

RIZAL

(A Biography)

By JOSE M. HERNANDEZ



Rizal (A Biography), By Jose M. Hernandez. Published by Alemar's, Manila, 1950. Distributed in the Philippines by The Alemar Book Store. Reviewed by Pura Santillan-Castrencia.

Jose M. Hernandez presents in this Biography a very human Rizal—that is the general impression the reader gets from the book in which the events of the hero's life are dramatized so that even those that have been, if possible, worn out by telling and retelling, receive new life from the novel imaginative setting. This manner of presentation is, indeed, to me, the attraction of the biography. It may, to a certain extent, constitute also its weakness. The drama is unevenly distributed, and while that, in itself, invites attention, the reader is not seldom discomfited with the change from an almost lyrical, certainly eloquent style, to one which is quite undistinguishedly pedestrian.

The "feeling" portions are very effective, because Mr. Hernandez has the gift of words and knows how

to use his periods with measure. The drama of *The Shadow*, for instance, which hovers over the hero, from childhood, it would seem, does not leave him, till symbolically, it becomes the Light. Rizal died and with his death, something is liberated:

'Then one day, on a beautiful morning in Bagumbayan they shot him down—they killed the nightingale that sang of the dreaming rose... This was the great, great man, grand, monumental, and magnificent, this was the moth, the wind, the knight, Prometheus; this was the warrior dead upon the field and now a simple, little blossom—'

Thus, Jose M. Hernandez often burst into passionate, poetic prose when, taken away by his subject's greatness of being, nobility of soul, and purity of heart, he writes inspired lines about the beauty of the life of the greatest Malayan.

Parts of the book show the teacher in Mr. Hernandez, the pedagogue. One could almost hear an after-question following a discussion: Do you understand? These are not the most

attractive parts of the work. Definitely erudite, but not attractive, either, is the polemical discussion on Palma's book, particularly on the part of retraction, for while the reasoning throughout is logical and lucid, the implied name-calling is not a very generous gesture. Palma cannot defend himself.

The literary criticism parts of the Biography are extremely interesting and elucidating. There is a certain tendency to take for granted an erudition from the reader equal to that of the author, which complements the reader, while at the same time makes him wonder if there is not just a little too much of that commodity, erudition, in the work. In the meantime he learns enough from the Hernandez' analysis to make him decide that the answer to his question is not important.

The Filipino, and the foreigner sympathetic with the Filipino and his problems, will like this new book on Rizal. Many details he has not known before in the patriot's life are presented here; for instance, Rizal's natural exclamation in his cell about the futility of his knowledge of languages in the face of death, his facetious remark to a cross-eyed man who would have his eyes straightened, little, seemingly insignificant items which fill up our ordinary knowledge of the noblest Filipino who ever lived and which make him closer, dearer to us.

"To millions of Filipinos", apostrophized Hernandez, in his very readable book, "he is not a mere man. He is the torch bearer of the brown race, an eternal sentinel on our quiet shores..."

FLOWN DARKNESS

Who would have dreamed it? But this morn the light
 Of blessed day was joy to me unknown;
 That happy sun, this tree, this meadow sown
 With flow'rs rejoiced not my imprisoned sight.

Yea, one with thousands buried in the night
 Of prophecies, I longed with suppliant moan
 To see the lifted veil, the darkness flown
 Before the face of Christ all glorious, bright.

But Sabbath-keeping Jews rejected me
 For calling prophet Him whose power kind
 My eyes has opened. Lord, more precious fee
 I willingly would give, if thus they'd find
 The very Lord of Sabbath hid in Thee,
 True God in Thy true mortal flesh enshrined!

Eladio Boria, S. J.