

MABINI THE STATESMAN: A BRIDGE  
TO HIS PEOPLE

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ON a worn-out rattan chair sits a paralytic. The late afternoon sun falls on his face, revealing an unusually high forehead, rounded cheekbones, and eyes with a distinctively plaintive expression.

His collar-button is closed. His hands do not grip the arms of his chair; they fall on his knees in repose. His shoulders- perhaps the most striking feature about him - are slightly hunched.

There is nothing dynamic about the picture. It is that of a man whose life is being wasted away. Yet long after this man is dead, historians will refer to him as one of the country's greatest statesmen. Poets will call him the Sublime Paralytic.

His name: Apolinario Mabini.

He would have been precisely 100 years old on Wednesday, July 23, 1964. Today, on the spot where once stood his wooden house roofed with palm-leaf thatch, are pillars of steel under a huge crane, to serve as the skeletons of a new bridge that would span the Pasig on Nagtahan.

Mabini was not a man of steel. Yet cripple that he was, he tried to be a bridge to his people.

Bridge to his People

It will hardly do, in telling the story of Mabini, to merely say that he was a great man. The reason is simple. Mabini's period in Philippine history produced many great men. In 1892, when Mabini began his political activities, Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere" was already being secretly distributed in Manila. His second novel, "El Filibusterismo," was ready for the printer at Ghent, Belgium.

Marclo H. del Pilar, then 42 years old, was in Madrid putting out the propaganda newspaper, La Solidaridad, which he had inherited from Lopez Jaena. Andres Bonifacio, only a year older than Mabini who was then 28, would soon become the Supremo of the Katipunan. Emilio Jacinto was barely 17 years old.

One then has no choice but to define the greatness of Mabini. For one thing, he was not what present-day psychologist would call a compulsive hero. No demon of the subconscious drove Mabini to seek fame. What he wanted was power - as a means to an end: Independence. And when he had that power, he conspired, intrigued, and plotted the course of the Revolutionary movement with such detachment from human emotions.

#### Mabini and Richelieu

Like Richelieu, he might have said: "My only enemies are the enemies of the state." And so he reaped, as Richelieu did, as many enemies as a man could. It was all a calculated affair. He knew that he was bound to be perhaps the most hated and envied man in the Philippines toward the end of the 19th century.

In 1898, paralyzed from waist down, Mabini was initiated into power. He became the adviser of General Aguinaldo who asked 12 municipalities to provide the men who would carry Mabini in a hammock to Cavite. It has been said that soon after his meeting with Aguinaldo on June 12, 1898, the General seldom rendered any decision on state matters without consulting Mabini.

There was nothing charismatic about Mabini's personality. Neither was he obsequious nor servile in his relationship with Aguinaldo. In fact, we are told that Aguinaldo, at first, was not impressed by the man. But what must have dispelled whatever doubts he had about Mabini was the fact that Mabini had a systematic plan for the Revolution.

Like Machiavelli, Mabini was both scientific and an ardent patriot. Unlike Machiavelli, however, Mabini did not fall into the error of divorcing from the study of ethics.