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## RAMON AVANCEÑA, Attorney-General

*By Hon. Fernando Salas, Judge of First Instance.*

Honorable Ramón Avanceña, present Attorney-General of the Philippine Islands, saw the light of day for the first time on April 13th, 1872, in the town of Molo, province of Iloilo, of these Islands. He studied his first letters in the town of his birth and pursued the advanced secondary courses in the Seminary of Jaro of the same province, where he finished two courses in Dogmatic Theology.

Not feeling any vocation for the ecclesiastical career, in spite of the wishes of his family, he transferred to Manila in order to finish the subjects which he lacked in the secondary course, until he graduated as Bachelor of Arts from the University of Santo Tomas.

After having obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts, about the year 1891, he began the study of law, which he finished in March, 1898.

In the school life of the subject of this sketch, two noteworthy things irresistibly attract our attention: the gifted mind which he revealed from the time he began the study of Mathematics, and the fact that in spite of his having passed from that time on as a great intellectual celebrity prior to his obtaining the bachelor's degree and that of licentiate in law, he did not obtain any grade higher than that of "aprobado" (passing).

We said that the intellect of our subject began to reveal itself when he studied Mathematics, that is, in the second year in Philosophy, according to the old plan of the seminaries in the Philippines; because until the study of Logic or first year in Philosophy, the old method of his professors, which up to that time consisted in requiring the lessons to be memorized, kept his genius in a latent condition; in those days the zeal of the professors, Spaniards as well as Filipinos, was directed towards making the pupils memorize the lessons that they assigned, although of course there existed meritorious exceptions to this general system.

This is how, when he took up the study of Mathematics in the said second year in Philosophy, a professor whose memory has been revered by all who have been seminarists at that time, learned to arouse by an inductive and analytic method the dormant powers of Mr. Avanceña's intellect which until then his former professors had failed to stimulate. Under the direction of said professor, Father Francisco Viera by name, our subject revealed an analytic intellect and a dialectic talent which were subjugating by reason of the clearness of their deductions and the force of their logic; he also showed himself as great a philosopher as a mathematician, for all the mediocrity which was apparent in him until he took up the study of logic was fast disappearing in the eyes of his professors, classmates and fellow students, before the rising figure of the investigator or intellectual observer and that of the talented scholar who shone with his arguments and mathematico-philosophic disquisitions.

From this epoch dates the real intellectual history of our subject, it being also the time when he did not know of any grades but those of excellent, until he continued his secondary studies in Manila and began the study of law and graduated as a lawyer.

It is thus provoking, that in spite of his having always been passed as one talented in his classes (in the secondary and law studies), when he obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts and Licenciado in Law, he did not receive a higher grade than that of "aprobado" (passing). This was because from this time on, our subject began to show a characteristic which has had and will always have a great influence in the success which he has up to the present attained, and which, we do not doubt, he will continue attaining for the rest of his life.

Mr. Avanceña, as a talent, without being obstinate or stubborn, as is commonly said, has the firmness of his own convictions; when by force of his intellect, he has reached some conclusion, while his opponent has not destroyed the foundations upon which this is based, it cannot be expected of him to change his attitude or to draw back from his convictions; without being arrogant, but on the contrary, considerate and tolerant towards those with whom he argues, he sustains his theories and doctrines or conclusions until his opponent shall have refuted his reasons, destroying them in their foundations.

At that time when the professors, imbued with the theory of the intellectual inferiority of the Filipino race, instead of refuting the arguments propounded to them by some one, considered it disrespectful obstinacy, if not sheer petulance, for one to sustain his opinions, it was but natural that at least two members of the examining board before whom our subject took the examinations, and to whom he was not known, should take him

as such, and for this reason by a majority of votes in the said examinations Mr. Avanceña was not given grades higher than that of "aprobado" (passing)

And the practical result of these not very encouraging occurrences was that while academically speaking Mr. Avanceña could not claim the honor of having obtained a brilliant success in his studies (nor could he perhaps think so, because of his modesty), yet his real merits were not thus belittled in the consideration of his classmates, nor in the eyes of his fellow students and friends who knew and were well acquainted with him.

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We are now entering upon what we may call the second epoch in the life of our subject. Retired to his native town as a lawyer, after a few months' stay he was honored with an appointment as Auxilliary Justice of the Peace of the same town, a position which he held without any particular events worthy of mention until he was obliged to abandon his town on account of his sacred duties as a patriot, as we shall later see in the course of this narrative.

A few months after his return to Molo, which was about the end of March, 1898, the opening of hostilities between the Americans and the Spaniards took place. The blockade of Manila having been declared, Mr. Avanceña immediately sought and thereafter kept in contact with the leaders of the province, and being acquainted with his merits, they at once elected him member of the Revolutionary Conspiracy Committee with other young men who were the most conspicuous in the province for their determination and audacity. In the midst of this Committee he so demonstrated himself as a thinker and as a prudent and sagacious man, that when the Revolution triumphed with the evacuation and surrender of Iloilo by the Spaniards to the Revolutionary Government, and when the Conspiracy Committee was turned into a Revolutionary Provisional Government awaiting orders from the Central Government of Manila presided over by General Aguinaldo, our subject was intrusted with the Secretaryship of State by the provisional president, Roque Lopez, and later confirmed in this office by the permanent president elect, Raymundo Meliza.

When the emisaries of the Central Government of Luzon together with the expedition under the command of General Pablo Araneta arrived in Iloilo, and the Government of the Federal State was definitely established, our subject was again confirmed in his office of Secretary by the representative element of the people and of the army, a position which he filled in both instances with brilliant success and to the complete satisfaction of his constituents.

Before proceeding to relate the most salient facts in the life of our subject, let us take notice of an important incident which shows not only the determined character of Mr. Avanceña, but also that when he is bent on some errand he cannot be set back by any consequences which may trample him down.

When the Revolutionary Government under which Mr. Avanceña was holding the office already indicated, was provisionally established in the town of Jaro, and while the Spaniards were yet in possession of Iloilo, Molo and La Paz, three adjoining towns which formed the last stand of Spanish domination, it became necessary for the provisional government to get into communication with the Central Government of Luzon, which was then located at Malolos. It was therefore discussed whether it would not be advisable to send a member of the provisional government with a member of the army, to take the first boat to leave Iloilo, and then proceed to Malolos, the temporary capital of the Central Government. After the deliberations, the Revolutionary Government decided in the affirmative and our subject was designated to carry out this commission, and together with one of the generals of the Army, Mr. Adriano Hernandez, he went *incognito* through Iloilo, and immediately took one of the boats bound for Manila in order to reach the place of his destination.

Long before reaching Manila, the boat on which Mr. Avanceña and his companion were, was detained by a cruiser of the American squadron, which after the occupation of Manila was patrolling the Philippine waters. While the boat was being searched, Mr. Avanceña and his companion, believing in the good relations existing between the rebels and the American Army and believing also that the purpose which brought them to Malolos could not be misinterpreted by the Americans, explained frankly who they were and what their mission was in going to Manila on the way to Malolos. The commander of the ship, after these manifestations, immediately detained them, while a consultation was had with the Commander-in-Chief of the American Army at Manila, as to what was to be done with them; and so they were taken from the boat and placed on board the American cruiser.

Time passed on in this way, our subject and his companion not knowing what to do, and being unable to ascertain how long they were to remain in their uncertain condition, until the cruiser took the direction of the port of Iloilo. They continued in this same situation of uncertainty, when hostilities broke out in February 8, 1898, and the Americans bombarded Iloilo. In the confusion which ensued on board the cruiser, our subject and his companion happened to meet an Englishman called Mr. Chiene, the last American consul at Iloilo in the waning days of the Spanish

government. Mr. Chiene who was highly esteemed in Iloilo for his fine qualities, and who knew Mr. Avanceña by name and his companion personally, took advantage of the confusion and inadvertently placed them, on board the lorchá on which he came and which lay by the boat where our subject and his companion were detained. They were then carried to the coast of the Island of Panay whence after gaining their liberty they proceeded to resume their respective positions, giving account of how their trip to Manila had been frustrated.

Peace was now partially restored in Iloilo, the constituted Revolutionary Government having failed and the advances of the Revolutionary Army having been frustrated, and Mr. Avanceña was obliged to return to his native town and resume his peaceful life, without devoting himself to any particular work, for the conditions were such as not to allow anybody to follow any kind of profession. While in the town he was suspected by the Americans of being connected with the rebels, and was one day detained by a squad of soldiers and administered the "water-cure," a punishment much used at that time by the chiefs of the American garrison at Iloilo. Soon, however, he recovered his liberty, there being no satisfactory proofs to sustain the charges imputed to him.

Peace having been restored in Iloilo and in almost every part of the archipelago, on the occasion of the establishment of the Supreme Court of the Philippines in Iloilo, Gregorio Araneta, former Secretary of Finance and Justice, who was a member of the committee, saw and appreciated the many good qualities of our subject during his short stay in Molo, his native town also. On his return to Manila, when he assumed the office of Solicitor General, and on the organization of the office of the Attorney General, of which he was second in rank, Mr. Araneta offered our subject a position as one of the assistants in said office during the last months of the year 1902.

In this position, which was the first one Mr. Avanceña held under the American regime, he soon demonstrated his real worth, which it is not necessary for us to repeat here having already dwelt on his merits in the previous paragraphs. For this reason, he was offered the post of Judge of First Instance at large during the first months of the year 1905, on the recommendation of the same Mr. Araneta. In less than six months, he was appointed Judge of the 13th District, where he remained until 1910 when he was transferred to the 12th District. This last position he held up to the time of his appointment to his present post of Attorney-General of the Philippine Islands on December 16, 1913.

The appointment to and acceptance by our subject of the position which he actually holds, requires our special attention, being the last link

of this chain of biographical data. When by the rise to power of the Democrats in the American Government, occurred the advent of what is called the New Era; in the avalanche of appointments for the high positions in the Government, on account of the change of personnel in the Philippine Commission which affected essentially the office of the Attorney General, in the sense that the Attorney-General was raised to the Executive Secretary's chair, the Nacionalista party had to look with caution for a person who could properly exercise the office left vacant by the present most worthy Executive Secretary of the Government. Names were shuffled, many aspired to the office, but in the necessity of finding a person who had, besides exceptional and high intellectual attainments, a character noted for integrity, and an incorruptible conscience, and to a certain extent, the qualities of a consummate diplomat, qualities which are required by the most responsible post of Attorney-General, the Nacionalistas, rightly and without any other guide but the brilliant record of an intelligent and upright judge, and a chief liked by all his subordinates, directed their attention to our subject, and the consideration of his brilliant record as a judge and a most competent employee, culminated in his appointment as Attorney-General, a post which he still holds.

The exercise of the office of Attorney General by the subject of our sketch may be said to be the third epoch of his life, and we leave it to another pen and another opportunity to write its history.

However, as a fitting conclusion, we will close this biography briefly indicating that such is the ability Mr. Avanceña has always displayed in the exercise of the different offices he has held up to the present that he is today the object of appreciation and praise by the Filipino people, by the Government which has appointed him and even by the subordinate personnel who co-operate with him, working under his guidance as Attorney General.

We will conclude by saying that if another favorable change takes place in these Islands, we firmly trust that the subject of our sketch will be raised to a post of much greater significance and responsibility. Of this we are most certain.