

VI - 73 C - 12. Smedley, Agnes "Dirge For a Dead Hero" Asia not
otherwise identified.

From an old Asia magazine
- 1934 - I believe -

DIRGE FOR A DEAD HERO

By AGNES SMEDLEY

AS we steamed through the blue seas toward the rugged shores of the Philippines, I thought to myself, "Aguinaldo—yes, I shall see him first of all."

I recalled all I knew of Aguinaldo. Long ago, in my childhood, tales of this man had percolated through to our dreary, miserable world. He had led the Filipino people in the uprising against Spain. Young, heroic, gun in hand, he had fought the Spaniards and then, when the American army of occupation had tried to step into the boots of the Spanish rulers, his army, with him at its head, had fought the Americans. I had learned nothing more of him since then. This heroic figure had remained in my mind. He had fought for the freedom of his people.

Why the tales of Aguinaldo's heroism had reached down into the masses of the American poor of which I was a part, I did not know. His magic name had mingled with those of my American heroes: with that of Jesse James who with a small band of men had robbed the fast express across the continent, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Holding me on his knee, my father had sung into my ears long ballads of the bravery of Jesse James, of his childhood, of just what his mother said when at last he was killed by American troops. Jesse James was one of my childhood heroes, one I was taught secretly to admire. And Aguinaldo was another.

Then I landed in Manila. Blending the task with my studies, my other work, I went in search of Aguinaldo. Yes, every one knew his name. "Oh, yes, he lives here some place," said one man indifferently; "last month he presided over the gathering of the Veterans of the Revolution. The Governor-General made a speech there."

"You mean the American Governor-General?" I asked, startled.

"Yes. The Governor-General appointed Aguinaldo's son-in-law to the Philippine Legislature. He was not elected even by the bourgeois property-holding electorate—the Governor-General had to appoint him."

"Who is this son-in-law?"

"Oh, he's a very slick lawyer and a *politico*. He married his wife so he could become the son-in-law of Aguinaldo and the Governor-General appointed him to the Legislature so he could keep hold of Aguinaldo."

"Do they succeed?"

"It does not require much to succeed. Aguinaldo is just another *politico* who criticizes the others out of jealousy."

Another man, more kindly, said of Aguinaldo: "He is still feared by the Americans, but that is because the Americans here are so utterly stupid and ignorant. Last week there was unrest among the peasants on Corregidor Island, and the Americans began to tremble, saying Aguinaldo was organizing peasants everywhere to march on Manila to slaughter all white people!"

"And does Aguinaldo organize the peasants?" I asked hopefully.

"No!" was the indifferent reply. "He has no power to do that. And he himself is also a big landowner now. Once he fought against the Spaniards who held the peasants in serfdom through the great landed Catholic estates. But now he is himself a big landowner—he has connections with some of the secret societies, but they are feudal, narrow-minded, without guidance."

"Aguinaldo?" I asked Americans of him.

"Aguinaldo?" they replied vaguely. "We never know what he is up to. He is like all Filipinos. Tomorrow they may start an uprising. Why are you interested in Aguinaldo?" They were suspicious of any white person who wanted to meet a Filipino.

"It is my business to see every one," I argued, recalling how my father had cautiously sung songs of Jesse James.

"Aguinaldo will not see you," the American said. "He hates all white people. He has always refused to speak a word of English or to set foot on the soil of the United States—of course now he is changing. We may induce him to go on a mission to the United States."

Later I told my Filipino friends of this conversation. "Yes," one of them replied, "Aguinaldo will go to the United States like the other *politicos* to beg the American government for independence. The Americans want him to go. He will be like a traveling circus. He is the only living bourgeois *politico* who has refused so far to go down on all fours before the Americans. But a few days ago he posed for an American movie camera and talked in Tagalog. That will be a sensation for Americans."

A Filipino Communist leader said to me: "If you will read the agreement signed between the American invading army in 1898 and Aguinaldo, you will see in black and white why he has been able to live in these Islands all these years while other leaders of the Revolution were killed or fled. He compromised with the invaders. He was ignorant and believed them when they said they would get out."

I read this agreement and found the Communist leader to be correct. Aguinaldo, the hero of my childhood, had betrayed the Revolution.

For weeks I did not meet Aguinaldo. Through a thousand other impressions, now and then came echoes of him. "From this mountain cliff," related one man, "Aguinaldo fought with a small band of men, capturing one position after another. He was very brave."

I looked at the rugged cliff—so I had pictured Aguinaldo in my childhood, fighting from high cliffs.

In peasant *nipa* huts everywhere I found faded colored pictures of men who had fought and died in the Revolution of 1898. So often did the same face appear that I asked about it. "Bonifacio," they replied. Bonifacio was a working man, one of the chief leaders of the Revo-

But the question of religion was destined to come up between us later when I had an interview with the Gazi at Ankara. The then recent "Brusa incident" naturally brought the matter up. To my great surprise, Mustafa Kemal talked freely and at length. He told me his own personal views and also expressed his opinion upon the attitude of the Turkish people of today toward religion. This was the only subject on which, after full discussion, he and I ever agreed to disagree, since I believe the Turks today to be more religious than he does.

It would, of course, be highly improper for me to include here a complete account of the Gazi's personal views upon religion. It seems essential, however, in view of

the many absurd stories that he is an agnostic and even antireligious that I set down that he believes in God and in humanity's need for a God and in humanity's need and right to make appeals to God. But by this he does not mean appeals in the form of set prayers. Mustafa Kemal asked me searching questions about my reasons for being a practising Christian. He has an interested as well as an interesting personality; he wishes not only to hear your arguments when you disagree with him but also to understand your point of view. Never have I talked with a fairer-minded man than he; and this trait must have greatly helped him when, beginning first at Erzerum and then moving eastwardly to Sivas and finally to Ankara, he argued to convince the Turkish people of their right to self-government and their fitness for it.

I hurried back from leave of absence in the United States so as to arrive in time for Ankara's greatest day of the year—the anniversary of the Declaration of the Turkish Republic. October 29, 1932, was one of those clear cool days that the elevation of Ankara so often provides. In the afternoon we had witnessed an admirable parade, mostly of Turkish infantry, carrying a full equipment of ultramodern machine guns and rapid fire rifles. The flight of sixty-three airplanes maneuvering overhead must have caused the Turks to recall the crushing defeats they inflicted on the Greeks in 1921 and 1922 when they possessed only one airplane.

The official banquet to which we sat down one hundred strong in the evening was not different from a similar banquet in any great European capital except for the magnificent gold plate—a complete service dating from the days of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839).

Mustafa Kemal was that night the affable statesman and perfect chief executive. Last to receive the graceful phrases which the President was dispensing to each and all of us ten Ambassadors was the newly accredited one from Italy, Signor Lojacono. The exchange of compliments between them showed the Gazi at his best. The Italian declared that he hoped Turks and Italians would



INTERNATIONAL NEWS PHOTO

Mustafa Kemal has traveled throughout Turkey to get in direct touch with the opinions and reactions of his people in remote sections

always work harmoniously together and then added, "especially the youth of both countries." With a smile the Gazi replied: "Say, rather, the mature minds of both lands. It is all very well for Your Excellency to speak of the youth; for you have the glorious history of ancient Rome behind you. But tall trees must have deep roots, like those of the Italian and Turkish races."

I have tried to give a rapid sketch of this strange combination of warrior-statesman who, a blade welded in Turkey's schools, tempered in her wars, sharpened by her internal politics, finally cut the Turks loose from the Ottoman tradition and the débris of decadent empire. From Turkey's extreme east to her westernmost outpost, Smyrna, he patiently built up a discouraged people's spirit until it flamed out as a united nation against the Greek invaders and cast them forth. Up in high-perched Ankara, at Turkey's very heart, he constructed an efficiently functioning government of her people, by her people and for her people. Nor was he even then content; for his series of revolutions in his people's life and habits then followed, so that now, with modernized writing, numbers, calendar and laws, Turkey can and does take her fair part in the comity of nations. This remarkable Turk has made Turkey once more proud of her race, her history and her language and vastly more hopeful of her future than she has been for centuries. And with her regained pride has come such an admirable and dignified national poise that today Turkey's outstanding foreign policy seems her desire not only to cultivate friendly relations with all her neighbors but also to foment better understanding between them. The countries encircling Turkey have reacted unanimously to Mustafa Kemal's policy of improved neighborly relations, and each of them is prepared to meet him fully halfway. The peace of the Near East has no more ardent friend than Mustafa Kemal the Victorious.



KEYSTONE

General Emilio Aguinaldo, almost forty years ago, led the Filipinos in the uprising against Spain and then, when the American army of occupation tried to step into the boots of the Spanish rulers, his army, with him at its head, fought the Americans

lution. He had been mysteriously assassinated because he refused to accept the compromise made by Aguinaldo with the Americans. "It is generally said that Aguinaldo had him assassinated because he knew Bonifacio was planning to lead the revolutionary army against the Americans and against the leadership of Aguinaldo. General Luna, another revolutionary leader who refused to accept the compromise, died the same death—by the hand of 'unknown assassins.'"

Over my mind descended a depression as if I had heard of the death of a precious friend. In silence I listened, saying nothing, looking long at the picture of Bonifacio in the peasant huts. Everywhere I looked, but in no hut did I find the photograph of Aguinaldo.

Then other men told me of General Ricarte, who still lives. In 1898 he was captured, gun in hand, by the Americans. He fought against Aguinaldo's compromise. They imprisoned him in a military fortress on Guam Island for five years, then released him and offered him wealth, honor, position, in return for acceptance of American rule. What he replied I do not know. He fled the country to British Hongkong, where American agents followed him. From Hongkong he tried to organize for revolution. He was driven out of Hongkong and for years was hounded up and down the Asiatic coast by American spies, arrested by American consular authorities. He finally found refuge in Japan, where he, an old man, continues to live today, refusing to return to his country, religiously celebrating Filipino national revolutionary anniversaries and the birthdays of Filipino heroes.

In any case I would go and see Aguinaldo for myself. Finally, with his smart, slick son-in-law who is real American Babbitt in all but skin, I met Aguinaldo in the spacious, sparsely furnished rooms of the Veterans of the Revolution. It was like opening the pages of an old tale of legends when I finally stood before him. He too stood, a man some five feet six inches in height. His white Filipino coat was fastened at the throat. I studied the rugged face, heavily lined, a face even fierce, the fierceness heightened by a shock of straight black hair mowed off like a coarse brush. He was squarely built, about sixty years of age, and I had the distinct impression that he looked at me with the eyes of an enemy. Clearly, he did not regard me as a friend. I was a strange white woman, and unwelcome at that.

As I watched him in silence, I could think of nothing to say. But, knowing I could not stand like that, I began to ask the usual formal questions that I had put to the other Filipino politicians. Aguinaldo answered in monosyllables in Tagalog and his son-in-law interpreted. The questions sounded foolish to me. What I really wished to ask was that he would come with me over the ground where he had led the army of the Revolution, tell me how the army had fought and why he had signed that



KEYSTONE

In this "talkie" with Aguinaldo, are (left) his wife and (right) his daughter and son-in-law

last traitorous compromise. But such a request would sound utterly foolish. And I knew too much about him now to ask such a childish thing. I knew that he had perhaps not read one book in the past thirty years, that he was a military man, that he had lived on the prestige of his reputation with politicians and ignorant masses of the people all these years. I knew he was involved in all the petty intrigues of the Islands.

I asked him why he disagreed with the other politicians, such as Roxas and Osmeña. He said they were always going to the United States on "independence" missions at the expense of the Filipino people, living like lords and achieving nothing. They have empty, nebulous programs to deceive the people. The signs of prosperity in the Islands, he said, were artificial and did not benefit the people. Such prosperity was not good for the Islands and could vanish in a second. The Islands are mortgaged to the hilt to America.

Then I asked him what his own program was. The program of the original Philippine Republic, he answered, was the chief thing. He then told me of it. Contemp-

tuously his son-in-law interpreted. Aguinaldo's program sounded primitive and undeveloped indeed. The smart young Babbitt was most obviously ashamed of his father-in-law and was trying to get it over with. Whether Aguinaldo realized this or not, could not be seen. He stood, unmoving, watching me with unfriendly eyes.

Then I asked him if he was going to the United States and if he expected to achieve more than the other politicians.

He evaded the question. Perhaps, he said, and looked away through the window. I asked him what program he would put forward if he did. His reply was almost an identical repetition of the program of his opponents. He even said, as had they, that he would not object if the Americans kept naval bases on the Islands for another thirty or forty years after the Islands were granted their "independence." Why? I asked. "Out of gratitude for what the Americans have done for the Filipino people," he replied, in exactly the same words used by Senator Osmeña, a rival politician.

I then asked, "How many soldiers of the Republican army were killed by the American troops during the Revolution?"

"About forty thousand," he answered.

"And is it true that the American invading army slaughtered every one over ten years of age in cities and towns captured?"

"Yes."

"You told me also that all the signs of prosperity in the Islands are artificial and not good for the Islands."

"That is true."

"You say the Philippines could very well develop without the Americans, and much more healthily."

"Yes, very much more so."

"Then," I said, "tell me please, on what do you base your statement about gratitude for what the Americans have done here?"

Aguinaldo smiled strangely and replied slowly: "We cannot fight the American army. It is too strong. We tried it and were defeated."

"Then why speak of gratitude?"

He would not reply.

"Could I ask you about the peasants?" I continued. And I told him of what I had learned of the serfdom in

ASIA

which the Filipino peasants of today live, eternally in debt to usurious landlords, just as before the uprising against Spain. "What program have you for changing this?" I asked.

He replied: "The peasants are in debt because they demand too much from life—their standard of living is too high!"

I looked down through the broad, open window of the building and saw his own private car and the car of his son-in-law, and I knew that before the day was done he would drive out to his estate in Cavite near Manila. Then I looked toward the hills beyond Manila Bay, where once a man had said to me, "From this cliff Aguinaldo fought." I recalled all I had read these weeks in the Islands, historical works of the serfdom of the peasants before 1898 on the great Friar lands through whose priests Spain once ruled the Islands. It was this serfdom that led to the uprising against Spain, and Aguinaldo was the chief leader in that uprising. And now, a little more than thirty years afterward, he was himself a landlord, telling me that the half-naked, debt-laden peasants of the Philippines, those peasants still held in virtual serfdom on the big Catholic, sugar and tobacco estates, are in debt "because they demand too much from life."

"Begging from your American masters is not the only way to gain independence!" I blurted out. "You will never get your independence that way!"

"How—what do you think is the way?" he asked, and both he and his son-in-law watched me intently.

I knew it was useless. I knew that the Islands are held in chains of intellectual isolation from the rest of the world and the bourgeoisie know nothing of real world events. I knew that the White Terror was starting in the Philippines, that workers and peasants were being called bandits and savages in the press and by just such men as these. Yet, out of a desire to see just what would happen, I spoke a few words to them, telling them of the world revolutionary movement. There, for instance, I told them, also was the League against Imperialism and for National Independence, which ought to interest them. Both men straightened and asked me quickly what that was. With a feeling of futility, still I told them. They asked how Filipinos could get in that organization, and I



In marked contrast to the picture opposite is this old one of Aguinaldo and his family

KEYSTONE

told them that the workers and peasants of the Philippines had sent a delegate to the Frankfurt Congress and that the League and all such organizations were watching and publishing all the truth about the persecution of these workers and peasants in the Islands. "I will also write the truth about it," I finished.

Neither man replied. Aguinaldo's old face assumed its fierce expression, but he seemed not to understand. Over me came, for a moment, a desire to talk more to him. My childhood impression returned, and I thought I could make him understand, make him change. But silence and depression descended upon me again and we all stood with our own thoughts, saying nothing. Then I bowed and turned. Aguinaldo walked by my side to the staircase, saying nothing.

Walking away with a friend who had accompanied me but kept silent throughout, I finally remarked: "He would have made a grand figure in bronze, had he only fallen fighting for the Revolution."

The friend answered: "He would still make a grand figure if he would only keep his mouth shut!"