

- The superior character of President Osmeña has not yet been equalled by his successors in the Philippine Presidency; and it has been responsible for the rise of a united country and people.

## SERGIO OSMEÑA: RECTITUDE PERSONIFIED

Today is Don Sergio's natal day. We would do well, I am sure, to look into his luminous life as we march on toward our rightful destiny.

Don Sergio's life, both private and public, was something beyond reproach, studied with so many virtues — like simplicity, humility, greatness of heart, and mind, incorruptibility, and lifelong dedication to country and people. Self-ostentation and the flare for the dramatics, a common weakness of lesser men, were not for him.

A life so assiduously planned and lived, none may point an accusing finger at Don Sergio. He was rectitude personified, whether in private or public life. But it is as our people's benefactor, or, to put it in more precise terms, as public servant, which interests us most and which, I believe, should

be our special concern to be familiar with as we go about to celebrate his birthday anniversary today.

Of all the fine things about Don Sergio, I like to think and remember him most as the patron saint of our national unity. This was the cornerstone of his leadership and of his entire public career, whether as the nation's leader or just as "a soldier in the ranks." Like Abraham Lincoln, Don Sergio firmly believed that a house divided against itself cannot and will not stand. In his life, man's vaulting ambition was always relegated to the backseat whenever and wherever national unity was at stake.

Times there were and they came one after another when Don Sergio's devotion to our national unity was severely tested, but, to his unfading

glory, it was never found wanting.

Now forgotten or dimmed by time, Don Sergio was our first national leader following the establishment of America's regime in our country, when as Speaker of the Philippine Assembly we started our epochal experiment in self-government. Upon the success of this historic experiment depended the ultimate recognition of our fundamental right to be free and independent. It was Don Sergio who piloted us so capably in establishing our capacity for self-government.

In the first Osmeña-Quezon break up in 1922 on what proved to be an empty issue of collective leadership against unipersonal leadership; Don Sergio flatly rejected the allure of sweet revenge by declining to combine his forces with Democratas, a combination which might have enabled him to retain the national leadership or, at least, placed him on a vantage position to harass his victorious adversary "The question of leadership," Don Sergio recalled without any sign of bitterness, "soon

became at issue, and the Nacionalista party became divided into two groups — one known as Nacionalistas and the other as Colectivistas. The elections of 1923 x x x did not give a majority to either group and resulted in the increase in the number of the opposition, the Democrata party, but without giving the majority capable of organizing the Assembly. "I had to appeal to the sense of patriotism of my fellow Nacionalistas when the leader of the other group, President Quezon, started negotiations for a coalition with his old colleagues in the Nacionalista party." Considering the strength and prominence of the protagonists. Osmeña and Quezon, as well as their powerful allies, our national unity, Don Sergio's life-long obsession, would have been dealt with a severe blow if the cleavage between the two leaders had not been healed.

Again Quezon broke up with Don Sergio on the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Independence Act which Congress rejected, with Quezon leading the forces for its rejection, only to accept its repro-

duction, as was the Tydings-McDuffie Act. Rejection of the one and acceptance of the other but identical bill paved the way, of course, for the relegation of Don Sergio to the background and assured Quezon's choice as first President of the Commonwealth.

Don Sergio's final act of supreme sacrifice at the altar of national duty took place when, by Constitutional mandate, he was to take over the Presidency of the Commonwealth from President Quezon whose tenure of office had expired or was about to expire. In a truly admirable spirit of self-renunciation, the incoming President took the initiative to extend the tenure of the ailing Quezon.

"Towards the end of the war," Don Sergio recalled, "with the expiration of the term of office of President Quezon fast approaching the menace of a new cleavage between the Filipino leaders looked inevitable. But faithful to the principle of national unity which had brought me to public life in 1907 and had guided my policies and actions during all these years whether I was a

leader of the party or a soldier in the ranks, I took the initiative of presenting the case to the leaders of the United States Congress, and a true friend of the Filipino people, Senator Millard E. Tydings, came to our rescue, who, upon my petition and with his support, a joint resolution was introduced by him x x x extending, for the duration of the war, the term of office of President Quezon. Filipino unity was again preserved." And, upon approval of the resolution, Don Sergio, without losing time, addressed himself to our people declaring: "These are critical days for individuals as well as nations. Our sense of responsibility as a people and the strength of our national solidarity have once more been tested. We have again proved our unity."

He could have said with Adlai E. Stevenson: "Let there be no tears for me . . . There are things more precious than political victory. For there is radiance and glory in the darkness could we but see, and, to see, we have only to look." — *Vicente L. Pastrana, Philippine Herald.*