

In Memory of Masao Matsuoka

By SUMIO MAKINO

ONE OF THE MOST SINCERE friends of the Filipino people was bland, patriarchal Masao Matsuoka, first president of the Manila *Sinbun-sya*. On October 28 of this year, Mr. Matsuoka breathed his last in his home in Tokyo. Thousands—men of various nationalities—mourned his death. Even when death was near, he talked and listened to news about his beloved Philippines.

The affable, understanding old man of the Manila *Sinbun-sya* was well-known not only among his journalistic colleagues but also among Philippine leaders. He was a close personal friend of His Excellency, President Jose P. Laurel. He was, in fact, a close friend of all—artists, writers, businessmen, social workers. Quiet, soft-spoken and self-sacrificingly modest, he helped a good many Filipinos—talents that he called his protégés—freely and anonymously.

That benign countenance of Mr. Matsuoka is gone forever. I was one of his protégés, but I certainly was not alone in feeling profound loss over his death. A truly cultured man, he knew how to deal with all kinds of people. He made friends everywhere. He was a diplomat of goodwill, lending his support to nationalistic causes, and going out of his way to give it freely.

He was an active proponent of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a cause he believed in at a very early age. He was something of a pioneer whose firm conviction that the Co-Prosperity Sphere would

be established remained unshaken until his death.

I left my Manila assignment for Tokyo in June of this year. Mr. Matsuoka had left earlier, due to illness. On arriving in Tokyo, I went to see Mr. Matsuoka. He was in good spirits. He talked about the Philippines a lot. He lived without showing any indication that he was a sick man. His condition was better than I had expected. He listened with lively interest to matters pertaining to the Philippines. He discussed the international situation with unusual insight.

But Mr. Matsuoka was not a healthy man. He had had an attack of cerebral hemorrhage, and was waging a gallant battle against the illness. Then one day, on the morning of October 20, he had another attack. He sank into a coma from which he never recovered until he died. At 1:32 a. m. on October 28, he started on the long journey from which no traveller returns.

His last moments were quiet. In death, his face lost none of its benign cast, although it looked a trifle thinner for his illness. Death took him at a time when the Greater East Asia War was entering a decisive stage.

His friends kept vigil over his dead body. On this occasion, one of his old friends remarked reverently: "Mr. Matsuoka's interest in the Philippines dates back to his college days." I know, for I heard him say once: "As a child, I heard from my father that there was a Filipino general named

Aguinaldo. Despite the fact that the Americans had put a price on his head, this Filipino general bravely presented himself to the American authorities. I know then, and thought, that General Aguinaldo must be a very brave man." His interest in the Philippine affairs increased as a student at the University of Keio from which he was graduated.

Shortly after Mr. Matsuoka's graduation from this college, he became an official with the government general of Taiwan. When his government commissioned him to make a trip to the Philippines, he left immediately. In Manila, he made friends with Teodoro M. Kalaw, then Director of the National Library, and Dr. Mariano Ponce. His assignment took him farther to the southern regions, and then to North and South America and, finally, to Europe. His travels did not deflect his interest in the southern regions of Asia. He was particularly interested in the affairs and in the future of the Philippines.

In Tokyo, Mr. Matsuoka forged an early friendship with General Artemio Ricarte, and extended help to many Filipino refugees in the Japanese capital. He took part in frank, sympathetic discussions of the Philippines and of the role the Philippines would play in Greater East Asia.

The late Mr. Matsuoka's specialty was colonial policies. An authority on the subject, he gave lectures at the University of Keio, and the University of Commerce of Tokyo. Scholars and students know him for the authoritative books he wrote on his favourite subject of colonial policies.

When the Manila *Sinbun-sya* was organised early in 1942, Mr. Masao Matsuoka was chosen to serve as its first president. He was then sixty-three. He stayed in the Philippines for one year and three months. During that short period, he made lasting friendships with his colleagues,

government officials, statesmen, artists, writers, and the common folk. He had cordial relations with his great and good friend, President Jose P. Laurel. In the Manila *Sinbun-sya* he found stimulation and comradeship in the company of Don Pedro Aunario and Don Alejandro Roces. With these distinguished confreres, he exchanged opinions most frankly and without reserve on the present state of Nippon-Filipino relationship, and its future.

An idea of the late Mr. Matsuoka was that there could be no politics worth its salt unless it had love for its basis. This he demonstrated during his stay in the Philippines. He understood the social customs and traditions of Filipinos, and observed them accordingly. He was a student of Tagalog, and wanted to look like a Filipino by wearing a *barong Tagalog*.

President Matsuoka was intensely interested in promoting and raising the standards of Philippine music. He lent active support to artists, and actually initiated the holding of a musical concourse for the leading talents of the land. First prize-winner in this contest was the young pianist, Angelina Reyes. A significant story is related about President Matsuoka's seeing Miss Reyes in his sleep one afternoon at the Nippon Hospital. Mr. Matsuoka had just undergone an operation for nasal catarrh. In his sleep that afternoon, he saw the musical prodigy in a blue dress. In his dream, he looked more closely at his girl-visitor's wrist for the watch that had been given to her as a gift by a Japanese official. At that very moment, Angelina Reyes succumbed to a fatal attack in the midst of a gruelling rehearsal. Nippon Hospital doctors were on their way back from the Nippon Bunka Kaikan, where the accident occurred, while Mr. Matsuoka was telling his story of the dream in which he saw young Angelina.

This story can not be taken lightly. It is significant because it shows President Matsuoka's abiding concern for his Filipino friends. He was a great inspirer, an unselfish friend, a sympathetic patron of the arts.

He was one of the first persons to suggest the setting of an early date for the granting of independence to the Philippines by Japan. He sincerely believed in early Philippine participation in the Greater East Asia War. When the Philippines entered the war in September, he was so overjoyed he muttered from his sickbed: "Very good, very good!" according to members of his family. He maintained constant contact with Ambassador Vargas in Tokyo, and kept tab of everything that had a bearing on the progress of Philippine participation in the Greater East Asia War.

When he heard about Japan's

victory in Taiwan, and in the waters east of the Philippines, he tried to express his thoughts in writing. He raised his hand and asked for pencil and paper. But he was too weak to say or write anything. On October 31, funeral services were held in his honour. Hundreds of distinguished persons, both Japanese and Filipino, attended the service. Ambassador Vargas was present at the ceremonies. Telegrams and letters from distant places poured in, condoling with Mr. Matsuoka's bereaved family.

Posterity will remember that one last wish of President Masao Matsuoka was to have half of his ashes buried in Manila, and the other half in his own Fatherland. President Matsuoka is gone, but his ashes which lie in a tomb that stands nobly in Philippine earth will forever remain a symbol of a great friendship between one of Japan's truly great men and the Filipino people.



Pledge —

GENERAL YAMASITA, Highest Commander of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Philippines: I wish to assure you one and all that my mission of defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country will be fulfilled even at the sacrifice of my own life.

I wish to pledge my word of honour—and the word of honour of a soldier of Japan is definitive and irrevocable—that my mission here is to assist this new-born Republic which has just celebrated its first anniversary to grow unmolested by any force and from any source into a strong virile nationhood.