



MAGAZINE OF GOOD READING

Entered as second class mail matter at  
the Manila Post Office on Dec. 7, 1955

NOVEMBER  
1960

VOL. XII

MANILA, PHILIPPINES

No. 11

*Whence comes another?*

# Our Countryman CLARO MAYO RECTO

By Leon Guerrero  
*Philippine Ambassador*

**I** DO NOT speak as an ambassador this afternoon, no one is an ambassador in his own country. I speak as a friend and as a partisan of Claro Mayo Recto.

No man incarnated the spirit of Filipino nationalism as much and as long as he did. He was one of those few who are privileged to re-discover youth and to belong to two generations. He lived long enough to reform the Third Republic; he was not too young to remember the First. Indeed he told me that one of his earliest recollections was the sound, overheard in the

night, of his mother weeping as she was interrogated by the Americans during the pacification of Batangas—a memory that is not wholly without significance.

He grew up under the new American regime, but was one of the last generation to imbibe the European culture of the Spanish Jesuits, the culture that had bred the Revolution. He also became a poet and an essayist in Spanish, and Filipino writers in Spanish were the heirs of Rizal, their poetry a nostalgia for our brief moment of independence, their prose a

protest against the Babylonian captivity of the national culture, as they understood and remembered it.

Thereafter, he and Manuel Luis Quezon, Sergio Osmeña, Rafael Palma, Jose Laurel, Manuel Roxas, and others, sometimes in partisan opposition to one another, but always united in the pursuit of the national objective, were leaders in the parliamentary struggle for independence that was the expression of Filipino nationalism in the decades before the Japanese War. It was a youthful nationalism, untroubled by doubts and apprehensions, attractively native, when we look back on it, because of its self-confidence.

**T**HAT WAS A time when Quezon could exclaim with a toss of his handsome head: "Better a government run like hell by Filipinos than a government run like heaven by the Americans." It was a time when Quezon, Recto, and the "antis" could successfully reject the Hare-Hawes-Cutting independence act because, apart from other more partisan considerations, the law established American bases in the Philippines. They would not, they said, feel really free if, riding along the Boulevard, they were to see the American flag waving over the Plaza Militar. It was

also a time when, under the presidency of Recto, the Constitutional Convention could draft a charter reserving to Filipinos alone the right to enjoy the national patrimony.

How idyllic that time must seem to the present day nationalist when even the American High Commissioner and threatened economic interests could not induce the Filipino leaders to undertake what was euphemistically termed a "realistic re-examination" of independence!

Yet already forces were at work that would undermine nationalism in its popular foundations. A new generation was growing up in schools that taught more American than Fil-patriotism in the colonial terms of a double allegiance. It was an English-speaking generation whose heroes and exemplars were Washington and Lincoln, who spoke of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," a formula that was understood to justify government of the Filipinos by the Americans. Rizal, in comparison, was a figure that grew increasingly dim and meaningless, a good man who had said "*morir es descansar*" when he was shot by the wicked Spaniards in a struggle that no longer had any significance in a modern free society. Few knew the words of the Filipino national anthem,

but almost every youngster could sing "God Bless America."

One wonders if Recto and his fellow nationalists of the time realized that they were losing the new generation to Hollywood, Tin Pan Alley, and Madison Avenue, and that the new appetite, habits, and ambitions bred by American free trade—the general euphoria induced by economic prosperity under a regime that, though alien, was politically democratic—would sap the vitality of Filipino nationalism in its charter as an historic protest against foreign rule.

**C**ERTAINLY THERE WERE symptoms enough of the change. NEPA, for example, the movement for national economic protectionism, never got very much farther than a flurry of interest in folk arts and cottage industries; while Roxas, the very idol of the new America-oriented generation, passionately handsome in a tieless cerrada jacket, soon wearied of rallying his new, his *Bagong Katipunan*.

The war and enemy occupation deepened the disenchantment. Quezon's proposal for Corregidor to declare the Philippines independent and neutral was a last despairing gesture of Filipino nationalism that was abruptly rejected and penitently withdrawn. The generation

of Wenceslao Vinzons and Ramon Magsaysay, to mention only the dead, was fighting bravely and loyally under two flags, while a cynical enemy was using the nationalist slogans to mask the most sanguinary and rapacious exploitation in our history; and the old nationalists, from Emilio Aguinaldo and Artemio Ricarte to Laurel and Recto himself, gave the appearance of believing in a mythical independence and a powerless Second Republic, in order to use them as a shield to protect the people from conscription and other extortions, and excesses of the enemy.

When the Americans returned, it must have seemed that Filipino nationalism, as distinguished from colonial double-allegiance, was at its lowest ebb. An exuberant gratitude for liberation from a brutal slave-master, as much as a pathetic economic prostration, and the obsessive need for some reassurance against a new aggression, led to the parity amendment of the Constitution of appalling one-sidedness.

But nobody could do anything much about it, or really wanted to. Everyone was much too happy with the G.I.'s and their jeeps, Virginia cigarettes, and K-rations, and it seemed almost callous ingratitude to haul down the good old Stars and Stripes and leave the Fili-

pino flag, lonely, and looking rather lost and forlorn over the ruins of Manila. Indeed the first President of the Third Republic proclaimed that his policy would be to "follow in the wake of America," America the Beautiful, America the Bountiful.

But nationalism was not dead. The old Nacionalista Party fought the parity amendment to the Constitution and the election of a number of Nacionalista senators had to be annulled to secure ratification of the bases agreement. In 1947 Camilo Osias won a significant election to the Senate; in 1949 Laurel stood for the presidency of the Republic with Recto at the head of his senatorial ticket.

If Filipino nationalism now entered a new phase it was almost entirely the work of Claro Recto. His party was fighting the elections on the traditional front: graft and corruption. Recto, almost alone, decided to fight in the field of foreign policy, and, inevitably, nationalism. I had the privilege of being associated with him in that campaign, and I remember that it was opened with a memorable indictment of what he considered the colonial party's foreign policy of mendicancy and subservience to the United States.

I know that he was fully aware of the powerful enmities he would arouse, the unforgiving rancour, the brooding hatred. He was also aware, although perhaps not so keenly, of the inevitable indifference of the voters towards foreign affairs, and of his own countrymen's loving identification of their interests with those of the former sovereign, providential liberator, and seemingly generous protector. He did not care.

IT MAY BE SAID that he could afford not to care. In many ways he was in a unique position which made him perhaps the only Filipino of our times capable of taking the leadership of the nationalist resurgence. For, in an acquisitive society where status was fixed by wealth, he had more than independent means, and yet was never corrupted by greed. In a society where politics was the source of all power and influence, he had a personal prestige and popularity that could defy party machines, and yet never succumbed to the temptation of using it for personal advantage. In a society hypnotised by dogmas and slogans, he had a mind of his own and had the courage to speak it out. In a conformist society he was a dissenter; in a frivolous society he was a thinker; in a clerical society he was a Galileo who

did not recant. In the Philippine zoo, with its exhibitionist monkeys, idle peacocks, trained parrots, and predatory hawks, he was an uncaged lion.

Yet even he had to make sacrifices. He was a genius in the law yet his nationalist crusade was bound to lose him clients; he was true to his religion yet his sermons on the nationalist gospel offended the pharisees. I am convinced that he never really hoped to be president; when he assumed the leadership of Filipino nationalism, he was consciously renouncing the leadership of the nation. For he was an old politician and he knew that politicians should make as few enemies as possible; he made many, deliberately and gladly, for the cause in which he believed.

He was a man who should be judged by the enemies he made. Their names were Ignorance, Apathy, Timidity, Servility; Opportunism in a white shirt and tie, Hypocrisy in a barong Tagalog, Bigotry in a cassock; Ambition, Intolerance, Greed. He fought them all, and was proud of his wounds.

Perhaps we realize only imperfectly what he achieved in the decade between 1949 and 1960. We are apt to take for granted now the attitudes which, were considered heretical and subversive.

It was he who first questioned our blind subservience in foreign affairs and advocated an independent policy based on national self-interest; he who first warned that a small nation should tend its own garden rather than meddle in the quarrels of the great.

He challenged the sufficiency of the guarantees against aggression; he demanded the revision of the bases agreement to restore national sovereignty and dignity, he denounced the cynical infringements of that sovereignty and dignity, he denounced the cynical infringements of that sovereignty which instituted in the Philippines a state within a state.

It was he who first inquired into the reality of foreign aid and its desirability, he who first demanded the industrialisation which he saw as the only foundation of economic independence.

If we are now receiving reparations from Japan, it is because he opposed the ratification of the Dulles peace treaty until the principle of reparations was accepted; if the Filipinos are again first in their own country it is largely because he never relented in his advocacy of the principles of the Constitution, and if our youth are beginning to re-discover our nationalist past it is gospels in their hands in defiance of what he called the most numerous Church.

**T**HE TRUE measure of his achievement is the transformation of the national character and climate that he brought about almost alone. Who would have thought, at the height of the colonial party's ascendancy in 1949, that a time would come when a Filipino provincial fiscal would dare to call for the arrest and surrender of military visitors and their mercenaries, and be backed by the authorities of the Republic! Who would have thought then that the time would come when the president himself of the colonial party would be reported as denying that he was pro-American and insisting that he was only pro-Filipino!

The nationalism of the present administration is the legacy of Claro Recto. His whole life was a testament bequeathing to his people the re-invigorated tradition of Filipino nationalism.

We are all his heirs, and may God give us the strength not to repudiate the inheritance, with all its onerous obligations.

When I last saw him in London he recounted to me that in his campaign for the presidency he had used an historical parallel to explain the need for a nationalist leadership. God, he had told our people, guided the destiny of nations. Thus, the Filipinos of the generation of the Revolution may well have wonder-

ed why God had permitted Rizal, the very embodiment of Filipino nationalism, to be shot by the Spaniards at that time of trial. The answer was that Rizal had served his purpose; he had awakened the Filipinos to a consciousness of their identity as a nation. But the needs of the people had changed; Rizal did not believe that the time was ripe for revolution, and so he had been taken away to enable Bonifacio and Aguinaldo to lead the Filipino nation in the armed struggle for independence. In the same way God had taken away the well-beloved Ramon Magsaysay with his touching faith in America, in the prime of life and at the height of his powers, and a more nationalist leadership had unexpectedly emerged.

Now, thinking back on it, I wonder what Recto would have said about his own death if he could have foreseen it. What is the hidden purpose of his sudden, ironic, heartbreaking disappearance from the scene? What turn of the plot is to be expected? What new protagonist is to appear upon the stage?

**F**OR THE play is not yet ended. Filipino nationalism has not yet attained its natural objective of a society where the sovereign powers of government will be wholly used to secure

the rights and welfare of all the Filipinos.

It has been truly said that Claro Mayo Recto's place in history is assured. He was a legend in his life time. Few men are, as he is, mourned for when they die because a cause dies a little with them, and for whom history itself closes a chapter.

It is superfluous to pass judgment on him. What we must fear is the judgment that will be passed on us, his contemporaries and successors, for we Filipinos shall be measured by his ideals, and his struggles and sacrifices for their attainment.

"How terrible it is to die in a foreign country!" he said before

he died. How much more terrible to die for a foreign country, and how still more terrible to die for one's own country when the sacrifice is spurned.

May it not be said that he lived for a lost cause, that, as someone has put it, he was the last of a generation. May it not be said that he spent himself in a meaningless battle, to save a nation that refused to repent and be saved, and clung to its sins and sordid possessions, a nation that no longer believed itself to be a nation. If the cause of Filipino nationalism should die with him, then it will deserve to die.

\* \* \*

### How Old Is the Egg?

*Eighty-million-year-old dinosaur eggs, each about the size of a human head, were discovered around Jacou and Clapiers, in Southern France, it was learned.*

*Professor M. Mattauer, of the Montpellier Geological Institute, found the eggs in a deposit of sandstone.*

*The region apparently was a favorite egg-laying spot for dinosaurs, the giant reptiles of the secondary era.*

*The institute has appealed to the inhabitants of the region to inform it of any other dinosaur remains.*

*Previously, dinosaur eggs have been found principally in the region of Aix-en Provence, Southern France, and in Mongolia.*