

Let Us Know Rizal, The Man

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RIZAL loved life. There was no question about that. There was a robust throwing of himself into everything he did or said or wrote or thought as though every moment was for him fraught with meaning and had to be lived to its fullest.

No one but a man who cherished life and its offerings could have accomplished so much in so short a space of time. He worked at everything which came his way with verve, and a certain "joy of living" which was not mere youthful exuberance. For one feels that with such a man as he, there would never have been any death of this joy no matter how old or what problems he came up against.

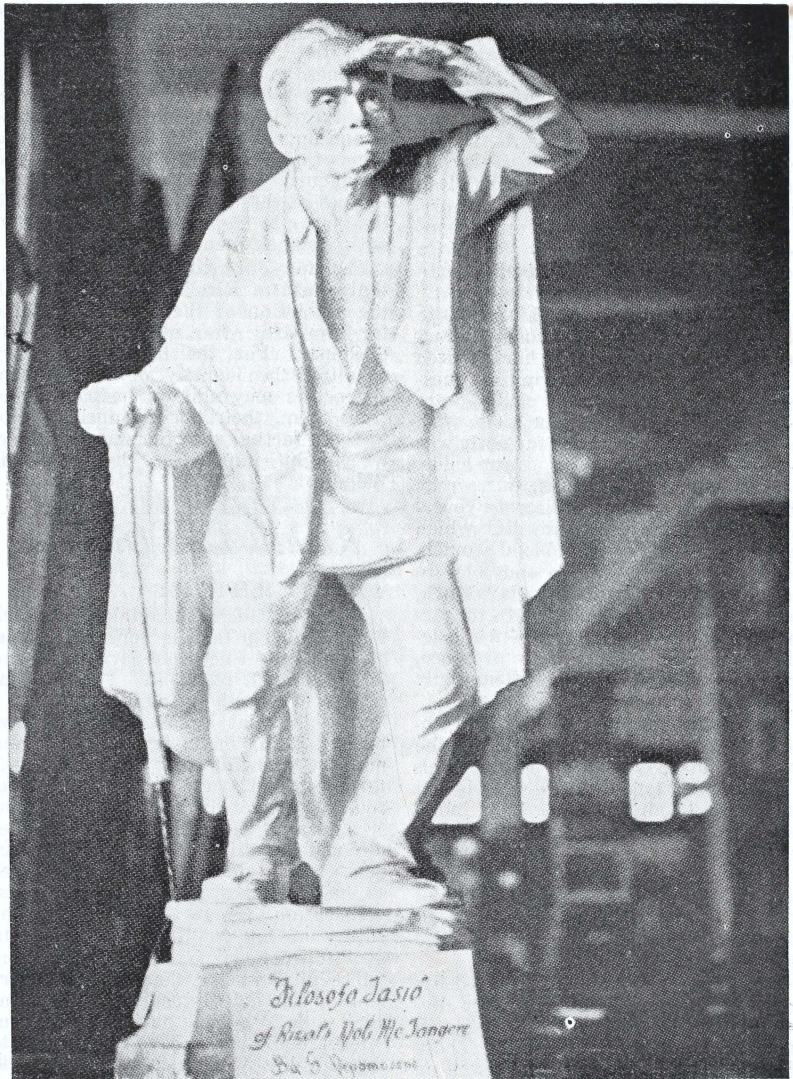
In his novels he shows this irresistible, irrepressible spirit, too. Somber as they are, they breathe an air of youthful ardor, as though the author would fain convince his readers that things, bad as they may seem, are not entirely hopeless. This certainly, paradoxical as the observation may sound, is not the wise-know-all pessimistic spirit of youth. There is a mellowness about it that seems of itself to portend tragedy. But it is a mellowness which is not accepting a grown-up understanding which at the same time challenges to action. In this optimism, this faith, this looking far into the future, Rizal transcends his younger years and becomes as old as the rocks. Only the rocks simply watch and witness in silent and passive wisdom, while Rizal watches, witnesses, acts, and urges action. The rocks wait in patient courage the turn in the lives of the men and the beasts whom they lord over. Rizal's courage is patient only within the limits wherein there is no danger of its fire dying out in its own ashes.

To such an ardent nature, the opposite sex cannot but be attractive. Rizal would be less the man for all of us that he was did he not find expression for himself in the approving glances and sweet words of fair women. There is a prudish tendency to hush this part of Rizal's life in an effort, so

the meticulous critics say, to present to his adoring people only the aspects of it worthy of emulation. Why, they say, "prostitute" his memory with details of his life which make him appear less the great and noble hero that history has succeeded in making completely of him? Why turn his people's eyes down to his feet of clay when they can look up admiringly at his noble bust of marble and feel that in worshipping him and establishing his cult, they worship too the ideals of Filipino-hood of which he is the epitome? Doubtless this secretive censorship is meant well, yet one cannot help wondering at the wisdom of such a move. Discretion carried too far can sometimes play the part of Folly and can easily assume the role of Hypocrisy. Debunking a hero is not a pretty game, specially if done for spite. But when the purpose is either to straighten out the facts revolving around him or get him close to earth and his fellowmen, thereby making emulation of him easier for the ordinary mortal, the purpose justifies the procedure.

The test of true love and of true worship is complete acquaintance and familiarity with its object. For while it is true that familiarity may breed contempt, it is equally certain that we love best what and whom we know best. Rizal we know as a patriot, a martyr, a linguist, a scientist, an artist; we know him as an ardent worker, a loving son, a deep thinker, a fearless idealist. For all these things we honor him and cherish his memory with warm gratitude. But because we are human, we would humanize him; we would want to know him not only in all his strength but in certain of his weaknesses; we would want to know these partly because we want to feel the common humanity that binds him and us together, and partly so that the admiration we bear for him could have at the same time the affectionate warmth of deep understanding.

No great man's memory has ever been desecrated by this humanizing touch. We know that Washington was



The famous character in Rizal's Noli Me Tangere lives in this remarkable statue of G. Nepomuceno — the mellow wisdom, the rebellious temper, and bitter cynicism.

never a gracious man, taciturn and self-conscious as he always was; we know that Abraham Lincoln's home life was something of a tragedy; we know that Voltaire was mean and spiteful, that Rousseau was a hypocrite, and that La Fontaine, while writing children's fables, neglected his own offspring; we know that Dante, for all his mighty anger at the lustful, was himself guilty of the sins of the flesh and that Wagner was wayward, capricious, and irresponsible. Yet none of these things could seriously count in the evaluation of the intrinsic worth of these famous men.

I have given time and attention to the analysis of Rizal's women-characters, an analysis which has invited again and again these intriguing questions: Were they real? Who were they in Rizal's life? Did he write with his heart in his pen? As far as it was possible, I have tried to draw aside, ever so gently, the curtain of secrecy which screens away in discrete reverence the chapter of Rizal's life which had to do with flesh-and-blood women, in order to give more life and color to the personages of his novels. Much, however, had to be justly left to surmises and conjectures, which while legitimate enough within their province, could naturally be biased and humanly erring.

That Rizal relished doing his women-characters is apparent in the over-subjective touch the reader feels in his delineation of them. He is not impersonal about them, nor is he indifferent to them. Always present in his description is the sense that there is a warm relationship between creator and his creatures, be these lovable and to be admired, loathsome and to be hated, or ludicrous and to be mocked at.

For as has been said, Rizal loved life intensely. And life meant every living thing, man and woman, trees and flowers, and soft, green grass. There has been many an occasion to dwell on this deep ineffable love for Nature of the youthful author of the *Noli*. And occasion, too, to show his admiration for man's strength, and woman's sweetness, as well as indignation at and reproach for the weakness of God's

creatures.

There is a shyness of approach when he deals in his novels with the more choice representatives of the fair sex indicative of a youthful worship of loveliness and feminine charm, so that the reader cannot but feel that somehow there is something deeply personal and appealing in these open declarations of admiration and affection. And indulgently he wonders who the prototypes of these girls could be that had the power to inspire the young idealist with such eloquence.

Perhaps our careful guardians of that phase of Rizal's life dealing with the attraction of the eternal feminine for him are, after all, wise, in their prudence. For the haze of mystery clouding the identity of his women-characters may add to, instead of detract from, their poetic appeal, if not to their factual significance. Mystery, we might improvise, thy name is Woman.

Rizal's Life Decision

TO THE FILIPINOS:

The step which I have taken or which I am about to take is very hazardous, no doubt, and I need not say that I have thought much about it. I know that almost everybody is against it: but I know also that almost nobody knows what is going on in my heart. I cannot live knowing that many are suffering unjust persecutions on my account; I cannot live seeing my brother, sisters, and their numerous families pursued like criminals; I prefer to face death, and I gladly give my life to free so many innocents from such unjust persecution. I know that at present, the future of my country to some extent gravitates about me; that if I die, many will exult, and that therefore many are longing for my destruction. But what shall I do? I have duties to my conscience above all, I have obligations to the families which suffer, to my old parents, whose sighs pierce to my heart; I know that I alone, even with my death, am able to make them happy, permitting them to return to their native land and to the tranquility of their

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