

MABINI: A SILHOUETTE

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When General Arthur MacArthur deemed it "absolutely essential" to deport Mabini, and Governor William Howard Taft refused to allow the patriot to return to the country without first taking the oath of allegiance, they unwittingly paid tribute to the man whom they distrusted and feared despite his physical handicap.

To the American authorities in the Philippines, Apolinario Mabini was a nemesis whose continued presence in the country constituted a great threat to the American sovereignty and to the pacification campaign.

Born on July 23, 1864, in Talaga, Tanauan, Batangas, the man whose genius guided the Philippine Revolution in 1898 spent his youth in poverty and died a poor man on May 13, 1903, shortly after his return from exile in Guam.

Mabini's plebeian origin would probably explain his suspicion of the rich and deep antagonism toward vested interests. When class conflict erupted among the Filipino leaders in 1898, he championed the cause of the greater number over the few who wanted to control the proposed national bank and the treasury of the revolutionary government.

Not only did Mabini sympathize with the downtrodden masses, but he also crystallized and articulated their political aspirations. He joined the Revolution because he felt that the majority of the people wanted to cast off the Spanish yoke. In April 1899, he requested the American authorities for a cessation of hostilities in order to consult the people about the Schurman Commission's proclamation. While in prison, Mabini refused to cooperate

with the American in the pacification campaign, fearing that the people might misconstrue such cooperation to be a betrayal of the ideals of independence. The same concern over popular opinion compelled him to take the oath of allegiance in February 1903, though he accepted American sovereignty with apprehension.

His parents were Inocencio Mabini and Dionisia Maranan. Mabini's father was an ex-cabeza de barangay. His mother possessed some sort of formal education. It was his mother, who wanted him to become a priest, that Mabini learned reading and writing.

To finish his studies, Mabini worked in various capacities as muchacho, assistant Latin teacher, copyist in the court of first instance, and assistant to the clerk of court. He finally obtained the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Professor in Latin in March 1887. The next year he began the study of law which he completed in 1894. He was admitted to the bar in 1895. Later, Mabini became a notary in the law office of his friend, Numeriano Adriano.

Mabini's initial involvement in the nationalistic movement that swept the country in the last quarter of the 19th century took place in 1892 when he joined the Liga Filipina. When Dr. Jose Rizal was exiled, the society which had become moribund as a consequence, was reorganized; Mabini became the secretary of the Supreme Council. The split within the revived Liga - between the radicals headed by Bonifacio, on one hand, and the conservative ilustrados, on the other - led to the dissolution of the society in October 1893. Later, in September 1894, the Ilustrados formed the Cuerpo de Compromisarios under the presidency of Numeriano Adriano with Mabini as secretary. However, because its efforts at securing reform through peaceful means remained fruitless, the Cuerpo disintegrated and the Philippine Revolution began.

Early in January 1896, Mabini contracted a severe fever which was followed by his paralysis. Had it not been for his ailment, Mabini might have been executed when he was arrested together with countless other Filipinos suspected of complicity in the Revolution in August 1896; instead, the authorities detained him at the San Juan de Dios Hospital until his release in June 1897, as a result of an amnesty proclamation issued by Governor Primo de Rivera.

The early months of 1889 ushered a new era in Mabini's life. He cast his lot with Revolution. He wrote monographs to justify the revolution against a rotten and tyrannical regime. Ordenanzas de la Revolucion transformed the struggle from mere uprising to revolution. Upon Aguinaldo's return to the Philippines in May 1898, Mabini became his personal advisers. That was on June 12, 1898.

Mabini drafted many decrees issued in Aguinaldo's name. Among them was the June 23rd decree establishing the Revolutionary government to replace the Dictatorial government. Mabini also had a hand in inviting the best Filipino mind to participate in laying down a strong foundation for the revolutionary government. He gave the ilustrados a prominent place in his Programa Constitucional by providing for a Senate composed of celebrities in the arts, sciences, and industries. This Senate was an advisory body assisting the President in legislative work.

It was indeed that a divisive clash occurred between Mabini and the conservative ilustrados over economic, ideological, personal, and political issues that led to the frustration of the revolution even before it could complete its course. This conflict weakened the Filipinos' united opposition against the Americans. These conservative ilustrado later vied with one another in courting American favor to protect their interests; the same being the principal reason that wrecked the ideals of the Revolution.

In January 1899, Mabini became the official Prime Minister of the Philippine Republic. He continued to serve in that capacity until May of the same year when his cabinet fell. Mabini's fall and subsequent replacement by Paterno were reportedly due to the failure of Mabini's government to secure cessation of hostilities with the Americans.

His return to politics when he was elected by the National Assembly to the post of chief justice of the Supreme Court was prevented by the opposition of Paterno who aspired to the same position.

When the framework of the Philippine society during the period, Apolinario Mabini possessed the attributes of a liberal nationalist. His belief in a democratic government rooted in popular consent is attested by his proposed constitution.

In December 1899 Mabini was captured by the Americans. His imprisonment did not mute the expression of his nationalistic convictions. He continued writing political articles which precipitated his deportation to Guam in 1901 as "inciter" and "fomenter" of insurrection. While in exile, his active mind produced what was probably his major work, La Revolucion Filipina.

Assessing Mabini in the light of history, he was at once a liberal nationalist and a revolutionary. Considering his era and setting, Mabini was first and foremost a revolutionary who wanted to effect fundamental changes that would lead to a better life.

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