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GREGORIO ARANETA

Former Attorney-General and Secretary of Finance and Justice

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The management of this Journal has seen fit to entrust me with the writing of the life-sketch of Hon. Gregorio Araneta.

I have not hesitated in accepting the charge, well knowing that the studious youth, especially those who are devoted to the study of Law, have much to learn and to emulate from this eminent Filipino. While still in the prime of life, having been born April 19, 1869, he already has, by his own merits, climbed up to the highest positions in the Government of these Islands.

He was born in Molo, province of Iloilo, the town which has given the country the greatest number of lawyers and jurists. At the age of ten, he moved to Manila and there finished the whole course of secondary instruction, with excellent record, occupying first place in strenuous competition with men who are now the pride and glory of the Philippines, in the *Ateneo de Manila*, which is, we might say, the Oxford or Harvard of these Islands, just as the *Colegio de Letrán* might be styled the Cambridge or Yale of this country. In 1884, he graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and, without losing time, he matriculated in the Faculty of Law, University of Santo Tomás, which is the profession generally embraced by the most notable men of any country on earth.

His course in Santo Tomás University was marked by a series of academic triumphs, for he not only obtained the best grades, but he also won prizes in competitions and literary contests. In 1891 he graduated as *Licenciate in Law*, together with such men as Simplicio del Rosario and Mariano Cui, both of whom now occupy an eminent place in the judiciary of these Islands.

At the time he finished the law course, there were in Manila two famous lawyers who divided between themselves the honors of the profession. Their offices were the most crowded with cases and clients. Young men newly

graduated from the University went thither to prepare themselves, under the guidance of such learned masters, for the active practice of the legal profession. These illustrious men, whose names should be preserved with undying glory and prestige in the juridical annals of these Islands, were in life José Juan de Icaza and José Moreno Lacalle.

Mr. Araneta practised in the office of the former and there tempered his arms for future forensic battles which he was to wage in company with Del Pan and Ortigas, now distinguished members of the Code Committee of these Islands. From that time on, Mr. Araneta made himself known as a studious, energetic and shrewd lawyer, and it was not long before his merits exacted recognition from the Spanish authorities, who did him honor by appointing him acting Assistant Attorney General of the *Audiencia* of these Islands, an office which, in those days, was held only by men whose heads had grown gray on the bench. At that day Filipinos who were not registered in the official roster, were permitted to hold provisional offices only. Under that administration, even D. Cayetano Arellano himself, our most glorious legal light, was but a mere *Magistrado suplente* of the *Audiencia*. But American sovereignty came, and it was formally promised that, under it, the Filipinos would have better opportunities to show their capacity for self-government. The American government, from the first days of its regime in these Islands, had intended to give to the natives greater participation in the management of public affairs.

On the spur of these new tendencies, Filipinos of worth soon made themselves known. If Arellano attracted the admiration of both natives and foreigners with his talent and juridical learning from his seat as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and if Osmeña earned the fame of being the most sagacious politician among the Filipinos, Araneta, in his turn, showed himself the ablest executive officer among our countrymen.

When General Otis, after a deliberate study of the matter, organized the Judiciary of these Islands, giving seats to the natives of the country and calling to its presidency the illustrious Cayetano Arellano, Mr. Araneta, though still of young age, already had a place in the *Audiencia*, which was then created, as judge of the Civil Sala, occupying a seat beside the veteran judge, D. Manuel Araullo, and him who is now Judge-Advocate-General of the United States Army—General Crowder. Upon the advent of the Civil Government, the *Audiencia* created under the Military Government ceased to exist, to become what is now the Supreme Court of the Philippine Islands. As it was thought proper that there should be a due proportion of Americans and Filipinos in the new Tribunal, Mr. Araneta could not become a member of the same; but hardly a few months had elapsed when the Government called him to the office of Solicitor General of the Islands.

It was not in the mind of the Commission to create this office, and it may be said that it was created for Mr. Araneta. The members of the Commission took immediate notice of the subject of our biography when, during its public sessions, he intervened in the discussion of the bill providing for a Code of Civil Procedure. The most luminous opinions of that epoch especially those which have to do with grave and intricate problems, emanated from the talent and pen of Mr. Araneta. While he filled the position of Solicitor-General, his weight and impress on the Bureau of Justice were as great as those of the Attorney-General himself. It was undoubtedly on this account that Mr. Taft, in a letter to a friend of his, said that Mr. Araneta was, in his opinion, without the exception of any American or Filipino, the best lawyer in the Philippines, and for that reason he was deeply interested in his promotion to a post of greater importance and prestige. And he really carried out this intention.

When Mr. Willey left the post of Attorney-General, Mr. Araneta filled the vacancy both by his own right and by succession. During his incumbency in this office, he continued to demonstrate that he possessed the gifts of an able administrator and an efficient executive official. Endowed with an untiring activity and with a fervent zeal for work, he succeeded in stamping his individuality on the office of Attorney-General, thus making it possible for his successors to find an easy-working mechanism in the Bureau of Justice.

Mr. Taft realized that even the post of Attorney-General was too small for Mr. Araneta and he worked for the latter's appointment as justice of the Supreme Court, even at the risk of impairing the proportion of Americans and Filipinos; and as this could not be, due to the unexpected refusal of Justice Tracey to accept the position of Secretary of Finance and Justice, which was offered to him, Mr. Taft, who was then Secretary of War, continued to keep an eye on Araneta, and thought of him in connection with the post declined by Justice Tracey. And, as a matter of fact, the promotion of Mr. Araneta to the position of Secretary of Finance and Justice was announced in a few months, this being the first time a commissionership with portfolio was conceded to a native-born citizen of these Islands.

Araneta did not, in this new office, disappoint the hopes that Taft and the Government at Washington had reposed in him. The experience that he acquired in his previous posts, facilitated his work in the Department of Finance and Justice. It almost passed for a saying that no Filipino was able to understand and resolve difficult problems in Finance; but Araneta belied this dictum. It never occurred to those who were responsible for the above saying that no barriers existed to the gifted talent of this man.

It is said of him that as a member of the Commission his words were always listened to with rapt interest and almost had the weight of advice in the deliberations of the upper legislative body. Whenever there was a complex question to solve, the matter was referred to Araneta. The walls of the Ayuntamiento are still pregnant with the reminiscences of the constructive and solid work accomplished by Araneta as Secretary of Finance and Justice: for this reason it was necessary to look for a man of the type of Mapa to relieve him in that office.

And it is now when he is again a mere private citizen, divested of every official title, that the salient qualities of this man rise to view. He has resumed the practise of his calling with the same zeal of other days and with a high sense of simplicity and true democratic spirit. The traditions of a glorious past do not bar his appearance before the courts of justice, there to contend with his brethren of the profession.

Araneta never has been popular, in the sense that he knew how to draw, by his mere presence, the applause of the masses. Never did he want to court the favor of public opinion. He has always believed that his mission was to teach and direct, rather than to please and attract. If we were to look for a parallel to his character, we could find it more easily in a Hamilton or a Root.

Whatever destiny Providence may vouchsafe to these Islands, the name of Araneta will go down to posterity as that of a patriot who has splendidly demonstrated the fitness of the Filipinos to fill the most exacting offices in the government of the state.

A public man can lay no claim to the admiration of his fellow-citizens unless he is adorned with private virtues, and it is precisely in his family life that people must look for an example worthy of imitation. Providence has gifted him with a good wife and companion. There are a round dozen of their children. Surrounded by them, the subject of our sketch lives a happy life in the beautiful mansion which has been constructed not for his own gratification, but for the well-being and comfort of his family. His house is a real palace, not only on account of its magnificent dimensions, but also because of the style and art with which it is ornamented. His office and library is a true place of retreat; it wears a noble aspect; the books standing on the shelves and heaped upon his desk proclaim a man of learning. But it is not all sobriety that we find in the character of this man; he has a profound love for art and especially for music. In order to satisfy his philharmonic propensities, he has made perhaps the most complete collection of phonograph records in this city; he enjoys listening through the phonograph to the best musicians and artists, from Caruso down to Ritta Rufo, from Verdi to Wagner.

The writer of these lines said to him one day: "My friend, what is the key to the success which you have attained in life?"

He promptly replied: "My rule of conduct has been never to get disappointed or downhearted, even in the face of the greatest difficulties."

With this motto, it is not surprising that he should, in less than a decade, have scaled the heights of power and should have descended from them without having been overpowered by the feeling of giddiness which they usually engender.