from compromising principles for political expediency and preserved democratic ideals by living them. That he refrained from regionalism and personal prejudice in the government was narrated by a fellow Cebuano, the late Senator Mariano J. Cuenco. The senator said:

"During those formative years of our national life, no Filipino could be appointed to the bench, to the cabinet, or to any other high office in the government, without first satisfying the high standard of public morality set and exemplified by Osmeña himself. When he occupied the highest magistracy of the land... Osmeña never abused his power or use his tremendous influence to favor members of his family, those of his wife, or fellow Cebuanos. On the contrary, to the disgust and disappointment of many a deserving Cebuano who could be ranked among the best minds in the country, President Osmeña's high sense of propriety restrained him from appointing fellow Cebuanos to positions in the government, because of his overpowering conviction that like the wife of Caesar, all his official acts should always be above reproach."

Friendship was one of Don Sergio's priceless treasures in life. Yet even with his closest friends, friendship ended where the interest of the country began.

As President running for re-election in the hustle and bustle of postwar days, Osmeña could have taken advantage of his high office and used government facilities and resources against his political adversaries. The U.S. was then pouring in enormous relief goods and aids in grants and getting ready to hand over \$800 million in war damage

payments to the Filipinos. Don Sergio could have used this tremendous loadstone in sweeping the electorate and luring oppositionists into the ruling party.

But he restrained himself and refused to stoop too low in politics. He maintained his delicadeza and high quality of statesmanship.

He took defeat in stride, with the same humility, graciousness, tolerance and cooperation so distinctive of his character. He gladly spent a part of his private life for public welfare by serving as member of the council of state from 1948 till his death on Oct. 19, 1961. — *Bernabe B. Paquio, Manila Bulletin.*

TO BE REMEMBERED

One Sunday afternoon I fell to thinking of an elderly gentleman in failing health whom I had not seen for a long time. "Why not surprise him by calling him up?" I asked myself.

"I was thinking of you and I wanted to have a little chat," I explained to the old man when he came to the phone. He was delighted, and we had an enjoyable five-minute visit.

His wife told me a few days later that my call had done more for him than a whole bottle of tonic. "You know," she explained, "the telephone almost never rings for him any more." — *David Dunn*