

A LETTER TO SANTA CLAUS

st. nick, old friend,

do you remember a year ago on christmas eve — the question i asked you — the puzzling enigma of my existence in a world where i could never seem to find a place. too busy in things that didn't really matter, i missed like so many others the answer staring me in the face that my place is any place, anytime where i can find Him.

in a few days, the bell of christmas will ring again—joyous and vibrant in all the churchtowners that rise into the sky. spires that thrust their crowns into the clouds — just like all of us when we are happy. i don't know why, i go all soft and hopelessly sentimental when i think of christmas. perhaps it's because the strange faces around me are softer, their eyes more gentle — softened by memories of many many christmases, both happy and clouded in sadness.

christmas is about the only time in the calendar that we allow a little show of life, a crack in the walls of our defenses as we let go of a little tenderness when we send a card or a gift — without feeling like a darn fool. "there is a kind of silence in which the hard thick shell which normally cover and protects us, the thick shell of fiction and prejudice and ready-made phrases which separates man from man begins to crack and open."

yesterday, one of my friends glanced up at the sky from a third floor window and muttered something about — "holy cow, look at that sky! terrific! the shade of that blue... i can't stand it!" and broke off into a rough cowboy strain about "the wide open spaces that i love"... today while crossing usc to the oriental book store opposite, lito cursed saragely when he saw a grimy slum kid miss the cruel wheels of a speeding jeepney by a fraction of an inch as he darted for a handful of peanuts that spilled from his pockets. "oh God, no!". a flash of that protective spark latent in all men for the helpless sprang to his lips. startled by such a manifestation of nobility from these renegades, we fell silent and felt very small. tough hombres, eh pardners? guess again... why are men such anachronisms? why do they hide their kindness in thick coatings of anger, boredom and casual indifference that hints nothing of its pilled walls? cigarettes are crushed out in piles of smoking embers and top tunes thunder in their brains while the seeds of immortality are pushed deeper and locked up inside themselves. my classmate tells me i pretend but i do not deny it. with eyes that see too truthfully and with a frightfully accurate analysis he tells me i act as tho' i don't care although i don't always sound like that — in my saner moments perhaps, i act. but so does everyone. we all pretend we are strong and don't need you or anybody — very sure of ourselves but you — you see into us with a piercing depth that most of it is just a show in our efforts to convince a world to accept us — in fear of its demands, in fear of not being a measure to all we are, trapped in "a period which has overdeveloped its brains and lost its heart" — we pretend for many reasons. we pretend we have no feelings, that we don't care because it seems silly to get mushy over a few lines of poetry. we get ashamed that we find a sunrise beautiful as if it was the sunrise's fault. crybabies, sentimentalists, dreamers. we fear such ridicule as though the ravings of the multitude were any d...n criterion! (God and i from the majority?) we pretend because we shrink from any too open display of emotion especially

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THE GREATNESS OF RIZAL

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The following is the prize-winning oration of Mr. MANUEL S. GO, a first year student of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, which won the Don Sergio Osmeña GOLD MEDAL in the Fifth Annual Inter-collegiate Oratorical Tilt sponsored by the Pre-Law class organization held at the USC Girls' High School Social Hall on November 30.

WHenever we recall the memory of Dr. Jose Rizal, soul and symbol of the Filipino nation, pride and pillar of the Malayan race, we become immediately aware of the presence of an overwhelming power, the influence of a mighty force. It is because we all feel so small in the face of him so great.

We all have certain ideas about this greatness. To some of us, it is a greatness compounded from the glowing personal attributes of the man and his glorious accomplishments seldom, if at all, achieved by any single individual in the span of a lifetime. For Dr. Rizal was a genius of higher order. His genius made him an artist, a scientist, a linguist, a poet, a writer, a historian, a philosopher; and in each of these fields of endeavor, he demonstrated a keenness of understanding, a perspicacity of vision that lay beyond the reach of ordinary minds.

To the others of us, Rizal's greatness flows from the sheer courage with which he faced the firing squad at the Luneta some sixty years ago. He fell on that spot, now enshrined in the heart of the nation, without the slightest flinching of his faith or the weakening of his willingness to die for a cause. Others, of lesser mettle and spiritual strength, would have promptly knuckled under in the face of certain doom, but Rizal stood calm and composed, sedate and serene down to the end.

Then, again, to still others of us, Dr. Rizal's greatness stems from his deep love for his family and abiding loyalty to his friends. In this regard, he was profoundly human. While studying abroad, tender thoughts of family and friends back home constantly crowded into his waking moments, and these thoughts he poured forth in a stream of letters warm with love and affectionate concern. Because of his family, because of his friends, because of his country.

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affection, in fear of being unloved in return we shut our eyes our hearts hoping we'll be spared the anguish of such a terrible pain. We pretend because it is easier that way. We pretend because it is the only sane thing to do — it's the only way to keep our heads (or so we think). We miss many miracles because we do not have enough courage to take a step beyond the arbitrary landmarks of our souls, because we do not believe that the price of greatness is danger. There is the growing cult that tells us that the only way never to be hurt is not to let anything matter to us — "that much". "Cry, the beloved country for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers nor stand too silent to which makes red the veils with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley, for fear will rob him of all if he gives too much."

Santa Claus, you've stood for everything fine and good that we are not, you stand for generosity, for peace, for love, you are the central figure of a tradition that defies time's flight, you are the symbol of a custom begun by the magi who followed a star, you are the relic of a beloved Christian way of life that no invention or discovery can vanquish... the little ones yet believe in you, the children whose hearts are not yet dead, you are the only one eternal in the grief of a changing world, from the remnants of a shattered childhood I have retained a memory of you. I do not have to ask you what is the answer to balance the gravity of such a pessimism, if you are not the answer then perhaps you and I had been playing a cosmic game of the living dead, you are real — more real than anything I'd ever been sure of. Santa Claus, I believe in you.

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men, he had to come back home, even if it meant his arrest and ultimate death.

All these — his genius, his courage that knew no faltering or fear, his devotion to family, his dedication to friends — are shining gems on the fame of Dr. Rizal's greatness. When we consider, however, his true significance in the light of history, when we reflect upon upon the whole of the stream of his life, his works and his struggles, we find that these gems, remarkable in themselves though they really are, are only so many little brilliances sparkling on the vast diadem of his real greatness.

For, then, we realize the real stature and the true magnitude of his greatness. We realize that Dr. Rizal was not so much a man as an ideas, not so much a person as an institution of thought. We realize that such idea, such thought was so strong, so powerful, so universally appealing, that it has not only banished darkness from this land with his fiery flames of freedom, but that also it has served, even to this day, as constant beacon light and inspiration in the political lives of people in other lands. As such idea, as such institution of thought, he has hardly any peer in all the history of modern times. This is the quintessence of Dr. Rizal's greatness.

We remember, reverently, the story of creation.

"And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

"And God said, 'Let there be light: and there was light.'"

The Spirit of God, the Thought of God, moved and kept moving through the void and darkness of the beginning of things. At the end of the sixth day, the Thought of God had created the world and all the things upon it. And light was born from the darkness and the moon and sun and stars; hung in the firmament of the heavens; and the earth grew green with grass, abounding in flora and fauna, and the waters were heavy with "moving creatures that hath life."

God, indeed, created the world by the force of His Thought.

In a limited, but nonetheless in a very substantial and real sense, Dr. Jose Rizal "created" this country of ours by the force of his thought.

It was a sad country that he was born into. It was a country that moaned and groaned under the heels of tyranny and oppression. The Spaniards wielded complete control and domination over its political and religious life; they were the masters, the supreme rulers whose

word was law all over the land. Their regime so sapped and subverted the will and assertiveness of the Filipinos that the latter in time ceased even to yearn for a better and happier future. The Filipinos had become abject slaves, paying bowing obedience to the caprices of the foreign conquerors, living merely for the present, hopeless and helpless. There had become a cheerless world indeed, a world "without form and void", a world heavy with the clouds of darkness and despair.

But Rizal, the idea, the thought, moved into this darkness and this despair. His thought, his spirit, to borrow a biblical phrase, "moved upon the face" of his country, touching the minds of his countrymen, reaching their hearts, reproving them for their lethargy and indifference, awakening in them the sparks of legitimate aspirations for the ultimate redemption of their land and its liberation from the clutches of colonialism. It appreciated the fact that the "contact with the Spanish culture had consolidated the political and moral unity of the Filipinos and had given them new religion, language, and customs"; but, at the same time, it echoed the conviction born out of bitter experience, "that the loss of liberty and human dignity was too great a price to pay for an incompetent government" that the Spaniards had instituted in the Country.

The spirit of Rizal, the thought of Rizal, moved and kept moving through the dark void of his country, and wherever it went, it left behind an indelible trail of light in the hearts of his people. After a lifetime of constant love and consistent labor, crowned by the glory of his supreme sacrifice at the Luneta, Rizal had "created" his country, so to speak, by the force of his thought, its trail of light multiplying into flaming multitudes of faith that burned torches for the freedom of the land we now know as the Republic of the Philippines.

Throughout his life, Rizal had only one obsession — the attainment of liberty for his native land, and its establishment as a sovereign nation with a government truly independent of foreign control and the Filipino people governing themselves. He believed that God had intended the country for the Filipinos and that the best administrators of the interests of the country and its inhabitants would be the Filipinos themselves. Whatever he did, he did in the passion of this obsession; even his death he had foreseen as an imperative in the fulfillment of this consuming ambition.

It was not that Rizal was selfish or that he championed the doctrine of schismatic regionalism, but he saw through the wisdom and logic of the proposition that a nation ought to be governed by the nationals themselves.

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would be gone. He would have nothing. Nothing. NOTHING. The word nagged him. He shut his eyes. A flurry of thoughts crossed his mind.

With a start he swooped down on her and yanked out the leather purse. Her bundles clattered to the pavement. She screamed. Mario dashed towards a dark alley in Raon Street. He threw a parting backward glance and saw the car screech into an abrupt stop. It was a police patrol car. Soon the night air was filled with the shrill tones of police whistles. Mario's heart

shoulder. The jig was up.

A voice jolted him back to reality. The hand was that of an old man. He was clad in rags and leaned over a crooked cane.

"What is the matter, *hijo*? Don't you feel well?" the old man queried.

"No, I'm all right," he replied. "Just a little sleepy."

"Go home, my boy," the old man advised. "It is Christmas, you know. Your folks must be waiting for you."

"Thanks," Mario acknowledged. The old man staggered. A wall

A DARK ALLEY

throbbed wildly. Figures were racing after him. He had to escape. He darted into another alley. The purse proved to be cumbersome. Snapping the lock open, he emptied the purse of its contents and discarded it. He thrust the money inside his trouser's pockets. The sharp wail of a police siren echoed from the opposite end of the alley. They were trying to corner him. Apparently they were using the two-way radio. A pair of automobile headlights swung into view. A prowl car. Mario turned back. Footsteps pounded the pavement ahead with menacing proximity.

An inconspicuous nook for trash cans caught his eyes. Run for it, his mind commanded. Using his left hand as a lever, he vaulted over the trash cans and covered behind them. His left hand had touched something slimy. The stench was nauseating. How he detested rank odors! The searching beams of the prowl car flashed by overhead. He crouched some more. The smell was overpowering. He felt like vomiting. Voices pierced the curtain of silence that hung over the alley. They were arguing which way he got away. The prowl car retraced its route and vanished. The voices faded away. Slowly and cautiously he strained his ears for some warning noise. A heavy silence prevailed. He vaulted over the trash cans once more. Warily he trudged forward. Everything seemed all right. Suddenly a hand clutched his left

clock which clung to a wall in a window display revealed it was quarter to twelve. Christmas Eve was just fifteen minutes away. Time to hurry home, Mario told himself. He broke into a run. The sight of home with a paper lantern suspended over the doorway warmed his heart and brought a smile to his lips. Gently, he rapped on the door. Must be twelve o'clock now, he guessed.

"Mario?" Grace called out in a drowsy voice.

"Yes, Darling," he answered. The door latch snapped free and the door swung open. The rising crescendo of sirens wailing, church bells ringing, and automobile horns tooting crept into the room. It was Christmas Eve. He caught Grace in a tender embrace and kissed her forehead.

"Merry Christmas, Darling!" Mario greeted.

"Merry Christmas," Grace whispered softly. He reached for the light switch and snapped it on. The light drove away the gloomy darkness. They approached the crib and saw the baby was fast asleep. The sight lightened the heart of Mario. It was good to be back.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mar," Grace remarked. He knew she was happy to see him smiling.

"The strangest thought came to me a moment ago," Mario explained. "A while ago, when I was out there in the street walking, I felt

sorry for you, for the baby, and for myself. I was despondent over the fact that I had nothing to give you two. Yet, now, the whole world seems bright and easy."

"I'm glad you feel that way," Grace sighed.

"So do I," Mario confirmed. "When I thought of how a Family of Three endured the same tribulations we are going through now, how inconvenient it must have been for them in that stable, how all the world frolicked without being aware of His coming to be with us, all the things that bothered me, that agitated my very soul did not matter anymore."

"Yes, darling," Grace agreed. "Sometimes, by not having anything, we have everything."

"Let's get some sleep now. We must hear Mass early," Mario advised. He switched off the light and the darkness did not affect him. Somehow, he was glad that the dark alley existed only in his mind. Sleep came heavily on his eyes. †

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for a nation is a group of people bound together by a common sentiment of unity by reason of common aspirations and a common history and heritage, and it is these people alone who can best chart their own future and determine their own destiny.

To the Filipinos, that was his message; to the world, he gave the same message.

The Filipinos learned the message well. When, on July 4, 1946, some fifty years after Rizal fell on the Luneta, the Filipino flag was raised for the first time alone on the flagstaffs of the nation, every Filipino knew that it was there, sustained on the wings of the idea and the thought that was Rizal.

That thought, moving upon the face of the Philippines to ultimately dissipate the clouds of colonialism and reveal the full splendor of freedom, continues to move towards other benighted colonial areas of the earth. In Indonesia and other countries, that thought has become a bible in their struggle for political emancipation. Rizal indeed now belongs not only to the Philippines; he belongs also to the hearts and history of peoples desiring to be free.

The greatness of Rizal was only the measure of the greatness of the thought that it was his singular fortune to give expression to, with all his mind, his heart, even with his life. And that thought has made him truly great because it is in accord with the essence of the greatness of justice, of humanity, of God. †