

# PHILIPPINE LAW JOURNAL

---

Volume I

NOVEMBER, 1914

Number 4

---

## FELIPE AGONCILLO, President of the Philippine Bar Association

*By Quintin Paredes, Prosecuting Attorney, City of Manila.*

Here is seen Don Felipe Agoncillo, with neither the big stick nor the pipe that are his inseparable companion, but there will be found reflected on his countenance the most salient characteristics that typify the man. The correct yet simple, attire, the firm look, the expression of intelligence, the half-opened mouth and the well set teeth, all give an idea of what he is.

The subject of this sketch was born in Lipa, Batangas, where he obtained his primary school training. Like the great majority of well-to-do Filipinos, he came to Manila, where he was registered at the College of the Jesuit Fathers, then called the Ateneo Municipal de Manila. While in this institution he distinguished himself by his scholarly attainments. Having obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts with high honors, he began the study of law in the University of Santo Tomas, graduating therefrom with the degree of Licentiate in Jurisprudence at the age of twenty. After practicing a few years in the office of Sr. Godinez, of Manila, he was licensed by the *Real Audiencia* of the Philippines to practice law in the Archipelago.

He was called to the post of Register of Deeds, then was made acting *Promotor Fiscal* of the Province of Batangas, and finally, *Promotor Fiscal Auxiliar*, an appointment which, confirmed as it was by a royal order of His Majesty the King of Spain, was the first of its kind in the Philippines.

He has always shown himself to be a lover of justice, and demonstrated this firmness of character and his self-denial for the cause of the fatherland.

The story is told of him that, when a nine years old student of the secondary grades, he was looking out of his study window, and caught sight of a group of *carabineros* passing in front of the house, escorting an uncle-in-law of his, whose hands were manacled. Child as he was, without a moment's hesitation, he went running down the stairway, and, boldly

facing the group of *carabineros*, asked them why his uncle's hands were not left loose. When the guards laughingly answered that his uncle had been suspected of smuggling cigars, the little boy poured forth a series of philippics, and told them that his uncle was not a thief and should not be treated in that manner. The *carabineros*, either ashamed of what they had done, or falling in with the views of the little boy, removed the cord, and took the man to the police department's office, where he was at once set at liberty.

This incident wrought such a profound impression on the mind of the young lad, and produced such indignation in his heart, that there was at once awakened in him that spirit of justice which, strengthened by the events that culminated in the revolution of 1872, urged him on to a determination to stamp out abuses. It fanned the flame of patriotism into those outbursts of passion that were later to distinguish him from the rest of his countrymen.

A few years afterward, when as a member of the bar he could already argue cases before the courts, he devoted his time exclusively to defending the cases of the indigent, and announced himself as the lawyer of the poor of the neighboring towns of Batangas, for whom he worked hard to free them from their dependence on the parish priests.

When the municipal reforms of Minister Maura announced the subdivision of the Philippines into districts for the sending of delegates to the Council of Administration, believing that as a member of that consultative body he could better and more effectively urge the reforms which he had long been advocating for his province, Don Felipe resigned his position as *Auxiliary Fiscal* of Batangas—a most lucrative post, indeed—and announced himself as candidate for the new position of delegate to the Council. This was a mere honorary situation, and his province, in recognition of his altruistic work, elected him on a unanimous ballot to the position, to represent the provinces of Batangas, Cagayan, Mindoro, and Camarines.

Don Felipe, however, was not destined then to promote the progress of the provinces which he represented. His campaigns for reform had already made his name famous, and his popularity grew, and, instead of confirming his election, the Government turned him over to an administrative tribunal for trial as a *filibustero*, which resulted in the promulgation of a decree ordering his deportation to Siasi.

This sudden turn of fortune's wheel did not agree with Don Felipe, and, filled with eager desire to be of service to that country from which he had been banished, he fled to Japan, and the revolution of '96 commencing in the Philippines a few months later, he went to Hongkong, organizing

at that place, along with other Filipinos, what is known as the *Junta Revolucionaria Filipina*.

The government of Aguinaldo and of Bonifacio, realized the exceptional brilliancy of Agoncillo, and he was made foreign agent of the Filipino government, in which capacity he stayed in Europe organizing Filipino revolutionary committees and urging that all the chancelleries of the Old World recognize the independence of the Filipino people.

Previous to the signing of the Treaty of Paris, he struggled hard to prevent the cession of the Islands to the United States, but he held no seat at that convention, and once again his hopes disappeared before him like a dream. It was on that occasion that Mr. Wildeman, the American consul at Hongkong, spoke of him as one who would honor any nation as secretary of any of its high departments.

Continuously devoted to his sole ideal, the independence of the Philippines, he went to the United States, and there, with the cooperation of a small number of Filipinos, began influencing American opinion in favor of the Philippines. The long-looked-for day seemed to have come when Senator Hoar presented a resolution before the Senate of the United States for the recognition of Filipino independence, but for the third time fortune put his bulldog tenacity to a test; when he felt most sanguine as to the success of that resolution, there came news of the outbreak of hostilities between the troops of Aguinaldo and General Otis, and this contributed to the defeat of the Hoar resolution.

Agoncillo aided the cause of his countrymen by sending munitions of war from abroad, many times paying for them with his own money.

The hostilities having ended and Agoncillo having been convinced that the independence of the Islands could be obtained only through a peaceful demonstration of native capacity, he was not willing to disregard his duty in the work of proving Filipino capabilities. He announced his candidacy for Assemblyman at the initial session of the Philippine Assembly, and was elected Assemblyman from the first district of Batangas province. In the Assembly he occupied the post of Chairman of the Committee on Metropolitan Relations, which position he was most qualified for by reason of his previous experience.

Now he is rather retired from political life. He is devoting his time to building up again the resources which have been exhausted by reason of the expenses he has incurred in his campaigns for the good of the fatherland.

In the practice of his profession Don Felipe has won laurels. In the Philippine bar he is held in high esteem and regard, as is testified to by his election to the presidency of the Philippine Bar Association.

He enjoys the reputation of devoting all his efforts and even sacrificing his personal interests for the cases which he has handled.

He acted as counsel for the defendants in the criminal actions against El Renacimiento and against Noriel, and, although he had the misfortune to lose both cases, it is none the less true that they showed his ability and skill as an attorney, for he used all the legal resources at his command to secure the acquittal of his clients. During his arguments he is polished and courteous in his treatment of the opposing side, without losing whatever the strength of his attacks.

Here is a man who does not stand still when he sees anything wrong. From the day of his election to the presidency of the Bar Association, he began with the aim in view of fostering the spirit of union among the members of the Philippine legal fraternity. He has done that which no other man has yet succeeded in doing in the history of that Association: he has made the Chief Executive listen to and consider the recommendations of the Association for posts in the judiciary.

His law office enjoys the distinction of being a place of retreat for new lawyers, eager to obtain experience and training. He has never been known to refuse them, but when he sees that they have acquired sufficient skill to enable them to practice alone, he urges them to do so, and does everything to make them break the bonds of dependence; for he firmly believes that no man can be any body who is under perpetual guardianship.

This sketch would be incomplete if we failed to mention the humanitarian instincts of Mr. Agoncillo.

Annoyed as he had been by the government of Spain, it is most natural to presume that he should harbor hatred against all those who belonged to that government. That was not the case, however, for when the government of Aguinaldo held a number of Spaniards as prisoners of war, he used all his influence to persuade the Revolutionary government to set them at liberty, and in this he was successful. For his work Don Felipe was made Knight of the Spanish Red Cross.

Such is the meager data that we have gathered on the life of the President of the Philippine Bar Association. His accomplishments speak for themselves. The respect and love which his colleagues have for him are indeed most highly merited.