

Essay Contest a Success

The Grand Lodge is pleased to announce that the essay contest this year on the Lives of Great Masons was a great success. While there were not as many participants as expected, the quality of the biographies entered in the contest was far beyond our fondest hopes. The themes were:

1. The Life of Jose Abad Santos
2. The Life of Rafael Palma, and
3. The Life of Teodoro M. Kalaw

It is noteworthy that a father and his son starred in the contest. Brother Ponciano Jacinto, a lawyer, writer and professor of English, won first prize with his entry "Life of Teodoro M. Kalaw". His son, Ponciano Jacinto, Jr., a fledgling lawyer at MLQ University, won first prize with his entry "Life of Rafael Palma", and second prize with his other piece "Life of Jose Abad Santos". Wor. Brother Leopoldo Boquiren landed three prizes:

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first, in "Life of Jose Abad Santos", second in "Life of Teodoro M. Kalaw" and third in the "Life of Rafael Palma". Brother Demetrio Estrella placed second in the "Life of Rafael Palma", while Brother Alfredo Samson got third in the "Life of Teodoro M. Kalaw" and honorable mention in the "Life of Rafael Palma".

The Board of Judges was composed of Rt. W. Bro. Luther B. Bewley, M. W. Bro. Sydney M. Austin, and V. Rev. Bro. Macario C. Navia. All of them are lavish in their praise for the fine quality of the literary works entered in the contest.

Delightful reading of beautiful writing on the lives of Filipino Masons awaits the brethren in many issues of the CABLE TOW featuring the winners in this contest. If this is any criterion, a literary contest may hereafter be a feature of every Masonic year.△

In the throes of a Crisis ---

Life of Rafael Palma

By PONCIANO JACINTO, JR.
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"Unless I miss my guess," said Rafael Palma as if in soliloquy, "they'll soon be here."

"Who?" asked one of his dear ones who were at his bedside, solicitous for his comfort. Don Rafael was nearing the end of the road and he knew it.

"Special guests," he answered ab-

sently, "...jackals, vultures, hyenas ..."

"He's delirious...."

"Don't be ridiculous," he scolded sharply, "my mind has never been clearer."

"Then what...."

"A-a-a-a-y," sighed the patient in

mock resignation. "You and your eternal headache. Whenever you start thinking, your head aches, so you resort to questions, questions, questions. Still," he mused with grim humor, "it proves that you have a brain."

That was Rafael Palma. Rarely given to quibbling and double-talk, he was brutally blunt to the end. He rode roughshod over people's feelings, not that he enjoyed sadistic pleasure in so doing, but because he had no patience for supidity. He merely insisted on the exercise of his right to speak his mind freely and he did so objectively, oblivious of the havoc he wrought upon other people's sensibilities with the bludgeoning force of his words.

But now it seemed that he had the gift of clairvoyance, although apparently a poor one, for guests indeed soon arrived — not denizens of the zoo as he predicted, but priests who were all solicitude for the salvation of his soul. Against their insistence, Palma was civil, but firm — he adamantly refused to repudiate Masonry, the sole source of the only true happiness he ever knew — where he was liked for what he was, or what he was not, with no selfish, ulterior motives, just the love of man for man.

Rafael Palma had lived a long and fruitful life, not because, but in spite of his artless ways. He was blessed with the rare combination of two complementary skills — that of the lawyer and that of the writer. But that extraordinary gift formed no more than the nucleus of the entire man that was Palma. This man had a brilliant mind, an iron will, and an indomitable courage.

Trained in the law, which includes dexterity in logic, argumentation, and

debate, he was a vigorous writer whose dissertations in any subject that affected the fundamental principles of right and justice and general welfare according to his lights, stood as invulnerable as a rock, manifesting the ruggedness of his powerful personality.

In his polemics, his legal training unerringly showed him where he could tread safely without sacrificing vitality. His mastery of the Castilian language put his ideas in orbit with the dazzling brilliance of lightning and the devastating power of a thunderbolt.

But his precision and his power of discourse sacrificed beauty, even as his fierce adherence to truth did away with tact and diplomacy. Conscious of his powers, he had little use for art in languages. He disdained the subtle advantage of skillfully wielded rhetorical aids, and simply demolished the opposition with the steamroller of logic and truth. He saw no useful purpose in saying that a certain lady was no longer young. To Rafael Palma, the woman was simply old. For that matter, neither was she out shopping for a crib — she was simply pregnant.

Thus it was that while his literary creations were robust, they were merely expositions of incontrovertible facts. He did not rave in poetic rapture over the breath-taking colors of the sunset, but merely pointed to a prosaic combination of light and dust in the atmosphere.

So it was that Dr. Rafael Palma's biography of Dr. Jose Rizal was as factual as gun powder, and about as dry and palatable. Indubitably it was a good, honest, conscientious work, but it did not scintillate, it did not throb with the vibrant beauty that only an

inspired artist can impart to a true work of art.

But the man was the epitome of intellectual honesty and moral integrity. Such was his uncompromising rectitude that he was impatient with sham, often rude even, without meaning to be. For a more compassionate soul never trod the earth, yet people called him ruthless, and he was, when the stakes concerned morality and honor.

Consequently, Palma was a lonely man. This was inevitable, for God made more rogues than saints, and Diogenes had been gone for ages before his Filipino counterpart in Palma came to the scene.

For the rich and powerful, it is easy enough to be intransigent, assertive, contentious. From the standpoint of affluence and influence, Palma was neither rich nor powerful, yet he neither gave quarters nor asked any in his fights for truth. For it was his noble courage that predominated among his virtues — the courage to express his opinions and to stand by his convictions, even if, in so doing, as it did happen throughout his life, it would cost him popular approval, his friends even, and the material comforts in which one of less rigid ethical criterion would have wallowed in epicurean plenty.

Above all, the crowning splendor of this misunderstood man's attributes was his pure honesty — pure entire, total, complete, absolute. The man's Spartan honesty was such that he could not help but starve to death if by eating to live he had to compromise his conscience and truth in the slightest.

All these attributes boldly stamped his writings and utterances, his acts and his policies — particularly in the newspaper "El Renacimiento," and in

his administration as President of the University of the Philippines.

Toward the sunset of his pragmatic career, when he would have been enjoying a well-earned rest, he was compelled to practise law to keep the spectre of want at bay. It was then that his integrity and rectitude were put to acid test.

At that time his fierce adherence to his iron criterion had already made him the invulnerable rock that he was, and, being a rock, he seemed unfeeling to the outside influences that did not speak his rock language. So, like a rock, he was alone, forlorn, convenient haven to raw-weather friends, like the fickle birds of prey and passage that needed the comfort of his strength upon which to rest their battered bodies from the buffeting of the elements, only to receive their droppings in return as they flew away strengthened, after using him, never to return.

This acid test came when a so-called friend, aware of Palma's straitened financial circumstances, struck on the bright idea of obtaining something for nothing by using Palma's talents and capitalizing on his poverty. This opportunist, a sharp operator, was quick to collect but slow to pay, and now he was in trouble.

The case he offered Palma was for the recovery in damages from a material man who brought action against the sharper for an already discharged obligation, to the alleged prejudice of his credit. Palma was to get a small fortune — enough to tide him over for the short remainder of his impecunious way of life.

But in the course of his investigation, Palma discovered that when his client, through his shady connections,

found that his creditor's lawyers were preparing a complaint against him, he hastened surreptitiously to pay his debt, and since it took time before the lawyers knew of the payment, the complaint was nevertheless filed several days afterward. The scheme was as clever as it was a swindle pure and simple.

Palma spat on the man's face.

Because of his absolute incorruptibility, Palma was essentially fearless. For he so lived that he could look any man in the face and tell him to go to the devil. More than fearlessness in the face of an adversary, he had a sense of humor that might have been at the evanescent point, the penumbra, as it were, where wit ends and humor begins.

Rafael Palma was then in the throes of his last fight and, true to his premonition, he had visitors. They were not jackals, vultures, and hyenas — the scavengers that attend death for the carrion. They were merely well-meaning priests who, in their own words, only wanted him to abjure Masonry if his soul was to be saved.

For like Dr. Jose Rizal, Dr. Rafael Palma was a Mason and so, like Rizal before his death, priests took shifts at his bedside trying to make him disown Masonry and make a good confession.

"But Father," Palma exclaimed. "I have nothing to confess to you, except that I am a true Mason if that's what you mean. If that's all you want me to do, I will do it with pleasure if it will make you happy."

To another of his tormentors, he said, "I wrote a biography of Dr. Jose Rizal, another Mason, and sound reason tells me that I am right in the conviction that Rizal died a Mason, your

so-called retractions to the contrary notwithstanding. So far I've found no valid reason to change that conviction. How can you now, in my house and under my circumstances, ask me to outrage my conscience with a retraction of my own?"

"Moreover, he added with a twinkle in his eye, 'I have been reading good literature lately, and I want to read a particularly interesting passage to you.' He groped under his pillow and began reading slowly and clearly.

"To suppose that God with bodily hands formed man from the dust is very childish. . . . God neither formed man with bodily hands, nor did he breathe upon him with throat and lips. . . ."

"Dr. Palma!" the good priest screamed with holy indignation. "That is sacrilege, unmitigated blasphemy. You and your iniquitous Masonic literature. . . ." he spluttered, choked then unceremoniously took his leave.

Rafael Palma smiled faintly, not without kindness, though tinged with sadness. For Palma, the Mason, was himself a deeply religious man according to his lights, gratefully enjoying the freedom of its profession which was made possible by the sacrifices of other Masons before him both at home and abroad. As a matter of fact, what he read to the priest was not exactly by a priest, or by a bishop, or by an archbishop; it was not by a cardinal either, or by a pope even. Actually it was written by no less a bulwark of the Roman Catholic Church than St. Augustine.

And now a hint of Palma's macabre wit and sense of humor. To the insistent and persistent priest who inconsiderately sapped the Doctor's waning strength with his nagging, he bar-

gained.

"Very well, Father. You are anxious for the salvation of my soul, and I certainly do appreciate your solicitude. Of my many shortcomings, ingratitude is not one of them. You believe that I ought to abjure Masonry and make a confession. Well, out of sheer gratitude for your deep concern for my spiritual welfare, I, too, want you to be saved. Amor con amor se

paga. ¿ch, padre? ¡Pues bien! I will confess, and abjure Masonry if you will be an equally good sport and, for the salvation of your own soul, become a Mason yourself."

The good priest, after recovering from the shock, crossed himself piously and fled the place.

And so, even as he lived, Dr. Rafael Palma died — a Mason. △

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Filipino Masons in California Organize



Some eighteen Masons belonging to lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines presently residing in California have organized themselves into the Philippine Travellers Club with headquarters at 744 Washington Street, San Francisco, California. It is one of their main objectives to band together for the purpose of having closer relations and keeping in touch with the activities of their Grand Lodge as well as their res-

pective lodges.

At the organization meeting on November 13, 1959, the following brethren were elected officers: N. N. Morabe, President; A. Asercion, Vice-President; and R. Ancheta, Secretary-Treasurer. At the time of their organization, they had for special guest, VWB Amador Ylagan, District Deputy Grand Master for District No. 9, who happened to be in the city in the course of his re-

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