

A President and His Sons

By ANTONIO ZACARIAS

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President Sergio Osmeña is called The Sphinx, because of his moderateness, his quietness, his aversion to clear-cut commitments and his general unassuming attitude. Even in America, where the Coolidge type of politician is not usual, journalists have dubbed him "genial" and "smiling" but because of his natural reticence they have called him the prototype of the oriental statesman.

After more than three years of absence, during which he toiled and suffered in a foreign land, burdened by sorrow and grief at the mere thought of the atrocities and devastation wrought upon his beloved country by a ruthless invader, he has come back to his native soil laden with the tremendous responsibilities of the Presidency. His beaming smiles, his hearty handshake and his outward manifestations of joy for the liberation of his country, have not wiped out the deep wrinkles in his face nor the worried look in his eyes. Those who know him and love him can not but think that here is a man, a brave old man, over grieved and over burdened with work, facing the monumental task of guiding the destinies of a nation in the most crucial period of its history.

But it is not only Osmeña the President who bears a heavy load of worries and responsibilities. Osmeña the man, Osmeña the father, has been badly hit by the war, for in truth he can face his countrymen and tell them that he, as much as any Filipino has offered at the altars of the Fatherland his generous sacrifice of "blood, sweat and tears". Are there many Filipino parents who have lost five sons in this war? That has been exactly the contribution of Osmeña to the common cause. Is it, therefore, surprising that he looks today more gloomy and reticent and that even his famous smile carries a

tinge of melancholy?

Sergio Osmeña, by his first marriage, had several daughters and six sons. Of the latter, he has lost five. Three are dead and two are now in prison. His eldest, Nicasio, was a constant headache to his father. He still is today. An inveterate playboy and a spendthrift he threw away his inheritance in a couple of years. During the Nip occupation, he was often seen around with important Japs and he occupied the luxurious offices of the late Major Stevenot in the Long Distance Telephone Building. In 1944, he was shot in the Trocadero Night Club by somebody, presumably a guerillero. He is now languishing in Muntinlupa, accused of collaboration with the Japs. His brother, Sergio jr., a graduate of an American University, shares the same fate. During the Jap regime, he had a big "buy and sell" business in the Escolta and he is accused of selling war materials to the enemy.

Jose Osmeña, another playboy, was killed in Negros during the first months of the Jap occupation, together with a former colonel of the Philippine Constabulary. This colonel and the young Osmeña were sent by the Japs to pacify the Negros region. They were provided with an armed escort of Filipinos, but it turned out that the guards were undercover guerillas, and so one lonely night, in a secluded spot, they turned their guns on the heads of the expedi-

tion.

Teodoro and Emilio died a hero's death. Teodoro was leader of a guerrilla outfit. In an encounter with the Japs he was killed together with some of his men. Emilio, who was a doctor, belonged to the U.S. army. Sometime after the occupation of Cebu, he was caught by the Japs. He was offered release if he would sign a document pledging allegiance to the Jap regime and promising never again to take arms against Japan. He firmly refused, alleging that he was an officer of the U.S. Army and that he was honor bound to maintain his oath of loyalty. He claimed that he should be treated as a prisoner of war. He was executed.

This is the intimate, poignant, story of the President and his sons. The sheer weight of the work and the responsibilities of the Presidency is enough to break down any man, but if to this weight you add the continuous worries and the constant bleeding of a father's heart you may have a clearer picture of the man who heads the Commonwealth today.

