

BALIWAG:

THEN AND NOW

By

ROLANDO E. VILLACORTE

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IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Limited copies of this book are available at the following:

1. *Baliwag Historical Society
36 A. Luna Street*
2. *Baliwag School Supplies
Plaza Naning (near Farmacia Ramos)*
3. *Atty. and Mrs. Emilio G. Garcia's residence
Felix Lara corner A. Mabini, Sabang-Tibag*
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DR. JOAQUIN GONZALEZ

NEXT to Mariano Ponce, Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez ranks as the second most illustrious revolutionary figure the town of Baliwag has ever produced.

Belonging to the wealthy Gonzalez family, Dr. Gonzalez engaged in a lucrative medical practice in town for quite some time, with his clinic located in their big ancestral home across the old municipal building along the national highway. He used to give free treatment to indigent townmates.

Dr. Gonzalez was born in Baliwag on July 22, 1853, the son of a frocked Spaniard who came to Manila in 1829 (during the time of Gov. Mariano Ricafort) and Mariquita Gonzalez, a native lass with a caustic temper. He had the distinction of being the first rector of the first Philippine state university, originally *Universidad Cientifico-Literaria de Filipinas*. Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, then president of the Revolutionary Government, founded this institution at Malolos as the highest seat of learning in the Philippines by his decree of Oct. 19, 1898. Aguinaldo appointed Dr. Gonzalez to the position upon recommendation of Felipe Buenacamino Sr. who was at the time a member (secretary of promotion) of Aguinaldo's cabinet.

The new university, succeeded in 1908 by the University of the Philippines, was inaugurated on Nov. 10, 1898, five months after the proclamation of Philippine independence at Kawit, Cavite. It offered courses in medicine, surgery, pharmacy and law.



The outbreak of Fil-American hostilities, however, affected the university's existence. When Malolos fell to the American invading forces, Aguinaldo transferred the Philippine capital to San Fernando (Pampanga) and later to Tarlac where, on Sept. 29, 1899, the school held its first commencement exercises under Leon Ma. Guerrero. Guerrero, who is honored with a street name in Baliwag, was the second and last rector.

At the time of his appointment as rector, Dr. Gonzalez was serving as member of Felipe G. Calderon's committee created by Malolos Congress to frame the constitution. Actually he was one of 16 physicians among the elite group of Congress members representing the "best constitutional minds of the country."

Embodying the Filipino people's "cherished aspirations and political ideals," the Malolos Constitution was adopted after two months of debate --- by the 92-member Congress and it was hailed as the "most outstanding legislative achievement of the First Philippine Republic."

Gonzalez, who himself taught in the ill-fated university, obtained his *licencia en medicina* from Universidad de Valladolid and his MD degree from Universidad Central de Madrid in Spain where he spent seven years. Before he left for Spain he had finished AB at

the Colegio de San Juan de Letran (Ponce was barely nine at the time he graduated from Letran). He travelled extensively in Europe before coming back to the Philippines.

Dr. Gonzalez' mother did not recognize him at first when he came home unexpectedly. The tall, bearded doctor arrived home in Baliwag at about eight o'clock one night and started knocking loudly on the door.

"Titang," he repeatedly called in a low voice. (Dr. Gonzalez called his mother by that name.)

Señora Mariquita was roused from her retirement. She could hear only the persistent rapping, not his voice.

"Who could be calling at this ungodly hour?" she demanded temperamentally. She sent the housemaid to find out.

The maid came back and reported: "It's a Spaniard, *señora*. A big, bearded Spaniard."

Señora Mariquita was perplexed. She became more so when the strange-looking caller familiarly addressed her "Titang" and hugged her. It took her many seconds longer before she identified the once clean-shaven face.

"Joaquin!" she shrieked.

"Titang!" responded Dr. Joaquin as he burst out laughing and kept kissing her.*

Dr. Gonzalez first established a clinic at Plaza Binondo in Manila, but he later transferred it to his hometown. His first patient in Baliwag was a man who had fallen from the lower section of the church belfry.

Dr. Gonzalez left Baliwag shortly after his marriage -- at the age of 30 -- to Florencia Sioco, daughter of Jose Sioco of Bocaue and Matea Rodriguez of Bacolor, Pampanga. The couple settled down in Barrio Sulipan, Apalit, where the doctor served as justice of the peace in 1896.

After the establishment of US military government in the Islands, Dr. Gonzalez was named chairman of a three-man civil service

board with two Americans as members. Unfortunately, however, he died of appendicitis on Sept. 21, 1900 in Manila before he could assume his duties.

That a highly competent physician like Dr. Gonzalez should die of appendicitis is rather puzzling. Dr. Gonzalez knew exactly what was going to happen to him. In fact, when he heard a soldier's trumpet blowing one late afternoon from the Spanish quarters across their house in Malate, he told some friends and relatives: "Tomorrow I'll not hear that sound again." True enough he never did, for he died the very next day.

Atty. Lloret (see footnote on this same page) said his Tio Joaquin had stubbornly turned down offers of his fellow Filipino physicians to operate on him.

"Lalapain lang ninyo ako," Dr. Gonzalez had reportedly said.

Why then did Dr. Gonzalez refuse to be operated on? Did he really want to die or did he have no confidence in his colleagues' ability? "Lalapain lang ninyo ako," he kept telling them.

Atty. Lloret merely shrugged his stooped shoulders. "Yan ang nangyari sa kanya," he says blamefully.

One striking biological fact about the Gonzalez clan is the predominance of male offspring. Dr. Gonzalez was a "classic" example for all his nine children (now all deceased) were boys. One of them was Dr. Bienvenido Gonzalez who became sixth president of UP, the second state university. The others were Fernando and Jesus, both physicians like their father; Emilio, a pharmacist; Augusto, an agriculturist; Virgilio, another physician and businessman as well; Javier, a Yale law graduate; Fausto, former Pampanga representative to the Philippine Legislature; and Joaquin, Jr., an agriculturist, too. The latter was the last of the brothers to die -- a victim of paralysis in 1968. The incumbent president of Avegon, Inc. was his townmate and namesake, but they were not related to each other.

Dr. Gonzalez had long ago been honored by the town by naming after him the street where he had lived. But the municipal council of a past administration indiscreetly cut this street in two, renaming the choice half in honor

*This incident was narrated to the author by Atty. Ricardo Lloret, one of Dr. Gonzalez' few surviving nephews. Born on Oct. 17, 1886, Lloret, along with Atty. Alfonso Ponce Enrile, was the most prominent legal luminary of Baliwag in his time. He was elected representative to the Philippine Legislature in 1917 at a young age (he waited three to five days before taking his oath). He later became secretary of the House of Representatives.

of the late Don Emilio V. Rustia, former town executive and Bulacan governor.

Dr. Gonzalez' surviving kin in Baliwag wouldn't have minded so much the "gerrymander" if the municipal board hadn't given the *wrong* portion to the noted patriot. Wrong in the sense that it isn't the part where the old Gonzalez home or estate is. If this boner wouldn't be rectified, at least the eminent mestizo could comfort himself with the

thought that somewhere along his street he and his equally distinguished colleague, Leon Ma. Guerrero, meet each other even at some dusty intersections.

Dr. Gonzalez' only close relative left in town is his granddaughter Eva, wife of Bert Iral, a prosperous building contractor. Another *apo* is Enya Gonzalez-Bebout, first prima donna to sing in the States. She is now living in US with her American husband and two children.



An old album photo of Dr. Gonzalez' children, all boys. Seated from left are Augusto, Fausto and Javier. Standing, same order, are Bienvenido, Fernando, Virgilio and Joaquin Jr. Not in the picture are Emilio and Jesus. They are now all deceased. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Eva G. Iral.)



ATTY. RICARDO LLORET GONZALEZ
One of few surviving nephews