

## THE INDIO LEADER

In the Americas of Colombia, in North America, the leaders of the independence By: Domingo Abella now to the... the Chronicle Magazine it can be... Vol. 19, No. 9, Feb. 29, 1964... p. 7. of modest education, he... with the knife, bow and arrow," as a "American biographer of his wrote in 1901.

Again unlike his counterparts in the America who had traveled and acquired sufficient cultural background from the European centers of thought to imitate the new theories of political relationships then MAGNIFICENT eulogies on General Emilio Aguinaldo's life in our national history as a freedom fighter, recalling his intense love of country and personal sacrifices during the most heroic period of our life as a people, have been written on the occasion of his death. Indeed the beloved leader fully deserves all the accolades and honors heaped upon him not only today, not only by the past two generations which had either witnessed his power to inspire men to heroism and self-sacrifice or felt the impact of his leadership in consolidating a nation and creating a stronger patriotism than had existed before, but by generations of Filipinos to come. They will forever feel indebted to him for the dignification in the eyes of the outside world of a downstrodden Oriental race, in the field of battle. Filipinos will always remember his name with love and pride.

To what has been said of his life story there is little that I can add that has not already been said by better equipped historians. But from a different point of view I would like to bring into prominence Aguinaldo's figure side by side with those military leaders who, before him but like him, had taken up arms elsewhere for the deliverance of their peoples from colonial rule.

From George Washington, father of his Country, and Agustin Iturbide, Liberator of Mexico, in North America, to Francisco Miranda, the Precursor, Jose San Martin, Protector of Peru, and Simon Bolivar, Liberator of the South American country, all were for the King.

Liberator of Colombia, in South America, the leaders of the independence movements were not new to the arts of campaigns and battles. In fact it can be said that they were polished and professional soldiers. Not Aguinaldo. Himself a man of modest education, he "mustered an army out of men who never fought but with the knife, bow and arrow," as a "American biographer of his wrote in 1901.

Again unlike his counterparts in the America who had travelled and acquired sufficient cultural background from the European centers of thought to imbibe the new theories of political relationships then, Aguinaldo had sailed forth with nothing but faith and trust in an ideal: the independence of the Philippines.

Moreover, and this consideration needs stressing, whereas the American liberators, from Washington to Bolivar, were first and foremost of the same racial stock as the colonial rulers, Aguinaldo was an Indio, one belonging to the subjugated race. In other words, the emancipation of the American colonies from their motherlands was achieved by patriots who belonged to the transplanted element from Europe, and element as foreign to the land which they now called their Patria as the rulers against whom they struggled.

Thus it is a truism in Hispanic American history that "while the conquest of American was made by the Indios, its independence was obtained by the Spaniards." The truism cannot be applied to the Philippines. Here the historical fact is that the conquest and independence of our country were both achieved by the Indios, the latter event under the leadership of the Indio Aguinaldo.

For the same reason that the wars for independence in the Hispanic American colonies were waged by Spaniards against Spaniards the struggle has been dubbed as a civil war, not a revolution properly so called. The struggle was one between Spanish-born Spaniards and American-born Spaniards. Loyalty to the crown of Spain was not at issue. Until fortuitous events happened in the mother country, all were for the King.

The movement was simply against bad government. And when it was all over, after colonial ties had been severed the Indians, the descendants of Aztecs and Incas, the human stock rooted in the continent, the element which was there when the foreigners from Europe came into it, hardly perceived the change. As far as these were concerned, the new regime of American Spaniards was nothing but a continuation of the old rule of Spaniards from Spain.

Aguinaldo's struggle was a revolution in the sense that it sought the overthrow of one government, that by foreigners, and its replacement by another, that of the real owners of the land. In fact it has been called by a Spanish historian a "Guerra de Razas." Comparing the Philippine rebellion with that of Cuba which was also aflame during the same period, the Spanish historian said: "It cannot be denied that the revolt in the Philippines is less criminal than that of Cuba... while in the latter the rebels are Spaniards whose parents or grandparents were born in Spain to whom the bravery and sacrifices of their fatherland had given for their home a fertile and beautiful island together with all the comforts and affluence which they now enjoy, at least in the Philippine archipelago, the rebels are not Spaniards at all (no tienen nada de españoles) ... they are made up of Tagalogs or other races either indigenous or among those who successively invaded that archipelago and became owners thereof, partly or wholly, before the Spaniards arrived and established therein domination in the middle of the 16th century." Aguinaldo led that revolt of Indios against the foreign Kastila.

A last but no less significant consideration. The American freedom fighters from Washington to Bolivar, in addition to achieving the emancipation of the colonies from their European mother countries, unified and consolidated the colonists of the different political areas in the New World to the extent of imparting to them the consciousness of separate nationalists, although racially and culturally they came from the same stock. But what of the Indios? These are today as strangers to each other as they have been ever since.

## AGUINALDO'S PLACE IN HISTORY

They are still a congeries of loosely organized tribes never thinking spontaneously as belonging to each other at all, let alone as one single people even in their own eyes. It was their misfortune that a man of their own race who could have been their rallying point in a war of races never appeared on the scene at the right time.

Aguinaldo, whatever his faults was the rallying point of the Filipino indios. Kept apart from each other for centuries by geographical barriers which made intercourse difficult, by the multiplicity of languages and diversity of regional customs, and by a colonial rule that frowned upon any measure that might eventually spell their political unification, the Filipino indios had to bide their time, keep their solidarity for a common cause within their breasts, suffer the frustration of their clamor for justice through the press and propaganda, and wait for the provincial man to lead them at the right time into the field of battle. The man was Emilio Aguinaldo. In battle, he fought back mercilessly when some of his own men sold him out. The revolution that he led welded us together into a nation. In young rear-guard commander, General Gregorio del Pilar, his lieutenant today would have graced every town plaza.

- 0 -

There was something in General Aguinaldo's destiny that marked him off, first, as a young, upstart, able, patriotic, and even brilliant at times man, second, as a retired horse-gallop, dandy, and calculating. Born into a family that was not distinguished either for intellectual attainments or for economic prominence, Aguinaldo tasted a little of Spanish education, taught for a while, and then took to business as a means of fattening his family's meagre income. He was still then an ordinary young man who was only an occasional guest at the social gatherings of the elite. And then the revolution came, extended its plumes over to Cavite, where the brilliant and robust Aguinaldo is supposed to have first appeared on the eve of the revolution against Spain. But Aguinaldo, having now achieved a part of some of a newly-elected member of his town, took the first significant step in his life by enlisting as a member of the revolutionary secret society.