

JOSE RIZAL—His Last Hours

By Dr. Frank C. Laubach

ON November 8, 1896, Jose Rizal, heavily guarded, was locked in Fort Santiago prison. His brother Paciano, was seized and tortured with a screw twisted into his left hand, while a pen was thrust into his right hand to make him sign a statement that his brother was connected with the Katipunan. Paciano would not sign. The torture was continued until he fainted. The next day he was tortured again until he began to act insane. But he had not signed anything. What courage flowed in the Rizal veins, in father, in mother, in sons, and daughters!

Then as always Rizal was against revolution, and on December 15 he wrote from prison to his countrymen to tell them that he had never had anything to do with these uprisings, and that he had tried to stifle the rebellion. "I am most anxious for the liberties of our country * * * but I place as a prior condition the education of the people, that by means of instruction and industry our country may have an individuality of its own and make itself worthy of these liberties. I have recommended in my writings the study of the civic virtues, without which there is no redemption * * * I condemn this uprising * * * Return then to your homes, and may God pardon those that have wrought in bad faith." Still cherishing the hope in Education which he had described in one of his early poems! To the very end, as Retana declares, "a convinced pacifist."

With his elbows drawn back with cords so that they nearly touched, he was brought before the court martial. In that position of torture he listened to the drawn-out readings of excerpts from his writings, which were produced to prove that his pen had really caused the Katipunan. The Christmas holidays interrupted the Court. Rizal spent his final Christmas eve composing his



"Last Farewell" which he wrote out while sitting in the Fort Santiago chapel. On December 29th, the court reconvened and pronounced the sentence: guilty of treason; death by shooting in the back in twenty-four hours.

Jose Rizal's mother and sisters came to say a last farewell. Wonderful mother, who had nerved her son to be true to his vision all his life! She was not allowed to kiss him farewell, lest she might give him poison and so cheat the spectators the next morning! He asked permission to give his sister Trinidad a little lamp which had been a gift of a friend in Europe, and was unlike lamps in the Philippines. As he gave it to her he said in English, which the guard did not understand, "There is something inside."

When his mother and sisters reached home, they hastily pushed a little ball of paper out of the lamp, opened it, and on that paper, stained with alcohol from the lamp, they read—his mother herself could see it!

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JOSE RIZAL—HIS LAST

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All eye witnesses agree as to Rizal's incredible serenity and courage during the trial, and during his last long hours. He spent the final night in prayer, in reading, or in untroubled conversation with guards and priests. The next morning as he was led down the street to Bagumbayan Field, he was the same keenly interested observer that he always had been. "When were those two towers added?" he asked the Jesuit beside him, pointing to the Ateneo. "I used to walk here with Leonora," he said as he passed another spot.

"We are going to Calvary," he said presently. "My sufferings are little. The Saviour suffered much,—nailed on the cross. In a moment the bullets will end all pain."

He looked out at the ships. "How beautiful it is this morning. Father. How clear is the view of Corregidor and the Cavite Mountains. I walked here with my sweetheart Leonora on morning like this."

There were troops waiting formed in a square as he approached, enough artillery to fight an army, and a band ready to play the national anthem when everything was over. Hundreds of government officials were there with their families, shouting with pleasure as the noblest, most gifted and most learned man in the Spanish realms approached. He stopped when he reached the captain and said:

"Would you kindly shoot me in the front?" For shooting in the back was the symbol of treason.

"I have orders to shoot you in the back," replied the captain.

"But I have never been a traitor to my own country nor to Spain."

"My duty is to comply with the orders I have received."

"Very well, then shoot me as you see fit. But may I ask that the sol-

And away they all flew like the down of a thistle;

But I heard him exclaim: ere he drove out of sight:

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

E. M. L.

diers aim at my heart and not my head?"

"Yes, we will do that," replied the captain. He did not know that Rizal desired one second of consciousness after the shots were fired, in order to choose how he should fall.

He turned again to the Jesuit.

"Oh how terrible it is to die, Father. How one suffers * * * I forgive everyone from the bottom of my heart * * * I have no resentment toward anyone: believe me your reverence." The Jesuit held the cross to his lips and stepped away. Rizal turned his back to the firing squad. His face was toward the western sky, perfectly calm. A military doctor in amazement ran out from the line of officers and cried:

"Colleague, let me feel your pulse." Rizal thrust his hand out as far as the bonds would permit. The beat was scarcely above normal.

"You are perfectly well, colleague, perfectly," said the doctor, as he withdrew.

Rizal twisted his hand to the spot in his back where he wished the soldiers to aim * * * Eight soldiers fired together. With one last effort of will the victim twisted his body about and fell—face toward the sky!

December 30, 1896. Thirty-five years, six months, eleven days old.

The band played the national anthem. The crowd shouted "Viva España." They thought he was dead. They tried to hide his grave.

His largest monument stands on the spot where he fell. Perhaps he has more monuments than any man of the nineteenth century. There is one on the plaza of every village. There are a million pictures of Rizal on the walls of the Filipino homes. And he is enshrined in ten million hearts. Eight shots did not kill him.

"Thine air, thy space, thy valleys I shall permeate."

A youth of eighteen had gone to Europe to learn what he could do for his helpless oppressed country.

PACITA'S CHRISTMAS TREE

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"Oh, Mother, I saw the most beautiful Christmas tree. It had so many shining stars it sparkled all over." Pacita was out of breath. "It was so wonderful," she continued, her eyes very bright with joy. "Perhaps I do not need to have a Christmas tree. I have already seen a very, very lovely one."

"But you have one, darling." The mother said very gently. "It is not very beautiful, but it is your own."

Pacita clapped her hands as she asked,

"Where is it? Where?"

Her mother led her into the small sala. Pacita was greeted by a Christmas tree no taller than she.

"How lovely! Where did you get it, Mother?"

Father made it for you." The mother answered.

"I like this better. It does not shine like Caridad's, but it has beautiful flowers on it. And oh! Look at these sweets. The wrappers look like butterfly wings. And they are among flowers. Aren't they beautiful?"

"I am glad you like it. Try the candy, Pacita, and tell me if you like it."

"Not yet, Mother. I just want to look at it now. Anyway, I know I will like it. You are the sweetest mother in the world."

Pacita skipped around her small tree. She kissed the flowers. She touched the candy with wrappers that fluttered like butterflies among the bright flowers. Her cat and her dog followed her about. They, too, were happy to have a Christmas tree.

Pacita's Christmas tree was a small branch of *calós*. White and pink *chichirica* flowers and red santan blossoms were tied among the leaves. Tiny one-centavo toys and coconut candy in wrappers of red, gold, and blue hung from the little twigs.

At thirty-five he had found the answer: He could tell the terrible truth, and die for it.