

## HONESTY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT \*

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I have come and make my appearance in obedience to your summons, for an invitation, coming as it does from a respectable and powerful organization like the WILOCI, is a summons. An association made up of lawyers is respectable and if the members of the guild are ladies it cannot but be powerful. The future destiny and fate of the world lie in the hands of women. Queen Elizabeth, Queen Victoria and Czarina Catherine the Great—to mention a few—played an important role in the shaping of the lives and fortunes of their respective nations and peoples.

I have come with no preconceived and definite idea of what to say. After declining the invitation because I really did not know what part I would and could play in this affair, I was finally prevailed upon to accept it. By the way, that is a proof of the women's power and influence. I was made to understand that I would make and have an informal talk—a sort of conversation—with you on topics that might be brought up. So, don't expect me to deliver a speech or an address or what sometimes is modestly called a few remarks, in the politician's manner or in the academician's fashion, because I am neither the former nor the latter. In my own way, I will leave out the usual protestation of modesty and unworthiness, of unskillfulness in the expression in literary form of thoughts and ideas and of lack of preparation—the speaker usually insinuating extemporaneous delivery, when in truth and in fact he has exhausted all his mental energies and exerted all his efforts to compose and produce a literary and classic piece. I will impart to you in a conversational way my observations.

What has taken place in our country and in other countries I had been to, has led me to drift toward misanthropy. Scandals, graft, corruption and dishonesty galore have influenced my attitude toward my fellowmen.

I came to learn a lot of things in my different assignments, some of which I accepted reluctantly but which turned out to be blessings in disguise because they afforded me the opportunity to know what I would not have learned had I confined myself to the city where I

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was born. After nearly ten years of apprenticeship in the Bureau of Justice, in the course of which I was directed to conduct several investigations and had to travel to distant parts of the country, I was promoted to the bench. This new assignment gave me further opportunity to learn many things that I did not know.

My first assignment as judge was to Sulu. I would not say that the people in Sulu were primitive but certainly they were backward as compared to the people of other sections of our country. The court calendar in Sulu opened with several cases of multiple murder and robbery with homicide. There, cattle rustling and theft were misdemeanors only. There, when an individual committed a crime such as robbery or abduction, the malefactor did or committed it by exposing himself to be hurt or killed, for he openly defied and challenged the owner of the property to be taken by force or the husband or the father of the wife or daughter to be abducted to fight it out. So, in spite of the perversity on the part of the transgressor of the law, which of course should never be condoned, he at least showed courage, boldness and daring.

Then I was assigned to preside over other courts where the prevalent crimes were stealing or theft. The transgressor of the law did not expose himself to any risk or ran no risk at all, except when he was caught *in flagrante*, and stole or appropriated to himself with intent of profit money, merchandise or goods belonging to another. But the malefactor did not want to be known as the one who stole the chattel of another for he was ashamed. He did not completely lose his feeling and sense of decency.

Then came the assignments to the cities or crowded towns, capitals of provinces, where the prevalent crimes were quite different from the two previous ones. The people brought to court in these cities or crowded towns were generally charged with misappropriating money or goods entrusted to them by the owners to the latter's damage and prejudice. Here we had defendants who had obtained possession of the money or goods belonging to another with his consent because of artful deceit, craft or skillful representations of large profits to be derived from a business venture that prompted the owner to part with his money or goods which he found out to his dismay to be uncollectible or unrecoverable because the person of glib and flippant tongue had disposed of them for his personal advantage and benefit.

After passing through the three stages which led me to conclude that the best index of the condition of the people in different sections of the country is the calendar of the court in those sections, I thought I had been through all the stages, but I was surprised to find out that

the third stage was not the last. There was another kind of law transgressor, especially in large cities like Manila, Cebu and Iloilo, who differed from the law transgressor but courageous individual of the backward people of Sulu, from the law transgressor among simple townfolk of the average municipalities of the country, from the law transgressor and deceitful "gentleman" of the city who made another—perhaps a friend or relative—part with his money or goods and disposed of them for his benefit and advantage. I found, to my surprise, another kind of law transgressor, still more subtle than the person with the glib and flippant tongue who secured money, goods or merchandise belonging to another with the latter's consent and disposed of them for his advantage and benefit, a highly cultured individual who, taking advantage of his knowledge of the law, or with the help of a lawyer, and perhaps with the aid of certain agencies of the Government, organized corporations, sold stock which turned out to be worthless. The Blue Sky Law is on the statute book to prevent such refined and cultured financial "wizards" from fleecing the people of their money by deceitful schemes.

My amazement though did not end in the fourth stage. I thought it was the last scheme that human mind and ingenuity had been able to conceive and design for fleecing his fellowmen. I found, to my greatest astonishment and deepest disappointment, I was wrong. There is a fifth stage in the matter of law transgression. The principal role in this fifth stage in law transgression is played by highly intellectual, refined and polished individuals and financial "wizards" of the fourth stage who, taking advantage of the political power, position and influence acquired and enjoyed by them through appointment or election to a public office, get and secure huge sums of money in the form of loans from the Government institutions of credit to further increase their influence and power in the Government, perhaps with no intention of paying them back. To carry out the intent and to bring about the desired result they would resort to shrewd, astute and smart manipulation, such as inflation or increase in the circulation of paper money without sufficient and proper backing, or devaluation of the currency, so that if, by the decree of the people, they should find themselves dispossessed of their power and influence and compelled to pay back what they owe the Government credit institutions they would only pay perhaps one-half or less than one-half in value of what they had taken from such Government institutions. And if by good luck they continue to enjoy the influence and power, the payment of such huge debts to the Government credit institutions will have to wait indefinitely—*ad infinitum*—until God in His infinite wisdom takes them away from this world for the good of the country. The illicit, immoral and unlawful opulence and

affluence which these politico-financial "wizards" enjoy and display in their daily and social life would make Croesus, the fabulously wealthy King of Lydia who lived in the 6th century B.C., appear a pigmy or dwarf.

Living and laboring under those impressions and knowing what has been going on in our country, would you blame me for feeling disappointed, a man drifting, as I said, toward misanthropy?

But in the midst of catastrophic conditions prevailing in the world today, we are witnessing a movement that may be likened to that of the Reformation and which makes me turn my back on misanthropy and return to the feeling that I used to have—that of optimism.

"Many of the reputations we most admire are made up of myths, many of the wealth we most envy have been amassed by deceit, many of the public figures we most worship have feet of clay," says a prominent politician. Leaders of both political parties in our country are set on combing the Government to weed out the grafter, the bribe-taker and the inefficient. In the United States we have learned of a movement undertaken by the Republican Party called "Crusade Against Graft and Corruption." The presidential candidate of the Democrats made reference to a "mess" in Washington, D.C. A contribution of a little over \$18,000 given to Vice-Presidential candidate of the Republicans, Senator Nixon of California, has threatened the unity of the party and the Senator who had received it had to make a long explanation—from whom it came and for what it was spent. The democratic presidential candidate published his income tax. All these events or happenings show or indicate the present temper of the people not to condone or tolerate graft. They are alert and keen to detect not only graft but also an impropriety.

We have not reached that stage in our country—that ethical sense and feeling that the Americans possess not only in condemning graft and corruption but also in frowning upon anything improper. And I say that we have not reached that stage, because if you compare contributions coming from private parties totalling a little over \$18,000, which already shocked American public opinion, to contributions in our country made to candidates for public office by political financial "wizards" which have not been condemned or criticized, perhaps because they are not yet known—money which is not theirs but have come from institutions of credit of the Government, \$18,000 dwindle into insignificance. Nevertheless, our leaders in the two rival or contending political parties are pounding on the thought of freeing our Government from graft, corruption, dishonesty and inefficiency. That is a good sign which men drifting toward misanthropy

cannot but take notice of and perhaps make them turn about and return to optimism. As I said I am one of them.

Because of your special and unique position in our families, the cells that compose the nation, you can exert a great deal of influence to realize and achieve the goal we are all trying to reach—a Government that interferes and rules less and steps in only to adjust differences that cannot be settled between the contending parties; a Government that makes an equal distribution among the people of benefits derived from the common contribution of its citizenry; a Government that tries incessantly and without vacillation to ameliorate the condition of the less fortunate citizens; a Government that is run thriftily and not extravagantly; a Government that redresses grievances, compromises neither with crime nor wrong, punishes crimes and rights wrongs; a Government that dispenses justice equally to all; a Government, in fine, that functions and is run for the good of all the people and not for the advantage and benefit of a favored few. Let us hope that the movement I just mentioned which already has started would acquire such a momentum that no amount of maneuvering and manipulating on the part of those who would profit by graft, corruption and dishonesty could stop it until the goal is attained and realized.

Before closing allow me to speak of another topic which may be unrelated to what I have been talking about. All our anxieties, all our longings, all our expectations and hopes for better things in life, for a better Government, will not be achieved without the aid of God. In all our efforts toward the realization of that goal—a Government that will insure the contentment, happiness and well-being of the people or at least of the greatest number—let us always invoke the help of Divine Providence, imploring His mercy, blessings, protection and guidance. Let us fear Him for without that fear we will be lost in a bedlam of confusion, passion, cupidity, rapacity, lust, greed and avarice. Let us fear Him because after all no one can and will escape from the responsibility and duty of rendering an accounting to Him of what he has done in the brief sojourn in this world. Thank you.