

“REVISITING” THE PAST

Let’s pay tribute to the memory of three Masonic icons by “revisiting” some of the highlights and sidelights of their lives and by being more highly resolved to carefully imitate what in them we have seen praiseworthy. They serve as role models to us; they are the “supermen” of the Craft in this jurisdiction.

BRO. APOLINARIO KATABAY MABINI

by **J. Flor R. Nicolas, PSGL**

BROTHER APOLINARIO KATABAY MABINI was perceived by his contemporaries as *“a political philosopher whose counsel enabled General Emilio Aguinaldo’s revolutionary government to weather disintegration, and whose political teachings made many of his countrymen bear immense difficulties,”* and he is not undeservedly recognized by the Filipino people as the *“Brains of the Philippine Revolution.”* (Del Castillo and Medina, p. 172).

His Birth, Family, and Educational Attainments

Born in Talaga, Tanauan, Batangas on July 23, 1864, Apolinario was the 2nd of the eight children of Inocencio Mabini, an unlettered peasant, and Dionisia Maranan, a vendor in the Tanauan market. (Next year, 2014, therefore, marks the Sesquicentennial of the birth of Bro. Apolinario Mabini.)

Despite the poverty into which he was born and in which he grew up, through sheer determination and iron discipline, he attained success in life.

He began his informal studies under his maternal grandfather, who was the village teacher. Because he demonstrated uncommon intelligence, he was transferred to a regular school owned by Simplicio Avelino, where he worked as a houseboy, and he took odd jobs from a local tailor, all in exchange for free board and lodging. He later moved to a school conducted

by Fr. Valerio Malabanan, whose fame as an educator was so widespread that Jose Rizal mentioned him in *El Filibusterismo*.

On the suggestion of Fr. Malabanan, he participated in a competitive examination for scholarship at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Intramuros, and he topped the examination. Thus, in 1881, he enrolled at the said school, where he took up Bachelor of Arts, major in Philosophy.

Because of a chronic lack of funds, Apolinario's studies in Letran were intermittently interrupted. To earn money for his board and lodging, he tutored children belonging to rich families in Intramuros. Working and studying to the best of his ability, he graduated from the Colegio de San Juan de Letran with the highest honors and with the title Professor of Latin.

At this juncture, his mother expressed her desire that Apolinario take up priesthood. But the latter decided to take up Law in order to be able to defend the poor.

Later on, he wrote her a letter in which he said in part:

Dear mother, in the midst of my misfortunes, your memory is not a very painful one when I am consoled by the idea that fate has spared me the sorrow of seeing them. But, if unexpectedly better days would come to me, I would begrudge fate for not allowing you to enjoy my fortune.

To improve his fortune, he strengthened his resolve to finish his law studies. He frequently felt the pang of poverty, but he did not allow his economic adversity to derail him from his ambition to become a lawyer. So, while studying Law at the Universidad de Santo Tomas, he supported himself by again teaching Latin to children belonging to wealthy families and by serving as a copyist in the Court of First Instance in Manila, where his boss was Numeriano Adriano, a Freemason, whose good example inspired him to petition for membership in the Masonic fraternity.

He Knocks at the Door of Masonry

Here is an interesting account of Bro. Apolinario Mabini's joining the fellowship of the Craft:

One day in September 1892, the members of Balagtas Lodge met in Sampaloc to initiate a new member. He was an unlikely candidate. Pale and sickly, he barely passed the physical requirements for admission. He was only a working student, not man of means, unlike the other candidates, who mostly belonged to the affluent class. Above all, he had not manifested any nationalistic inclinations. He was not active during the days of Governor-General Terrero; he did not take part in the Manifestation of 1888; he was neither a member of the Comité de Propaganda, nor was he present when Rizal founded La Liga Filipina, nor did he enlist in the Katipunan. This most unusual candidate for Masonic degrees was Apolinario Mabini.

Mabini chose Katabay, a Tagalog word meaning "cautious" and "calculating," as his symbolic or secret name in Masonry. After his initiation, to the delight of his brother Masons, he became a very ardent disciple. He immersed himself completely in the serious study of Masonic mysteries and assiduously participated in Masonic functions. Very importantly, he began to manifest a deep sense of nationalism, plunging himself into pro patria activities. In no time, Mabini gained the respect and admiration of his brother Masons. They began to seek his advice and views and frequently invited him at Masonic meetings. He was their favorite orator. (Fajardo, pp. 120-121).

Galicano Apacible gave an amusing account of a lodge meeting in Nagtahan, where Mabini was the orator of the day, as follows:

At that meeting, the orator of the Lodge read his speech expounding the situation of Philippine Masonry, its difficulties and defects, and proposing the measures that should be adopted. Unconsciously and because of his newness, I took notice of the physical aspect of the speaker. He was a tall man, slim, somewhat pale, whose face, though Malayan, had a Roman profile. His voice was almost a soprano; he spoke softly, and he

did not make gestures. His physical look did not impress me favorably. I imagined that his speech would be boresome, and I prepared to sleep in my chair. But as he advanced in his speech he stirred my interest until my attention was completely absorbed. In my eyes his figure was transformed; it was growing gigantic; his ideas were concrete, vigorous and virile, impregnated with patriotism and sane judgment. At those moments he proved false the maxim of mens sana in corpora sano. The speaker was a sickly man in striking contrast to his very sane, robust, and vigorous mentality.

After the meeting, during the refreshment, I asked to be introduced to him personally and then learned that his name was Apolinario Mabini. (Ibid., p. 121).

Adds MW Fajardo: "Mabini's mastery of Masonic law and lore would soon come in handy, for trouble was brewing in Masonry's backyard, which would eventually lead to the downfall of Nilad Lodge." (*Ibid.*)

A General Assembly of Masons was held in Malabon in April 1892. All the Lodges in Manila, except Nilad, were represented in that assembly, where Mabini's suggestion, that they form a Regional Grand Council, and not a Regional Grand Lodge, was approved and where the officers of the said Council were duly elected, as follows: Ambrosio Flores (*Musa*), Grand Master; Numeriano Adriano (*Ipil*), Grand First Vice-President; Faustino Villaruel (*Ilaw*), Grand Second Vice-President; Paulino Zamora (*Terror*), Grand Third Vice-President; Apolinario Mabini (*Katabay*), Grand Orator; Cipriano Castillo (*Algiabaral*), Asst. Grand Orator; Arcadio Flores (*Sosten*), Grand Secretary; Jose Barbasa (*Tagadagat*), Grand Asst. Secretary; Bonifacio Arevalo (*Harem*), Grand Treasurer; Sixto Celis (*Liwayway*), Grand Accountant; Isidro Villaruel (*Gelano*), Grand Almoner; Timoteo Paez (*Raxa Matanda*), Grand Master of Ceremonies; and Marciano Ramirez (*Raxa Bata*), Grand Tiler. (*Ibid.*, p. 131).

Apolinario Mabini was perceived by his contemporaries as “a political philosopher whose counsel enabled General Emilio Aguinaldo’s revolutionary government to weather disintegration and whose political teachings made many of his countrymen bear immense difficulties....” He is not undeservedly recognized by the Filipino people as the “Brains of the Philippine Revolution.”

He Finishes Law; His Economic Condition Improves

At long last, he graduated from UST in 1894 with the degree of Bachelor of Laws (Ll.B.).

With the help of his boss and mentor, Numeriano Adriano, whose Masonic name was *Ipil*, and other Mason lawyers, who referred their clients to him, Apolinario Mabini had a lucrative law practice, which led to the gradual improvement of his economic condition and, eventually, to the purchase by him of a house and lot in Nagtahan.

Hindi batid ng lahat na, noong abogado’t Mason na si Ka Pule, tinulungan siya ng mga Kapatid niya sa Masonerya. Binigyan nila siya ng mga kliyente. Dahil sa tulong nila, umunlad ang kanyang “law practice” at ang kanyang buhay, at nakabili siya ng bahay at lupa sa Nagtahan, malapit sa Palasyo ng Malakanyang.

His Illness, Arrest, and Change of Heart

In 1896, however, he contracted an illness, which was diagnosed by the physicians among his brethren in Masonry as “infantile paralysis.” Those brethren did all they could to cure his illness, but to no avail.

When the Katipunan revolt broke out late that year, despite his physical infirmity, he was arrested by the Spanish authorities, who made him a prisoner of war at the San Juan de Dios Hospital.

During his imprisonment in this hospital, he started writing *La Revolucion Filipina*, a political and historical treatise, which he would continue in Los Baños, Laguna and complete in Guam.

Ironically, at that time he was still a pacifist or reformist. In fact, he was the Secretary of the reorganized La Liga Filipina. As such, he believed that the Reform Movement would still succeed; so, he actively participated in the collection of monthly monetary contributions from Filipino Masons for the support of the Asociacion Hispano-Filipina, the organization headed by Miguel Morayta, Rizal's history professor at the Universidad Central de Madrid and the Grand Master of the Gran Oriente Español (Spanish Grand Orient), and *La Solidaridad*, the fortnightly publication of the Reform Movement, which was edited first by Graciano Jaena Lopez and then by Marcelo Hilario del Pilar.

According to Past Grand Master Reynold Fajardo once more, Mabini did not join the Revolution of 1896 because, as a brilliant lawyer, he opposed anything that smacked of illegality, and he preferred peaceful methods in attaining reforms from the Spanish government. But his political attitude changed from pacifist or reformist to revolutionary because Spanish authorities, instigated by the abusive friars, resorted to severe measures to dissuade the Filipinos from emancipating themselves from Spain. Specifically, they distorted the role of the Masons, whom they unjustly hounded, harassed, deported, and even executed. Among the innocent persons senselessly persecuted, incarcerated, deported, and even executed were Mabini's close associates. In fact, as mentioned earlier, he himself was unfairly arrested and imprisoned. (*Ibid.*, p. 221).

When he was released from prison, he left for Los Baños in the province of Laguna, hoping that the hot springs in that place would help cure his illness. In his solitude, he continued to analyze the Revolution, and he concluded that its failure was due to the absence of an ideological direction and lack of a comprehensive and coordinated plan for revolutionary consciousness. Deep in his heart he knew that the Pact of Biak-na-Bato did not write *finis* to the Revolution, and he sensed that the fighting would inevitably resume. Thus, he resolved that this time the

Revolution would not fail because he would endow it with intellectual direction, the power of ideas, and the sustaining strength of the spirit. He would also make sure that the Revolution would (1) not be confined to the Tagalog provinces like the Katipunan, but rather participated in by the entire Filipino people, rising as one and recognizing the leadership of a President and the moral leadership of a legislature; (2) provide the new citizens with a law, a fatherland, and a nationality; and (3) aim at attaining independence of the country and her people from foreign domination, but this should only be a means of achieving its ultimate end, which is the social emancipation and regeneration of the Filipino. (*Ibid.*, p. 222).

He Pens *El Verdadero Decalogo*

In April 1898, to bolster the Filipino people’s patriotism and to teach them their civic duties, he penned *El Verdadero Decalogo*, which he patterned after the *Codigo Moral Masonico*. In this opus, he dissected with a surgeon’s ruthlessness the true meaning of liberty and, like Moses and Hammurabi, laid down the proper norms of conduct. (Del Castillo and Medina, pp. 173-174).

Mabini firmly believed that the faithful and conscientious observance by all Filipinos of the set of truths or rules contained in *El Verdadero Decalogo* would bring about a greater political and moral consciousness among them. He wanted the Filipino revolutionists to observe a strict code of morals; for, to him, even more important than triumph in the battlefield was victory in the struggle to establish the habits of virtue and right conduct in the minds and hearts of the Filipinos. (Fajardo, pp. 222-223).

He Becomes Aguinaldo’s Chief Adviser

Reportedly, when the Filipino revolutionary leaders were exiled in Hongkong, Gen. and WB Emilio Aguinaldo, who had chosen “Colon” as his Masonic name, requested a fellow Freemason, Don Felipe Agoncillo, to recommend to him a highly educated and erudite countryman who could serve effectively as his chief adviser when he would return to the Philippines and resume the war against Spain, and Don Felipe Agoncillo

unhesitatingly recommended Bro. Apolinario Mabini. Agoncillo is said to have told Aguinaldo, "*Paralitiko iyan. Ngunit may ulo, at Kapatid natin siya sa Masonerya.*" Thus, Aguinaldo decided to make Apolinario Mabini his chief adviser.

In May 1898, shortly after his return to the country, he sent for the paralytic, who was then vacationing in Los Baños, Laguna. The paralytic was carried in a hammock by many men all the way from Los Baños to Cavite Viejo, where he arrived on June 12, 1898, just in time to witness the proclamation by Gen. Aguinaldo of the independence of the Philippines "before the Filipino people and the civilized nations" of the world and the consecration of the Philippine flag. Hence, on that day, Aguinaldo and Mabini met for the first time. Comments Past Grand Master Fajardo: "They were a natural team and hit it off from the very start. Aguinaldo provided the muscle for the Revolution, Mabini the brains. Eventually, the two would invest the Revolution with a distinctive Masonic flavor." (*Ibid.*, p. 223).

As the chief adviser of Aguinaldo, Mabini had a hand in appointments to high positions, frequently recommending his brothers in Masonry. His bias came under severe attack. Felipe G. Calderon assailed the "sectarian Masonic spirit" that pervaded the Revolutionary Government, branding it as one of the evils of the Revolution; he bewailed the "mania of Aguinaldo or rather of his adviser, Mabini, to elevate any person who was a Mason." (*Ibid.*, p. 224).

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Some Official Acts of Mabini

Mabini formulated a decree ordering the reorganization of local government in those provinces already freed from Spanish control. On

June 18, 1898, Aguinaldo signed the decree, which stated, among other things, “The first duty of the government is to interpret the popular will faithfully.” This statement may as well epitomize Mabini’s policy throughout the Filipino people’s struggle against foreign rule.

Two days later, Aguinaldo issued a supplementary decree, again written by Mabini, providing for the administration of justice.

On June 23, Aguinaldo signed the decree setting up the Revolutionary Government. This decree changed the title of the Chief of State from Dictator to President, created four departments to assist the President in his duties, and provided for the creation of a Revolutionary Congress and the election of delegates thereto. (*Ibid.*)

Mabini’s Bitter Conflict with Wealthy Members of the Revolutionary Congress

On September 15, 1898, Aguinaldo convoked the Revolutionary Congress at Barasoain, Malolos, Bulacan. Masons did not control the Congress, so that when its officers were chosen, non-Masons captured the principal positions. Pedro S. Paterno was elected President; Benito Legarda, Vice President; and Gregorio Araneta, first Secretary. These officers, plus other wealthy delegates, planned to draft a Constitution for the First Philippine Republic. They contended that a Constitution addressing the needs of the time was necessary to secure foreign recognition of Philippine independence. Firmly believing that, given the emergency conditions of war, the function of the Congress was simply to advise the President, Mabini opposed the plan to draft a Constitution. He was, however, defeated by the majority of the delegates to the Congress, who created a committee of nineteen to draft the fundamental law. Calderon, the anti-Mason, was made its head. His committee initially considered three constitutional plans. One of these was Mabini’s *Programa Constitucional para la Republica Filipina*, which he based on the Statutes of Universal Masonry and in which he charted the course of action to be taken by Aguinaldo’s Revolutionary Government. The second was written by Pedro Paterno. And the third was drafted by Calderon himself.

Calderon's committee rejected Mabini's plan because "it was too Masonic." Paterno withdrew his plan from consideration. Hence, the plan submitted by Calderon remained as the sole working draft. This eventually became the basis of the Malolos Constitution of the First Philippine Republic. (Fajardo, pp. 224-225; also Del Castillo and Medina, p. 174).

On January 2, 1899, Mabini was appointed by Gen. and Pres. Emilio Aguinaldo as Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of his newly-formed dictatorial government. Thus, he led the first Cabinet of the First Philippine Republic, which was formally declared by the Revolutionary Congress in appropriate ceremonies held on January 23.

He Negotiates for Peace

On March 6, 1899, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Apolinario Mabini started negotiating for peace with the Americans. He endeavored most earnestly to convince the latter to respect the autonomy of Aguinaldo's new government. But he included ceasefire as a condition for peace. Since the Americans rejected this condition, the negotiations for peace failed. So, Mabini sought for an armistice instead. But even this gambit failed. Eventually, feeling that the Americans were not negotiating *bona fide*, he forswore them, rallied the people, and supported war. A staunch nationalist, he wrote *El Simil de Alejandro*, which may be summed up briefly as follows:

Peace is a "flower" growing in the soil; it is contentment borne by the possession of individual rights, inherent in all men. But the American Government does not wish to recognize such rights as inherent in the Filipinos, whom they regard as "incapable" and having little "culture." For this reason, America tries to impose her rule on the Filipinos through brute force and, under such a condition, "the flower," as claimed by the Federal Party, which is independence, cannot grow. Nor can the seed be planted for want of soil. (Del Castillo and Medina, pp. 174-175).

His Conflict with the Wealthy Members of Congress and Aguinaldo’s Cabinet Intensifies

Apolinario Mabini was the most competent thinker and theoretician in the Cabinet of Aguinaldo. Although he was a paralytic, not only was he highly educated, but he also had a very flexible and imaginative mind as well as very comprehensive views. However, a significant number of property owners and members of the landlord class who occupied high ranks or positions in the revolutionary government formed a conspiracy to eclipse Mabini as Aguinaldo’s principal adviser. (*Ibid.*, p. 175).

His conflict with the conspirators became more and more intense, so that on May 7, 1899, he resigned from all his posts in the Aguinaldo Cabinet. His resignation notwithstanding, he succeeded in exposing the vicious opportunism of the Paterno-Buencamino clique, which tried to gain control over, as well as to profit from, the financial transactions of the revolutionary government. (*Ibid.*).

He Is Captured, Set Free, Recaptured, Exiled

On December 10, 1899, the American forces, who were in hot pursuit of Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo and his soldiers, who were then fleeing northeast toward the province of Isabela, found and captured Apolinario Mabini in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija. But later, seeing that he was suffering from extreme physical infirmity, they set him free. Mabini, however, continued to support the Filipino revolutionists in their ideological struggle against them; he turned out subversive manifestos appealing to all Filipinos to take active part in the fight against the Americans. Hence, the latter captured him again.

Mabini was, therefore, described by former American Governor-General William Howard Taft, a Freemason like him, as “*the most irreconcilable among Filipinos, whose physical infirmity had appealed to the imagination of the Filipinos and to the pity of all ... to place him in the attitude of a martyr.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 172).

In 1901, the American authorities in the country deported him to Guam, together with scores of other Filipino “insurrectos” (insurgents), who also adamantly refused to swear fealty to the United States of America.

When Brig. Gen. Arthur C. MacArthur, Jr., another Freemason, was asked by the US Senate to explain why Apolinario Mabini had to be deported to Guam, he cabled this message to the Senate: “*Mabini deported: a most active agitator; persistently and defiantly refusing amnesty, and maintaining correspondence with insurgents in the field while living in Manila.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 173).

He Finishes His *Memoirs* and *La Revolucion Filipina*

During his exile in Guam, Apolinario Mabini completed writing his *Memoirs* and *La Revolucion Filipina*.

The latter work consists of two volumes. The first volume, which covers the period April 1899 to May 1899, contains all that Mabini had written as a private citizen and as a public official under Aguinaldo’s revolutionary organization. The second volume, on the other hand, records Mabini’s writings and public letters from June 21, 1899 to September 2, 1902.

La Revolucion Filipina, besides its beautiful dedicatory message for Mabini’s mother and a prologue, is made up of 11 short chapters, as follows: (1) The Revolution and Political Evolution; (2) Spanish Domination of the Philippines before the Opening of the Suez Canal; (3) The Cause and Effect of the Garroting of Fathers Burgos, Gomez, and Zamora; (4) Spanish Administration of the Philippines before the Revolution; (5) Reforms Demanded by *La Solidaridad*; (6) The Novels of Rizal; (7) La Liga Filipina and the Katipunan; (8) The Early Beginnings of the Revolution; (9) The Revolution in Its Period of Development; (10) The End and Fall of the Revolution; and (11) The Conclusion.

The foregoing chapter headings indicate that *La Revolucion Filipina* is “a rapid historical account written by a quasi-political scientist and

philosopher, with an eye to evaluating what transpired in his own time,” and that it is Mabini’s “reasoned analysis and cogent argument concerning the ideological implications of the war against Spain and the resistance to the American invaders.” We may glean from this work that Mabini was a dedicated and disinterested patriot, always trying to mediate between the people’s will and their leaders’ decisions. (*Ibid.*).

He Pledges Allegiance to the USA, But ...

On February 26, 1903, after taking an oath of allegiance to the USA before the Collector of Customs in Guam, he was allowed to return to the Philippines. But on his way back to the country, he issued the this statement to the press: *“After two long years, I am returning, so to speak, completely disoriented and, what is worse, almost overcome by disease and sufferings. Nevertheless, I hope, after some time of rest and study, still to be of some use, unless I have returned to the Islands for the sole purpose of dying.”*

To the American officials’ chagrin, soon after his return from exile, Mabini resumed his pro-patria work; specifically, he agitated for independence for the Philippines.

He Drops Life’s Working Tools

On May 13, 1903, at the age of 38, he died of cholera in Manila.

In Conclusion

Bro. Apolinario *Katabay* Mabini set the good example of not allowing poverty and illness to prevent him from attaining academic and professional success. He consistently exemplified iron discipline, diligence in work and study, strict adherence to convictions and principles, and *pagkabayani* or disinterested, dedicated, and devoted service to country and countrymen. Although he was the chief adviser of Gen. and Pres. Emilio Aguinaldo and the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the First Philippine Republic, he did not take advantage of those positions of power to promote his own welfare and interests. Instead, throughout

his stint as a government official, he consistently lived an unselfish and unblemished life. He was, indeed, a real patriot and hero. In Masonic parlance, both as a private citizen and as a public servant, he wore his lambskin apron with credit to himself and honor to the Fraternity.

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