

Memoirs of a student in manila by jose rizal



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Soon to become eighteen years old and disillusioned, scarcely have I stepped on life's threshold, I direct my glance toward the first time the breath of the tempest, already engulfed, turns his glance toward the shore and reminds him of his peaceful hours. Ah, I weep for you, placid hours that disappeared from the scene of my life more rapidly and fugaciously than lightning that shines on the dark road of the traveler. So sad is my situation that I doubt if I had ever been happy at all for I doubt if those days had ever existed.

During vacation my sisters made clothes for me and during that time also my sister made clothes for me and during that time also my sister Narcisa married . . . I cannot portray here what I felt on seeing the separation of a sister whom I loved so much . . . and notwithstanding it had to be thus. I entered college then on 16 June 1875. My classmates received me well. The brother wardrobe-keeper assigned to me an alcove located in the corner of the dormitory looking out to the sea and the embankment.

It consisted of a space of about two square varas, (25) an iron bedstead on which they placed my bedding, a small table with a basin, which a servant filled with water, a chair and a clothes rack. I forgot to say that in the little table I had a drawer with soap, comb, brushes for the hair and for the teeth, powder, etc. My little money that amounted to some eight pesos, I kept under my pillow. We didn't go to the alcove but twice a day regularly, once at siesta to wash and again at night to sleep.

On holidays, in the afternoons, we dressed and we went out for a stroll. The rest of the time we spent in the study hall, at recess, in the classes, in the

dining room, and in the chapel. In spite of my thirteen years to fourteen, I was still very small, and as it is known that new students, especially the small ones, are received by the big ones with jokes, so it was on my first day, my pranks having attracted their attention. In a chorus they teased me and when they calmed down I told them in a tranquil voice: " Gentlemen, thanks. Since then they respected me and they didn't tease me maliciously.

Excepting a few, all my companions were good, simple, pious, just, and amiable. There was no one among us who would want to control the rest by force, for power is achieved through skill. I had the luck to win if not the love at last the esteem of all of them. The names of some of my classmates shall never be eased from my memory; among them that of one Jovellanos, of one Lete (Enrique) and of others whose enumeration would be very pleasant for me but I foresee will be vexing to the reader.

Our Professor was a model of uprightness, earnestness, and love of the advancement of his pupils; and so much was his zeal that I, who scarcely spoke very ordinary Spanish, at the end of a short time, succeeded already to write it moderately well. His name was Francisco de Paula Sanchez. With his aid I studied mathematics, rhetoric, and Greek with some advantage. Often I got sick with fever despite the gymnastic exercises that we had, in which I was very much behind, though not so in drawing under a teacher worthy of his name and under whose guidance I still continue to study.

I'm proud to tell you, reader, that I spent this year better than anybody else as a student, as a man, and as a Christian. Ten months passed that I haven't written anything in my diary because I don't want to relate to you inspired

occurrences, and thank God I won five medals with an immense pleasure for with them I could somewhat repay my father for his sacrifices. What sentiments of gratitude did not then spring from my heart and with what sad delight I kept them still! After having bidden farewell to my superiors, teachers, and companions, I left. . .

Who has not felt the vague melancholy that seizes the heart upon separating from one's companions? Who, at the age of fourteen years, if he has enjoyed the favor of the Muses, does not shed tears on the transition from childhood to young manhood? My arrival at my hometown in the company of a father who idolized me mitigated somewhat my sorrow, and I spent my vacation in the best way possible. I returned to college after three months and I began to study again, though the subject that I took was different. I was in the fifth year and already I was a philosopher.

I had other professors, called Fathers Vilaclara and Minoves, the first one of whom liked me very much and to whom I was somewhat ungrateful.

Although I was studying philosophy, physics, chemistry, and natural history and in spite of the fact that Father Vilaclara had told me to give up the society of the Muses and give them a last goodbye (which made me cry), in my leisure hours, I continued speaking and cultivating the beautiful language of Olympus under the direction of Father Sanchez.

So sweet is their society that after having tasted it, I cannot conceive how a young heart can abandon it. What matters, I said to myself, the poverty that is the eternal companion of the Muses? Is there anything sweeter than poetry and sadder than the prosaic positivism of metallic hearts? Thus I dreamed

then! I studied the fifth year course with the same success as the previous one, though under other circumstances. Upright, severe philosophy, inquiring into the why of things attracted also my attention as did poetry, beautiful as she alone can be, playing with the charms of nature and leaving traces that breathe sublimity and tenderness.

Physics, lifting up the veil that covers many things, showed me a wide stage where the divine drama of nature was performed. The movement, sound, warmth, light, electricity, a thousand varied phenomena, the most beautiful colors and delicate beauties entertained me during my free hours.

Polarization plunged me into a world of mysteries from which I have not yet emerged. Ah, how beautiful is science when the one teaching it knows how to embellish it! Natural history seemed to me somewhat antipathetic.

Why, I asked myself, if the perusal of history and the description of the birds and flowers, of animals and of crystals captivate me so much, why do I loathe seeing them reduced to a harsh order and wild animals mixed with tame ones? Shells pleased me very much for their beauty and because I knew that they inhabited the beaches of which my innocent imagination dreamed and treading on them I imagined the most beautiful waters of the seas and lakes lapping my feet. Sometimes I seemed to see a goddess with a shell that I saw in the shelf.

At last the end of the term came and the same thing happened to me. I carried away another five medals due to the indulgence with which my superiors treated me and to my no little luck in winning them. The day before the distribution of prizes, a feeling tormented me, the saddest and

most melancholy that I had ever felt. On thinking that I had to leave that asylum of peace in which was somewhat opened my mind and my heart began to have better sentiments, I fell into a profound sadness.

The last night on going to my dormitory and considering that night would be the last I would spend in my peaceful alcove, because, according to what they said, the world was waiting for me, I had a cruel presentiment which unfortunately was realized. The moon shone mournfully, illuminating the lighthouse and the sea, presenting a silent and grand spectacle that seemed to tell me that the next day another life awaited me. I was unable to sleep until one o'clock in the morning. It dawned and I dressed.

I prayed fervently in the chapel and commended my life to the Virgin so that when I should step into that world which inspired me with so much terror, she would protect me. The prizes were distributed, they gave me the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and I believe that any young man who was fifteen years old, loved by his companions and professors, with five medals and the degree of Bachelor of Arts, the dream of the student of the secondary course, should be very much contented. (26) But, alas, it did not turn out that way!

I was sad, cold, and pensive. Two or three tears rolled down my cheeks, tears offered as in farewell to the time past, to my good luck that would never come back, to my peace that soared to heaven leaving me alone on earth. Imagine it and you will feel if, if you have a heart. Now it remains for me to evaluate the two years that I consider the happiest of my life, if happiness consists in living without vexatious cares. In what way have I

advanced, that is, what had I learned during the first year of my residence in college?

What did I get from what I had learned? I entered college still a child with very little knowledge of Spanish, with a moderately developed mind, and almost without refined sentiments. By force of study, of analyzing myself, of aspiring higher, of a thousand corrections, I was little by little transformed thanks to the beneficent influence of a zealous professor. My mortality of that time makes me now sigh on remembering that state of sweetest tranquility of my spirit.

By cultivating poetry and rhetoric, my sentiments were further elevated and Virgil, Horace, Cicero, and other authors showed me another road through which I could walk to attain one of my aspirations. I don't know if my present state makes me see the beauty of the past and the sadness of the present, but the truth is that when I was a college student, I never wanted to leave college and that now I would give anything to get over this terrible age of youth.

Had I been perchance like the brook that, while following its delightful way amidst willows and dense flowers smiles and frolics and upon being converted into a torrent angrily and turbulently flings itself until it is buried in the sea? My second year in college resembled the first with the difference that patriotic sentiments as an exquisite sensibility had been greatly developed in me. It passed like the first among principles of logic, physics, and poetical compositions.

I had advanced somewhat in the cultivation of the Muses so much that I had composed a legend that suffered very slight correction by my professor and a dialogue that was staged for the first time at the end of the school term, alluding to the students' farewell. Goodbye then, beautiful, unforgettable period of my life, brief twilight that will not shine again! If my eyes no longer shed tears upon recalling you, my heart melts and seems to be oppressed! I have your memory here in my heart, in my mind, in my whole being. Farewell fortunate hours of my lost childhood; fly to the bosom of pure Innocence that created you to sweeten the moments of tender hearts.

Manila, 1 December 1879.