

When They Were Young~

LEON MA. GUERRERO

MANY a school child has been heard to say, "If I had rich parents, I could take and finish a fine course." Or, "If I were rich, I could serve my country better."

Few people know that many successful men were poor boys who had to struggle hard for an education. Among our truly great men who rendered useful service to their country in a quiet way was Dr. Leon Ma. Guerrero. He would not have been what he was, if he did not possess courage and determination to overcome difficulties. He was a poor boy.

As a child, Leon had to go to school in shabby clothes. Because he had shoes but without socks, his schoolmates jeered at him and made fun of him. Just like other boys, he did not enjoy being the laughing-stock. So the following day, he picked up a pair of old socks that had been thrown away by his older brother. He cut the torn ends and sewed the parts together. When he put them on, the socks looked as good as new.

One day he had to attend a program. At this program he was to receive a prize for the excellence of his work. As he had no decent suit of his own, he borrowed one from his older brother. To hold the loose waist in place, he used a piece of rope for



a belt. Could you imagine how he felt during the exercises?

Leon went to school in Manila, but his parents lived in Pasig. Whenever he went home, he had to go on foot. He enjoyed the walk for he liked to watch the birds and insects on the way. His natural interest in plants and animals developed as he observed them. Later he wrote about them. They were so good and useful that they were read by people outside of the Philippines.

He passed on his knowledge, not only through the books he wrote, but also by actual teaching. He taught in the University of Sto. Tomas and at the old Liceo de Manila. In fact, he was one of the founders of the Liceo. He also rendered service to his country by working in the Bureau of Science.

Dr. Leon Ma. Guerrero died only last month. He was then already over eighty years old. He was born on January 21, 1853. His long life must have been due to his poverty during his youth. For then he had to walk long distances. That habit made him healthy and strong.