

Chapter 1

Advent of A National Hero

Dr. Jose Rizal is a unique example of a *many-splendored genius* who became the greatest hero of a nation. Endowed by God with versatile gifts, he truly ranked with the world's geniuses. He was a physician (ophthalmic surgeon), poet, dramatist, essayist, novelist, historian, architect, painter, sculptor, educator, linguist, musician, naturalist, ethnologist, surveyor, engineer, farmer businessman, economist, geographer, cartographer, bibliophile, philologist, grammarian, folklorist, philosopher, translator, inventor, magician, humorist, satirist, polemicist, sportsman, traveler, and prophet. Above and beyond all these, he was a hero and political martyr who consecrated his life for the redemption of his oppressed people. No wonder, he is now acclaimed as the national hero of the Philippines.

The Birth of a Hero. Jose Rizal was born on the moonlit night of Wednesday, June 19, 1861, in the lakeshore town of Calamba, Laguna Province, Philippines. His mother almost died during the delivery because of his big head. As he recounted many years later in his student memoirs: "I was born in Calamba on 19 June, 1861, between eleven and midnight, a few days before full moon. It was a Wednesday and my coming out in this vale of tears would have cost my mother her life had she not vowed to the virgin of Antipolo to take me to her sanctuary by way of pilgrimage."¹

He was baptized in the Catholic church of his town on June 22, aged three days old, by the parish priest, Father Rufino Collantes, who was a Batangueño. His godfather (*ninong*) was Father Pedro Casanas, native of Calamba and close friend of the Rizal family. His name "Jose" was chosen by his mother who was a devotee of the Christian saint *San Jose* (St. Joseph).

During the christening ceremony Father Collantes was impressed by the baby's big head, and told the members of the family who were present: "Take good care of this child, for someday he will become a great man." His words proved to be prophetic, as confirmed by subsequent events.

The baptismal certificate of Rizal reads as follows:

"I, the undersigned parish priest of Calamba, certify that from the investigation made with proper authority, for replacing the parish books which were burned September 28, 1862, to be found in Docket No.1 of Baptisms, p. 49, it appears by the sworn testimony of competent witnesses that JOSE RIZAL MERCADO is the legitimate son, and of lawful wedlock, of Don Francisco Rizal Mercado and Doña Teodora Realonda, having been baptized in this parish on the 22nd day of June in the year 1861, by the parish priest Rev. Rufino Collantes, Rev. Pedro Casanas being his godfather. — Witness my signature.

(Signed): LEONCIO LOPEZ

It should be noted that at the time Rizal was born, the governor general of the Philippines was Lieutenant-General Jose Lemery, former senator of Spain (member of the upper chamber of the Spanish Cortes). He governed the Philippines from February 2, 1861 to July 7, 1862. Incidentally, on the same date of Rizal's birth (June 19, 1861), he sent an official dispatch to the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Ultramar in Madrid, denouncing Sultan Pulalun of Sulu and several powerful Moro datus for fraternizing with a British consul. Among his achievements as governor general were (1) fostering the cultivation of cotton in the provinces and (2) establishing the politico-military governments in the Visayas and in Mindanao.

Rizal's Parents. Jose Rizal was the seventh of the eleven children of Francisco Mercado Rizal, and Teodora Alonso Realonda. The hero's father, Francisco (1818-1898) was born in Biñan, Laguna, on May 11, 1818. He studied Latin and Philosophy at the College of San Jose in Manila. In early manhood, following his parent's death, he moved to Calamba and became a tenant-farmer of the Dominican-owned hacienda. He was a hardy and independent-minded man, who talked less and worked more, and was strong in body and valiant in spirit. He

died in Manila on January 5, 1898, at the age of 80. In his student memoirs, Rizal affectionately called him “a model of fathers”.²

Doña Teodora (1826-1911), the hero's mother, was born in Manila on November 8, 1826 and was educated at the College of Santa Rosa, a well-known college for girls in the city. She was a remarkable woman, possessing refined culture, literary talent, business ability, and the fortitude of Spartan women. Rizal lovingly said of her: “My mother is a woman of more than ordinary culture; she knows literature and speaks Spanish better than I. She corrected my poems and gave me good advice when I was studying rhetoric. She is a mathematician and has read many books.”³ Doña Teodora died in Manila on August 16, 1911, at the age of 85. Shortly before her death, the Philippine government offered her a life pension. She courteously rejected it saying, “My family has never been patriotic for money. If the government has plenty of funds and does not know what to do with them, better reduce the taxes.” Such remarks truly befitted her as a worthy mother of a national hero.

The Rizal Children. God blessed the marriage of Francisco Mercado Rizal and Teodora Alonso Realonda with eleven children — two boys and nine girls. These children were as follows:

1. Saturnina (1850-1913) — oldest of the Rizal children, nicknamed Neneng; she married Manuel T. Hidalgo of Tanawan, Batangas.

2. Paciano (1851-1930) — older brother and confidant of Jose Rizal; after his younger brother's execution, he joined the Philippine Revolution and became a combat general; after the Revolution, he retired to his farm in Los Baños, where he lived as a gentleman farmer and died on April 13, 1930, an old bachelor aged 79. He had two children by his mistress (Severina Decena) — a boy and a girl.

3. Narcisa (1852-1939) — her pet name was Sisa and she married Antonio Lopez (nephew of Father Leoncio Lopez), a school teacher of Morong.

4. Olimpia (1855-1887) — Ypia was her pet name; she married Silvestre Ubaldo, a telegraph operator from Manila.

5. Lucia (1857-1919) — She married Mariano Herbosa of Calamba, who was a nephew of Father Casanas. Herbosa died of cholera in 1889 and was denied Christian burial because he was a brother-in-law of Dr. Rizal.

6. Maria (1859-1945) — Biang was her nickname; she married Daniel Faustino Cruz of Biñan, Laguna.

7. JOSE (1861-1896) — the greatest Filipino hero and peerless genius; his nickname was Pepe; during his exile in Dapitan he lived with Josephine Bracken, Irish girl from Hong Kong; he had a son by her, but this baby-boy died a few hours after birth; Rizal named him "Francisco" after his father and buried him in Dapitan.

8. Concepcion (1862-1865) — her pet name was Concha; she died of sickness at the age of 3; her death was Rizal's first sorrow in life.

9. Josefa (1865-1945) — her pet name was Panggoy; she died an old maid at the age of 80.

10. Trinidad (1868-1951) — Trining was her pet name; she died also an old maid in 1951 aged 83.

11. Soledad (1870-1929) — youngest of the Rizal children; her pet name was Choleng; she married Pantaleon Quintero of Calamba.

Sibling relationship among the Rizal children was affectionately cordial. As a little boy, Rizal used to play games with his sisters. Although he had boyish quarrels with them he respected them. Years later when he grew to manhood, he always called them Doña or Señora (if married) and Señorita (if single). For instance, he called his older sister "Doña Ypia," his oldest sister "Señora Saturnina," and his unmarried sisters "Señorita Josefa" and "Señorita Trinidad."

Rizal's relation with his only brother Paciano, who was ten years his senior, was more than that of younger to older brother. Paciano was a second father to him. Throughout his life, Rizal respected him and greatly valued his sagacious advice. He immortalized him in his first novel *Noli Me Tangere* as the wise Pilosopo Tasio. In a letter to Blumentritt, written in London on June 23, 1888, he regarded Paciano as the "most noble of Filipinos" and "though an *Indio*, more generous and noble than all the Spaniards put together"⁴. And in a subsequent letter also written to Blumen-

tritt and dated London, October 12, 1888, he spoke of his beloved older brother, as follows: "He is much finer and more serious than I am; he is bigger and more slim; he is not so dark; his nose is fine, beautiful and sharp; but he is bow-legged."⁵

Rizal's Ancestry. As a typical Filipino, Rizal was a product of the mixture of races.⁶ In his veins flowed the blood of both East and West — Negrito, Indonesian, Malay, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish. Predominantly, he was a Malayan and was a magnificent specimen of Asian manhood. Rizal's great-great-grandfather on his father's side was Domingo Laméo, a Chinese immigrant from the Fukien city of Changchow, who arrived in Manila about 1690. He became a Christian, married a well-to-do Chinese Christian girl of Manila named Ines de la Rosa, and assumed in 1731 the surname Mercado which was appropriate for him because he was a merchant. The Spanish term *mercado* means "market" in English. Domingo Mercado and Ines de la Rosa had a son, Francisco Mercado, who resided in Biñan, married a Chinese-Filipino mestiza, Cirila Bernacha, and was elected *gobernadorcillo* (municipal mayor) of the town. One of their sons, Juan Mercado (Rizal's grandfather), married Cirila Alejandro, a Chinese-Filipino mestiza. Like his father, he was elected *gobernadorcillo* of Biñan. *Capitan* Juan and *Capitana* Cirila had thirteen children, the youngest being Francisco Mercado, Rizal's father.

At the age of eight, Francisco Mercado lost his father and grew up to manhood under the care of his mother. He studied Latin and Philosophy in the College of San Jose in Manila. While studying in Manila, he met and fell in love with Teodora Alonso Realonda, a student in the College of Santa Rosa. They were married on June 28, 1848, after which they settled down in Calamba, where they engaged in farming and business and reared a big family.

It is said that Doña Teodora's family descended from Lakan-Dula, the last native king of Tondo. Her great-grandfather (Rizal's maternal great-great-grandfather) was Eugenio Ursua (of Japanese ancestry), who married a Filipina named Benigna (surname unknown). Their daughter, Regina, married Manuel de Quintos, a Filipino-Chinese lawyer from Pangasinan. One of the daughters of Attorney Quintos and Regina was Brigida, who married Lorenzo Alberto Alonso, a prominent Spanish-Filipino

mestizo of Biñan. Their children were Narcisa, Teodora (Rizal's mother), Gregorio, Manuel, and Jose.

The Surname Rizal. The real surname of the Rizal family was Mercado, which was adopted in 1731 by Domingo Lamco (the paternal great-great-grandfather of Jose Rizal), who was a full-blooded Chinese. Rizal's family acquired a second surname — Rizal — which was given by a Spanish *alcalde mayor* (provincial governor) of Laguna, who was a family friend. Thus said Dr. Rizal, in his letter to Blumentritt (without date or place):⁷

I am the only Rizal because at home my parents, my sisters, my brother, and my relatives have always preferred our old surname Mercado. Our family name was in fact Mercado, but there were many Mercados in the Philippines who are not related to us. It is said that an *alcalde mayor*, who was a friend of our family added Rizal to our name. My family did not pay much attention to this, but now I have to use it. In this way, it seems that I am an illegitimate son.

“Whoever that Spanish *alcalde mayor* was,” commented Ambassador Leon Ma. Guerrero, distinguished Rizalist and diplomat, “his choice was prophetic for Rizal in Spanish means a field where wheat, cut while still green, sprouts again.”⁸

The Rizal Home. The house of the Rizal family, where the hero was born, was one of the distinguished stone houses in Calamba during Spanish times. It was a two-storey building, rectangular in shape, built of adobe stones and hard-woods, and roofed with red tiles. It is described by Dr. Rafael Palma, one of Rizal's prestigious biographers, as follows:⁹

The house was high and even sumptuous, a solid and massive earthquake-proof structure with sliding shell windows. Thick walls of lime and stone bounded the first floor; the second floor was made entirely of wood except for the roof, which was of red tile, in the style of the buildings in Manila at that time . . . At the back there was an *azotea* and a wide, deep cistern to hold rain water for home use.

Behind the house were the poultry yard full of turkeys and chickens and a big garden of tropical fruit trees — *atis*, *balimbing*, *chico*, *macopa*, *papaya*, *santol*, *tampoy*, etc.

It was a happy home where parental affection and children's laughter reigned. By day, it hummed with the noises of children at play and the songs of the birds in the garden. By night, it echoed with the dulcet notes of family prayers.

Such a wholesome home, naturally, bred a wholesome family. And such a family was the Rizal family.

A Good and Middle-Class Family. The Rizal family belonged to the *principalia*, a town aristocracy in Spanish Philippines. It was one of the distinguished families in Calamba. By dint of honest and hard work and frugal living, Rizal's parents were able to live well. From the farms, which were rented from the Dominican Order, they harvested rice, corn, and sugarcane. They raised pigs, chickens, and turkeys in their backyard. In addition to farming and stockraising, Doña Teodora managed a general goods store and operated a small flour-mill and a home-made ham press.

As evidence of their affluence, Rizal's parents were able to build a large stone house which was situated near the town church and to buy another one. They owned a carriage, which was a status symbol of the *ilustrados* in Spanish Philippines and a private library (the largest in Calamba) which consisted of more than 1,000 volumes. They sent their children to the colleges in Manila. Combining affluence and culture, hospitality and courtesy, they participated prominently in all social and religious affairs in the community. They were gracious hosts to all visitors and guests — friars, Spanish officials, and Filipino friends — during the town fiestas and other holidays. Beneath their roof, all guests irrespective of their color, rank, social position, and economic status, were welcome.

Home Life of the Rizals. The Rizal family had a simple, contented, and happy life. In consonance with Filipino custom, family ties among the Rizals were intimately close. Don Francisco and Doña Teodora loved their children, but they never spoiled them. They were strict parents and they trained their children to love God, to behave well, to be obedient, and to respect people, especially the old folks. Whenever the children, including Jose Rizal, got into mischief, they were given a sound spanking. Evidently, they believed in the maxim: "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

Every day the Rizals (parents and children) heard Mass in the town church, particularly during Sundays and Christian holidays. They prayed together daily at home — the Angelus at sunset and the Rosary before retiring to bed at night. After the family prayers, all the children kissed the hands of their parents.

Life was not, however, all prayers and church services for the Rizal children. They were given ample time and freedom to play by their strict and religious parents. They played merrily in the *azotea* or in the garden by themselves. The older ones were allowed to play with the children of other families.

* * * * *

Chapter 2

Childhood Years in Calamba

Jose Rizal had many beautiful memories of childhood in his native town. He grew up in a happy home, ruled by good parents, bubbling with joy, and sanctified by God's blessings. His natal town of Calamba, so named after a big native jar, was a fitting cradle for a hero. Its scenic beauties and its industrious, hospitable, and friendly folks impressed him during his childhood years and profoundly affected his mind and character. The happiest period of Rizal's life was spent in this lakeshore town, a worthy prelude to his Hamlet-like tragic manhood.

Calamba, the Hero's Town. Calamba was an hacienda town which belonged to the Dominican Order, which also owned all the lands around it. It is a picturesque town nestling on a verdant plain covered with irrigated ricefields and sugar-lands. A few kilometers to the south looms the legendary Mount Makiling in somnolent grandeur, and beyond this mountain is the province of Batangas. East of the town is the Laguna de Bay, an inland lake of songs and emerald waters beneath the canopy of azure skies. In the middle of the lake towers the storied island of Talim, and beyond it towards the north is the distant Antipolo, famous mountain shrine of the miraculous Lady of Peace and Good Voyage.

Rizal loved Calamba with all his heart and soul. In 1876, when he was 15 years old and was a student in the Ateneo de Manila, he remembered his beloved town. Accordingly, he wrote a poem *Un Recuerdo A Mi Pueblo* (In Memory of My Town), as follows:¹

When early childhood's happy days
In memory I see once more
Along the lovely verdant shore

That meets a gently murmuring sea;
When I recall the whisper soft
Of zephyrs dancing on my brow
With cooling sweetness, even now
New luscious life is born in me.

When I behold the lily white
That sways to do the wind's command,
While gently sleeping on the sand
The stormy water rests awhile;
When from the flowers there softly breathes
A bouquet ravishingly sweet,
Out-poured the newborn dawn to meet,
As on us she begins to smile.

With sadness I recall. . . recall
Thy face, in precious infancy,
Oh mother, friend most dear to me,
Who gave to life a wondrous charm.
I yet recall a village plain,
My joy, my family, my boon,
Besides the freshly cool lagoon, —
The spot for which my heart beats warm.

Ah yes! my footsteps insecure
In your dark forests deeply sank;
And there by every river's bank
I found refreshment and delight;
Within that rustic temple prayed
With childhood's simple faith unfeigned
While cooling breezes, pure, unstained,
Would send my heart on rapturous flight.

I saw the Maker in the grandeur
Of your ancient hoary wood,
Ah, never in your refuge could
A mortal by regret be smitten;
And while upon your sky of blue
I gaze, no love nor tenderness
Could fail, for here on nature's dress
My happiness itself was written.

Ah, tender childhood, lovely town,
Rich fount of my felicities,
Oh those harmonious melodies
Which put to flight all dismal hours,
Come back to my heart once more!

Come back, gentle hours, I yearn!
 Come back as the birds return,
 At the budding of the flowers!

Alas, farewell! Eternal vigil I keep
 For thy peace, thy bliss, and tranquility,
 O Genius of good, so kind!
 Give me these gifts, with charity.
 To thee are my fervent vows, —
 To thee I cease not to sigh
 These to learn, and I call to the sky
 To have thy sincerity.

Earliest Childhood Memories. The first memory of Rizal, in his infancy, was his happy days in the family garden when he was three years old. Because he was a frail, sickly, and undersized child, he was given the tenderest care by his parents. His father built a little nipa cottage in the garden for him to play in in the day-time. A kind old woman was employed as an *aya* (nurse maid) to look after his comfort. At times, he was left alone to muse on the beauties of nature or to play by himself. In his boyhood memoirs, he narrated how he, at the age of three, watched from his garden cottage, the *culiauan*, the *maya*, the *maria capra*, the *martin*, the *pipit*, and other birds and listened “with wonder and joy” to their twilight songs.

Another childhood memory was the daily Angelus prayer. By nightfall, Rizal related, his mother gathered all the children at the house to pray the Angelus.

With nostalgic feeling, he also remembered the happy moonlit nights at the *azotea* after the nightly Rosary. The *aya* related to the Rizal children (including Jose) many stories about the fairies; tales of buried treasure and trees blooming with diamonds, and other fabulous stories. The imaginary tales told by the *aya* aroused in Rizal an enduring interest in legends and folklore. Sometimes, when he did not like to take his supper, the *aya* would threaten him that the *asuang*, the *nuno*, the *tigbalang*, or a terrible bearded and turbaned Bombay would come to take him away if he would not eat his supper.

Another memory of his infancy was the nocturnal walk in the town, especially when there was a moon. The *aya* took him for a walk in the moonlight by the river, where the trees cast grotesque

shadows on the bank. Recounting this childhood experience in his student memoirs, Rizal wrote: "Thus my heart fed on sombre and melancholic thoughts so that even while still a child, I already wandered on wings of fantasy in the high regions of the unknown."²

The Hero's First Sorrow. The Rizal children were bound together by ties of love and companionship. They were well-bred, for their parents taught them to love and help one another.

Of his sisters, Jose loved most the little Concha (Concepcion). He was a year older than Concha. He played with her and from her he learned the sweetness of sisterly love.

Unfortunately, Concha died of sickness in 1865 when she was only three years old. Jose, who was very fond of her, cried bitterly at losing her. "When I was four years old," he said, "I lost my little sister Concha, and then for the first time I shed tears caused by love and grief. . ."³ The death of little Concha brought him his first sorrow.

Devoted Son of the Church. A scion of a Catholic clan, born and bred in a wholesome atmosphere of Catholicism, and possessed of an inborn pious spirit, Rizal grew up a good Catholic.

At the age of three, he began to take part in the family prayers. His mother, who was a devout Catholic, taught him the Catholic prayers. When he was five years old, he was able to read haltingly the Spanish family Bible.

He loved to go to church, to pray, to take part in novenas, and to join the religious processions. It is said that he was so seriously devout that he was laughingly called *Manong* Jose by the *Hermanos* and *Hermanas Terceras*.

One of the men he esteemed and respected in Calamba during his boyhood was the scholarly Father Leoncio Lopez, the town priest. He used to visit this learned Filipino priest and listen to his stimulating opinions on current events and sound philosophy of life.

Pilgrimage to Antipolo. On June 6, 1868, Jose and his father left Calamba to go on a pilgrimage to Antipolo, in order to fulfill his mother's vow which was made when Jose was born. Doña Teodora could not accompany them because she had given birth to Trinidad.

It was the first trip of Jose across Laguna de Bay and his first pilgrimage to Antipolo. He and his father rode in a *casco* (barge). He was thrilled, as a typical boy should, by his first lake voyage. He did not sleep the whole night as the *casco* sailed towards the Pasig River because he was awed by "the magnificence of the watery expanse and the silence of the night." Writing many years later of this experience, he said: "With what pleasure I saw the sunrise; for the first time I saw how the luminous rays shone, producing a brilliant effect on the ruffled surface of the wide lake."⁴

After praying at the shrine of the Virgin of Antipolo, Jose and his father went to Manila. It was the first time Jose saw Manila. They visited Saturnina, who was then a boarding student at La Concordia College in Santa Ana.

The Story of the Moth. Of the stories told by Doña Teodora to her favorite son, Jose, that of the young moth made the profoundest impression on him. Speaking of this incident, Rizal wrote:⁵

One night, all the family, except my mother and myself, went to bed early. Why, I do not know, but we two remained sitting alone. The candles had already been put out. They had been blown out in their globes by means of a curved tube of tin. That tube seemed to me the finest and most wonderful plaything in the world. The room was dimly lighted by a single light of coconut oil. In all Filipino homes such a light burns through the night. It goes out just at day-break to awaken people by its spluttering.

My mother was teaching me to read in a Spanish reader called "The Children's Friend" (*El Amigo de los Niños*). This was quite a rare book and an old copy. It had lost its cover and my sister had cleverly made a new one. She had fastened a sheet of thick blue paper over the back and then covered it with a piece of cloth.

This night my mother became impatient with hearing me read so poorly. I did not understand Spanish and so I could not read with expression. She took the book from me. First she scolded me for drawing funny pictures on its pages. Then she told me to listen and she began to read. When her sight was good, she read very well. She could recite well, and she understood verse-making, too. Many times during Christmas vacations, my mother corrected my poetical compositions, and she always made valuable criticisms.

I listened to her, full of childish enthusiasm. I marvelled at the nice-sounding phrases which she read from those same pages. The phrases she read so easily stopped me at every breath. Perhaps I grew tired of listening to sounds that had no meaning for me. Perhaps I lacked self-control. Anyway, I paid little attention to the reading. I was watching the cheerful flame. About it, some little moths were circling in playful flights. By chance, too, I yawned. My mother soon noticed that I was not interested. She stopped reading. Then she said to me: "I am going to read you a very pretty story. Now pay attention."

On hearing the word 'story' I at once opened my eyes wide. The word 'story' promised something new and wonderful. I watched my mother while she turned the leaves of the book, as if she were looking for something. Then I settled down to listen. I was full of curiosity and wonder. I had never even dreamed that there were stories in the old book which I read without understanding. My mother began to read me the fable of the young moth and the old one. She translated it into Tagalog a little at a time.

My attention increased from the first sentence. I looked toward the light and fixed my gaze on the moths which were circling around it. The story could not have been better timed. My mother repeated the warning of the old moth. She dwelt upon it and directed it to me. I heard her, but it is a curious thing that the light seemed to me each time more beautiful, the flame more attractive. I really envied the fortune of the insects. They frolicked so joyously in its enchanting splendor that the ones which had fallen and been drowned in the oil did not cause me any dread.

My mother kept on reading and I listened breathlessly. The fate of the two insects interested me greatly. The flame rolled its golden tongue to one side and a moth which this movement had singed fell into the oil, fluttered for a time and then became quiet. That became for me a great event. A curious change came over me which I have always noticed in myself whenever anything has stirred my feelings. The flame and the moth seemed to go farther away and my mother's words sounded strange and uncanny. I did not notice when she ended the fable. All my attention was fixed on the face of the insect. I watched it with my whole soul. . . It had died a martyr to its illusions.

As she put me to bed, my mother said: "See that you do not behave like the young moth. Don't be disobedient, or you may get burnt as it did." I do not know whether I answered or not. . . The story revealed to me things until then unknown. Moths no longer were, for me, insignificant insects. Moths talked; they knew how to warn. They advised just like my mother. The light seemed to me more beautiful. It had grown more dazzling and more attractive. I knew why the moths circled the flame.

The tragic fate of the young moth, which "died a martyr to its illusions," left a deep impress on Rizal's mind. He justified such noble death, asserting that "to sacrifice one's life for it," meaning for an ideal, is "worthwhile." And, like that young moth, he was fated to die as a martyr for a noble ideal.

Artistic Talents. Since early childhood Rizal revealed his God-given talent for art. At the age of five, he began to make sketches with his pencil and to mould in clay and wax objects which attracted his fancy.

It is said that one day, when Jose was a mere boy in Calamba, a religious banner which was always used during the fiesta was spoiled. Upon the request of the town mayor, he painted in oil colors a new banner that delighted the town folks because it was better than the original one.

Jose had the soul of a genuine artist. Rather an introvert child, with a skinny physique and sad dark eyes, he found great joy looking at the blooming flowers, the ripening fruits, the dancing waves of the lake, and the milky clouds in the sky; and listening to the songs of the birds, the chirpings of the cicadas, and the murmurings of the breezes. He loved to ride on a spirited pony which his father bought for him and take long walks in the meadows and lakeshore with his black dog named Usman.

One interesting anecdote about Rizal was the incident about his clay and wax images. One day when he was about six years old his sisters laughed at him for spending so much time making those images rather than participating in their games. He kept silent as they laughed with childish glee. But as they were departing, he told them: "All right laugh at me now! Someday when I die, people will make monuments and images of me!"

First Poem by Rizal. Aside from his sketching and sculpturing talent, Rizal possessed a God-given gift for literature. Since early boyhood he had scribbled verses on loose sheets of paper and on the textbooks of his sisters. His mother, who was a lover of literature, noticed his poetic inclination and encouraged him to write poetry.

At the age of eight, Rizal wrote his first poem in the native language entitled *Sa Aking Mga Kababata* (To My Fellow Children), as follows:⁶

TO MY FELLOW CHILDREN

Whenever people of a country truly love
The language which by heav'n they were taught to use
That country also surely liberty pursue
As does the bird which soars to freer space above.

For language is the final judge and referee
Upon the people in the land where it holds sway;
In truth our human race resembles in this way
The other living beings born in liberty.

Whoever knows not how to love his native tongue
Is worse than any beast or evil smelling fish.
To make our language richer ought to be our wish
The same as any mother loves to feed her young.

Tagalog and the Latin language are the same
And English and Castilian and the angels' tongue;
And God, whose watchful care o'er all is flung,
Has given us His blessing in the speech we claim,

Our mother tongue, like all the highest that we know
Had alphabet and letters of its very own;
But these were lost — by furious waves were overthrown
Like bancas in the stormy sea, long years ago.

This poem reveals Rizal's earliest nationalist sentiment. In poetic verses, he proudly proclaimed that a people who truly love their native language will surely strive for liberty like "the bird which soars to freer space above" and that Tagalog is the equal of Latin, English, Spanish, and any other language.

First Drama by Rizal. After writing the poem *To My Fellow Children*, Rizal, who was then eight years old, wrote his first dramatic work which was a Tagalog comedy. It is said that it

was staged in a Calamba festival and was delightfully applauded by the audience.

A *governadorcillo* from Paete, a town in Laguna famous for lanzones and woodcarvings, happened to witness the comedy and liked it so much that he purchased the manuscript for two pesos and brought it to his home town. It was staged in Paete during its town fiesta.

Rizal as Boy Magician. Since early manhood Rizal had been interested in magic. With his dexterous hands, he learned various tricks, such as making a coin appear or disappear in his fingers and making a handkerchief vanish in thin air. He entertained his town folks with magic-lantern exhibitions. This consisted of an ordinary lamp casting its shadow on a white screen. He twisted his supple fingers into fantastic shapes, making their enlarged shadows on the screen resemble certain animals and persons. He also gained skill in manipulating marionettes (puppet shows).

In later years when he attained manhood, he continued his keen predilection for magic. He read many books on magic and attended the performances of the famous magicians of the world. In Chapter XVII and XVIII of his second novel, *El Filibusterismo* (Treason), he revealed his wide knowledge of magic.

Lakeshore Reveries. During the twilight hours of summertime Rizal, accompanied by his pet dog, used to meditate at the shore of Laguna de Bay on the sad conditions of his oppressed people. Years later, he related:⁷

I spent many, many hours of my childhood down on the shore of the lake, Laguna de Bay. I was thinking of what was beyond. I was dreaming of what might be over on the other side of the waves. Almost every day, in our town, we saw the Guardia Civil lieutenant caning and injuring some unarmed and inoffensive villagers. The villager's only fault was that while at a distance he had not taken off his hat and made his bow. The *alcalde* treated the poor villagers in the same way whenever he visited us.

We saw no restraint put upon brutality. Acts of violence and other excesses were committed daily . . . I asked myself if, in the lands which lay across the lake, the people lived in this same way. I wondered if there they tortured any countryman with hard and cruel whips merely on suspicion.

Did they there respect the home? Or ever yonder also, in order to live in peace, would one have to bribe tyrants?

Young though he was, he grieved deeply over the unhappy situation of his beloved fatherland. The Spanish misdeeds awakened in his boyish heart a great determination to fight tyranny. When he became a man, many years later, he wrote to his friend, Mariano Ponce: "In view of these injustices and cruelties, although yet a child, my imagination was awakened and I made a vow dedicating myself someday to avenge the many victims. With this idea in my mind, I studied, and this is seen in all my writings. Someday God will give me the opportunity to fulfill my promise."⁸

Influences on the Hero's Boyhood. On the night Jose Rizal was born, other children were born in Calamba and hundreds of other children were also born all over the Philippines. But why is it that out of all these children, only one boy — JOSE RIZAL — rose to fame and greatness?

In the lives of all men there are influences which cause some to be great and others not. In the case of Rizal, he had all the favorable influences, few other children in his time enjoyed. These influences were the following: (1) hereditary influence, (2) environmental influence, and (3) aid of Divine Providence.

1. **Hereditary Influence:** According to biological science, there are inherent qualities which a person inherits from his ancestors and parents. From his Malayan ancestors, Rizal, evidently, inherited his love for freedom, his innate desire to travel, and his indomitable courage. From his Chinese ancestors, he derived his serious nature, frugality, patience, and love for children. From his Spanish ancestors, he got his elegance of bearing, sensitivity to insult, and gallantry to ladies. From his father, he inherited a profound sense of self-respect, the love for work, and the habit of independent thinking. And from his mother, he inherited his religious nature, the spirit of self-sacrifice, and the passion for arts and literature.

2. **Environmental Influence:** According to psychologists, environment, as well as heredity, affects the nature of a person. Environmental influence includes places, associates, and events. The scenic beauties of Calamba and the beautiful garden of the

Rizal family stimulated the inborn artistic and literary talents of Jose Rizal. The religious atmosphere at his home fortified his religious nature. His brother, Paciano, instilled in his mind the love for freedom and justice. From his sisters, he learned to be courteous and kind to women. The fairy tales told by his *aya* during his early childhood awakened his interest in folklore and legends.

His three uncles, brothers of his mother, exerted a good influence on him. *Tio* Jose Alberto, who had studied for eleven years in a British school in Calcutta, India, and had traveled in Europe inspired him to develop his artistic ability. *Tio* Manuel, a husky and athletic man, encouraged him to develop his frail body by means of physical exercises, including horse riding, walking, and wrestling. And *Tio* Gregorio, a book lover, intensified his voracious reading of good books.

Father Leoncio Lopez, the old and learned parish priest of Calamba, fostered Rizal's love for scholarship and intellectual honesty.

The sorrows in his family, such as the death of Concha in 1865 and the imprisonment of his mother in 1871-74, contributed to strengthen his character, enabling him to resist blows of adversity in later years. The Spanish abuses and cruelties which he witnessed in his boyhood, such as the brutal acts of the lieutenant of the Guardia Civil and the *alcalde*, the unjust tortures inflicted on innocent Filipinos, and the execution of Fathers Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora in 1872, awakened his spirit of patriotism and inspired him to consecrate his life and talents to redeem his oppressed people.

3. Aid of Divine Providence: Greater than heredity and environment in the fate of man is the aid of Divine Providence. A person may have everything in life — brains, wealth, and power — but, without the aid of Divine Providence, he cannot attain greatness in the annals of the nation. Rizal was providentially destined to be the pride and glory of his nation. God had endowed him with the versatile gifts of a genius, the vibrant spirit of a nationalist, and the valiant heart to sacrifice for a noble cause.

* * * * *