

## THREE LETTERS OF APOLINARIO MABINI

By Encarnación Alzona, Academician

At this fourth annual meeting of the National Academy of Science and Technology, I am presenting three letters of Apolinario Mabini (1864-1903) to Cayo Alzona (1869-1927), rather than let them slip into limbo or to be devoured by termites or destroyed by fire, as it has happened to the other letters.

Mabini needs no introduction to a Filipino. Every school boy or girl had heard of him and his place in our national history.

Mabini and Cayo Alzona met as students at the College of Law (*Facultad de Leyes*) of the University of Santo Tomás (*Real y Pontificia Universidad de Santo Tomás de Manila*). Mabini was highly admired by his classmates for his extraordinary brilliance. Many years later, in 1926, one them, Felix M. Roxas (1865-1936), well-remembered mayor of the city of Manila from 1905 to 1917, wrote in his column in *El Debate*,<sup>1</sup> *De Ayer a Hoy* (From the Past to the Present) about a *Promoción Notable* (A Notable Class). It was about the class in "Ecclesiastical Discipline" conducted by Father Nozaleda. In his previous classes he never gave more than three grades of "Excellent" (*Sobresaliente*); but this time he had to give seventeen. He declared emphatically, striking the table with his fist, that never before had he seen such a thing happen at the University. Roxas mentioned that the members of that class were Mabini, Aquiles Luzuriaga, Julian Gerona, Magalona, Goyenchea, José Varela Calderon, Roberto Moreno, Francisco Santamaria, Bartolome Revilla, Francisco Villanueva, Gregorio Singian, Cayo Alzona,<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Arnedo, and others he could no longer recall. Out of modesty he did not mention himself as a member of that notable class.

Both Mabini and Alzona, during their student days, taught at the *Escuela Privada de Segunda Enseñanza* (Private Secondary School) in Manila whose director was Raymundo Alindada, later one of the members of the Malolos Congress.

The first of these letters is dated 13 of September 1899 at Rosales, Pangasinan<sup>3</sup>, and deals about his election as President of

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<sup>1</sup>*El Debate*. Year IX, No. 397, p. 8, A Filipino newspaper in Spanish.

<sup>2</sup>Cayo Alzona, Licentiate in Jurisprudence (Master of Laws) 1896, *Meritissimus Sobresaliente*, which is equivalent to *summa cum laude* of the universities in the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup>First published in the *Philippine Social Science Review*, Nov. 1938, pp. 330-336.



APOLINARIO M. MABINI  
23 July 1864 — 13 May 1903

the Supreme Court by the Congress. The government of the Philippine Republic had already moved to Tarlak, fleeing from the advancing American attackers.

The original letter is in Spanish. Here is my English translation:

Rosales, 13 September 1899

Mr. Cayo Alzona

My dear friend and colleague:

I received your letter of the 6th instant. I have been told already about that document, for Panganiban came to see me when he passed through this town and he related to me the same thing he told you. The nullity

que no podría desempeñar, porque  
yo he desempeñado el cargo de Pre-  
sidente del Consejo y Secretario de  
Nuestro Excmo. Sr. Ministro, a pesar de la in-  
capacidad que me atribuyen. La ley  
dice solo incapacidad física, pero  
no dice en que consiste, porque  
si tengo incapacidad física para  
ser juez puede que no sea in-  
capaz para otro cargo, porque puede  
escribir y pensar como <sup>un</sup> hombre or-  
dinario. Ahora si dice la ley que los  
paralíticos son incapaces <sup>para</sup> <sup>funcionamiento</sup> <sup>de</sup> <sup>todo</sup>  
cargo judicial, podría todavía ambar-  
se la elección. Continúa que no que-  
do yo defendiendo y viendo que un  
uno que sepa resolver no podría  
haber sido.

Amigo mío,

Agustín Abadía

Bogotá 13 de Septiembre de 1888.

Dr. Cayo Alzona.

Mi querido amigo y compañero:  
no me poder en parte del 6. Ya me  
han dicho algo de ese escrito, pues  
Paraguanibá vino a verme al pasar  
por este pueblo y me contó lo mismo  
que a U.

La nulidad que persiguen es in-  
fundada. La elección se hizo por el  
poder legislativo en concordancia con  
el ejecutivo, y dicha elección por con-  
siguiente si no está conforme con  
alguna ley derogará la anterior,  
por no podrá ser nulo el acuerdo.  
Si la Justicia hecha el poder exe-  
cutivo, cuya obligación es ejecutar



CAYO ALZONA

1869-1927

(Photo taken at Hong Kong in 1900)

that they are seeking is groundless. The election was done by the legislative power in concurrence with the executive and consequently that election, if it is not in conformity with any existing law, will repeal the former, but the resolution cannot be null and void. Had it been done by the executive power whose duty is to enforce the law, it can be declared null and void; but the resolutions of the legislature, which makes the laws, do not infringe them, but abrogate them partially or totally, whether forever and in a general way or temporarily and for a particular case, as it happens now.

Moreover, the incapacity they allege applies to prosecuting attorneys and judges whose duties cannot be performed by persons who cannot walk, because many times they have to be in various places to conduct investigations. This is not so in the case of the President of the Supreme Court who can direct and dictate his orders without leaving his office and delegate certain duties that have to be done outside.

They cannot allege that there is no justifiable reason for the law not to be enforced, because there is no other reason more justifiable than the sovereign will of the Congress which has elected me.

Moreover, let them cite to me a function of the President of the Supreme Court that I cannot perform, because I have held the post of President of the Cabinet and Secretary of Foreign Affairs despite the physical handicap they attribute to me. They allege only physical incapacity, but they do not say what it consists of, because if I am physically handicapped to perform the duties of a judge, I cannot be necessarily incapable of performing the task of another post, for I can write and think as a healthy man. Now, if the law says that crippled men are unqualified for all judicial posts, my election could be annulled. What a pity that I cannot defend myself! They would see that they cannot do anything to one who knows how to reason.

Most affectionately yours,  
Ap. Mabini

Mabini was crippled by poliomyelitis in January 1896. Despite this physical handicap, in June 1898 President Aguinaldo invited him to serve as his private adviser; and then after the approval of the Constitution of the Republic, the first cabinet was established with Mabini as president and secretary of foreign affairs. The Mabini Cabinet assumed office on 4 January 1899 and resigned on 4 May 1899. He was out of the government when he was elected by the Congress President of the Supreme Court of Justice, who was also Vice President of the Republic in accordance with the Constitution. The Paterno Cabinet opposed his appointment and President Aguinaldo listened to it.

Although he was no longer in the government, Mabini was pursued by the Americans and finally captured him at Kuyapo, Nueva Ecija, on 10 December 1899. They imprisoned him in the Estación de Calle Anda, Intramuros, until 3 October 1900.

The following letter was written in that prison.

Manila, 5 February 1900

Mr. Cayo Alzona  
Hong Kong

My dear friend and colleague:

I received your letter of 20 January and your account of what you have seen on that rock gave me much satisfaction. I am very much surprised that it took you 55 days to reach Hong Kong. I attribute it to a slip of the pen, because I suppose that the trip would not take more than 5 days. Some say that it takes only three days. I am not surprised at your seasickness, because they say that it happens to those who sail the high seas for the first time.

Aquilino<sup>4</sup> tells me that he has received a letter from there informing him of the receipt of my replies to Wheeler.<sup>5</sup> I had to rewrite them, because I have not received the first ones. I have just received a letter from Wheeler dated there asking me to send to Washington a list of the members of the two cabinets of Aguinaldo. I have already sent it together with a statement for the Senate, commenting on the bases presented by Senator Bacon and published in *The Hong Kong Telegraph*.

Corrales came here with your trunk, because there they kidnapped Adolfo Castillo. He told me that he has a letter of Ñor Bosiong<sup>6</sup> addressed to his clients there, advising them to reveal my hiding-place to the Americans. Notwithstanding, I bear no grudge at that dotard who is proud like a child of his post as judge of the Court of First Instance of Pangasinan.

Singian<sup>7</sup> has not yet come back to see me. Thank Kahukom for his regards to me, which I return very

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<sup>4</sup>Dr. Aquilino Calvo, a mutual friend.

<sup>5</sup>Gen. Joseph Wheeler of the American Army who asked him to answer eleven questions about the Philippine Revolution and the aspirations of the Filipinos. His replies may be found in T. M. Kalaw *Las Cartas Politicas de Mabini*, Manila 1930, pp. 261-264.

<sup>6</sup>Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista, president of the Congress and Mabini's political adversary. Ñor is colloquial for *señor*.

<sup>7</sup>Dr. Gregorio Singian, noted surgeon and mutual friend.

affectionately. For the present I have nothing notable to tell you. Greet on my behalf our compatriots there.

Wishing you rapid progress in your studies.

Your friend at your command,  
Ap. Mabini

Cayo Alzona had gone to Hong Kong with some messages of Mabini for the Central Filipino Committee established there under the direction of Galicano Apacible. He remained there for a few months and enrolled in the Victoria School to study English.

The third letter was written after his return from his exile in Guam. It was typewritten.

Manila, 26 April 1903

Mr. C. Alzona  
Ilagan, Isabela

My dear friend and colleague:

I have just received your letter of 23 March and everybody in the house as well as I are most grateful for your compliments.

Buencamino with Abreu<sup>8</sup> did see me in Guam; but I could not tell him if it would be convenient for me to return or not to the Philippines, because I had not yet read the Proclamation of Amnesty. When I found out its terms, I requested that I be permitted to take the oath here in Manila, after having ascertained that I could do it without remorse. I waited five long months for the decision that I was free to go anywhere, except the Philippines, without first taking the oath of allegiance.

As it was necessary for me to know the prevailing conditions here, having received no information about them for two years that they held me there, I had no alternative but to comply with the requirement.

My only plan is to withdraw from politics, because my illness requires a more peaceful life. I do not intend to re-enter into politics, unless I see that my cooperation would be indispensable.

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<sup>8</sup>Felipe Buencamino was secretary of foreign affairs in the Paterno Cabinet. Jose Abreu was a Filipino lawyer.

With regard to my health, I am as before. I am glad that you are there with your family and I wish success in your office.<sup>9</sup>

If Don Gracio Gonzaga<sup>10</sup> lives there, please greet him in my behalf.

Needless to say, you may command me as before.

Your most affectionate friend,  
Ap. Mabini

After taking the oath of allegiance, he was offered the post of register of deeds; but he declined it with statesman-like dignity.

The harsh climate of the tiny Pacific island of Guam and the monotonous diet of canned food provided by the American army for the prisoners wrought havoc upon Mabini's poor constitution. Two months and seventeen days after his return from Guam, at eleven o'clock at night, he died. It was the 13th of May 1903.

To the Filipinos in general Mabini was the brilliant, consistent and tireless defender of their human rights, of their political independence. To the Americans he was a thorn in their side. General E. S. Otis, the American military governor, called him "the most dangerous insurgent". General Arthur MacArthur, his successor, decided to deport him, along with other Filipino patriots, to the forbidding Island of Guam. Civil Governor Wm. H. Taft reported to Washington that he was "a consistent opponent of American sovereignty and a persistent inspirer of rebellion and insurrection, and the most prominent irreconcilable among the Filipinos."

What they did not say was that the Republican administration of President McKinley was determined to hold our beautiful and rich Archipelago to serve as an American foothold in the Far East. Lying next door to the vast market of China our country was also alluring to the American capitalists. Already on the road to becoming a super power, America must not lag behind Great Britain and France, and even Holland, which held important territories in this part of the world.

Thus, with her superior military force, aided by the enforcement of a sedition law, censorship of the press, prohibition of the display of the Filipino flag, concentration camps, and other repressive measures she was able to remain in our country; and she is still here. (1982).

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<sup>9</sup>Cayo Alzona was then prosecuting attorney or provincial fiscal of the Province of Isabela.

<sup>10</sup>Gracio Gonzaga was secretary of development (*fomento*) in Mabini Cabinet.



## DISCUSSION ON THREE LETTERS OF APOLINARIO MABINI

Serafin D. Quiazon, Ph.D. Discussant

It is to Dr. Encarnacion Alzona that singular compliments be given for bringing to light some inner thoughts of Mabini expressed in three letters written sometime after he left the government service.

These letters, never before published, form a part of a private collection which, I presume, belongs to the Alzona family of which our distinguished resource person is a proud scion.

To begin with, Apolinario Mabini and Cayo Alzona met in the Faculty of Law, University of Santo Tomas during their student days and together taught during their spare hours at the Escuela Privada de Enseñanza in Manila.

Later in the course of their professional lives as lawyers, Mabini, in a note to President Aguinaldo on the composition of the Audiencia, proposed Don Cayo Alzona as one of the 13 members and hold one of the positions of Attorney-fiscals. That letter although undated was written according to T.M. Kalaw on March 12, 1899, two months before Mabini resigned as President of the Cabinet on May 4, 1899.

Seeking a cure for his health and upon invitation of the Municipal President of Rosales, Pangasinan Mabini went there and stayed in Balungaw, a barrio of the town where there was a hot-spring. That was in June 1899. Cayo Alzona, who was his private secretary stayed with him until they parted ways, partly attributable to the fact that the Americans were pursuing Aguinaldo up the north of Luzon.

Later, contact between the two was made by the first letter. Here Mabini explained to his friend the legal angles and his defense on the controversy raised by his detractors on his (Mabini's) appointment as President of the Supreme Court.

His opponents opposed because of his paralytic condition. But the real reason could be that, and this is not expressed in any of the letters of views of the oppositors, Mabini as president of the Supreme Court would also be, according to Article 40 of the Malolos Constitution, the Vice President of the Republic who would have presidential functions too "in the meantime, while the choice of the President of the Republic has not yet taken place."

The consequence of this was that the nation would be led in its struggle for independence—and during the times of the Fil-American hostilities—by a paralytic. The question that nagged, supposedly was: How effective can a paralytic discharge one of the main presidential functions in such circumstances. For according to Article 65 of the same Constitution, “The President shall command the army and navy, declare war . . . and Article 67, no. 6 which says the President was to “preside over national ceremonies and to receive envoys. . . .

This line of thinking show somehow the Paterno cabinet was totally wrong and therefore Aguinaldo rightfully listened to it.

The second letter in relation to the Republic is not very significant because by that time it no longer existed, as the Philippines was already occupied by the Americans.

What it reveals was the heroic forbearance Mabini had for one of his strongest opponents—Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista, CFI Judge of Pangasinan whom he called Ñor (short for Señor) Bosiong. Bautista in effect wanted him captured by the Americans and thereby silence his opposition to the American occupation.

Here Mabini also revealed his humanity. He said he bears no grudge at him but in the same breath he called him dotard— an imbecile or one of advanced age attended by enfeebled mentality and childishness. Let us take note of the translation phraseology: “I bear no grudge at the dotard who is proud like a child of his post. . . .”

But let us bear in mind Mabini wrote this letter in prison, two months after his capture by the Americans, to Alzona who was then in Hongkong.

Written in his residence at Nagtahan, Manila, the 3rd letter found Alzona in Ilagan, Isabela as provincial fiscal. It revealed Mabini’s delicate patriotic conscience. He wanted to be sure that remorse would not follow him to the grave if he were to sign the oath of allegiance to the American flag. It was a farewell letter to politics; he even declined the post of register of deeds in the American regime government. A certain premonition of death was surely in his mind for in two week’s time he breathed his last. It was the 13th of May 1903, 14 days after his arrival from his exile in Guam.

### MABINI SHRINE

In this house as in the hearts of all Filipinos is enshrined the memory of Apolinario Maranan Mabini. In this house were penned by him brilliant essays, letters and documents that served as guides for his contemporary Filipino leaders in the early struggles for national independence.

Born in poverty but endowed with a vastly superior intellect, Mabini stayed in this nipa house as a boarder from 1888 when he entered law school. Owned by a couple, Cecilio del Rosario and Maxima Castañeda, the humble dwelling stood on # 23 Nagtahan, Sampaloc on a lot portion of the estate of the Tuazon-Legarda, to whom the del Rosarios presumably paid rents.

It was in that house that on 23 July 1892 Emilio Jacinto consulted Mabini, then a law student, on the preparation of a draft for a newly organized secret society. He agreed and drafted in Spanish a blueprint of the organization which Jacinto later translated into Tagalog and became the Katipunan's constitution.

On Christmas day of 1893, Andres Bonifacio came here to ask advise on a planned purchase of arms for the Katipunan which he formally organized at about this time. This plan was deferred until 1895 when Mabini, already a lawyer, drafted the credentials of the Katipunan representatives to Japan to pursue Bonifacio's plan.

Undoubtedly, the house at Nagtahan sitting on a rented lot from an *ilustrado* became the birthplace of the Katipunan for here the seeds of its organization were sown.

Two months after the Cry of Balintawak, and the start of the struggle for national independence in August 1896, Mabini was paralyzed in both legs. The Spaniards arrested and brought him away from the house but not to a prison cell. Instead he was placed "under house arrest" at the San Juan de Dios Hospital until 5 July 1897.

Despite his physical handicap he continued writing; before and after his stint in the Malolos Congress he served as a paramount intellectual powerhouse of Aguinaldo's shortlived republic. Mr. Cayo Alzona was Mabini's private secretary.

During the American regime he was rearrested in Jan. 1901 and exiled to Guam only to be returned to this house in 1903 where he died, victim of a cholera epidemic on 13 May, 14 days after his arrival. He was age 39.

The house at # 23 Nagtahan Sampaloc was first located on a lot near the foot of the north approach to the old Bailey bridge (now Mabini) across Pasig going to Pandacan. In the 1930s the lot was acquired by the Ampil family from the Legarda estate, while the house passed on to Mabini's younger brother Agapito, married to Maria, a daughter of the del Rosario couple, the original owners.

At this turn of events, the memory of Apolinario Mabini was endangered of being obliterated. Whereupon President Quezon ordered an adjacent lot of the Ampil's to be bought and through Director T.M. Kalaw of the National Library and Museum, the national government acquired for ₱1,800 the house and its relics

and had them transferred to the new site which was declared in 1941 a national shrine at the instance of the Philippine Historical Committee.

Came the war and the destruction of Manila, including the Bailey bridge but the fragile shrine remained intact unlike the neighboring buildings which were reduced to ashes. As rehabilitation and progress advanced into the area the bridge was reconstructed and so expanded that its foot at the north approach at the Sampaloc side bank of the Pasig occupied a major portion of the shrine.

Decades passed and the shrine seemed to have passed into oblivion until Pres. Marcos ordered the shrine's transfer, which was completed in 23 Mar. 1966, to a 3 1/2 hectare lot located across the Pasig, opposite the old shrine site and ceded for the purpose by the Bureau of Animal Industry to the Philippine Historical Commission. On 12 Jan. 1968, the new site was finally declared the permanent shrine of Mabini.

Of thatch and pyramidal roofed and built of sturdy local materials, the house stands a few meters from the south bank of the Pasig on the Pandacan side. Its posts are of whole tree trunks, whose upper parts extend to the second floor area where their exposed portions are polished to a sheen of reddish brown. The inner walls and the ceilings are of aged sawali, partitioned by a movable divider, the spacious one-room upper floor of 15 windows is constantly wafted through by cool breezes from the Pasig; here and there are the few furnishings that served the almost heremitic needs of the intellectual Mabini: a writing desk, an aparador, a couple of thonet chairs, a chinal mirror and the familiar convalescent chair.

Except for a wooden bench in a corner and a carved wooden wreath the rest are replicas of the originals which are now on display at the Mabini Birthplace Shrine in Talaga, Tanauan, Batangas.

Today thanks to the efforts of First Lady Imelda R. Marcos, the then Chairwoman of the National Parks Development Committee, Mr. Teodoro Valencia, MH Chairman Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Jose Guevarra, monetary contributions from civic groups and individuals and, today, with the care of the National Historical Institute, the Mabini Shrine is truly a lasting memorial, albeit with the atmosphere of fragility of relic and rusticity of scenery, yet verily reflecting the lasting ideas of an intellectual and scholar who belonged to the rare breed of the first generation of Filipino intellectuals.

Gregorio F. Zaide, Ph. D., Discussant

I would like to make a suggestion, if it is possible to make the article more interesting. I suggest that the title be like this: "The Other Side of Mabini, His Three Letters," just like the *Other Side of Midnight* and the *Other Side of Alma Moreno*.

It is my great pleasure to comment on the paper of Dr. Alzona, my beloved history professor at the old UP. Most people know her as the worthy daughter of Don Kayo Alzona, especially in Laguna. I am, of course, also from Laguna. But to me, Dr. Alzona is the top lady historian of our nation, for whom I do believe some day the bell of history shall ring an eternal salute for her wonderful achievements in Philippine historiography. She has done a wonderful job now, by preserving the three letters and translating them into English so that our people now and even historians may know them. It is a lamentable fact that Spanish is dying out and yet, it is a fact also that no historian can write the history of the Philippines without knowing Spanish unless they copy from others.

Now the first letter as read to you, is relevant and viable to history for three reasons. First, this is a brilliant defense of an intellectual giant like Mabini against the malicious protest of his enemies, against his election as chief justice of the Supreme Court of the First Philippine Republic. Why the protest was given to Gen. Aguinaldo is because Paterno himself coveted that position. He did not want Mabini, his political enemy, to get in. Unfortunately, Pres. Aguinaldo heeded the protest because Paterno was in power, being the president of the Cabinet, with Felipe Buencamino as foreign secretary. Now, the question arises, supposed Pres. Aguinaldo approved, would Mabini make a good chief justice despite his paralysis? That is of course, academic.

Now the second reason, the first letter of Mabini exposes the prevalence of dirty politics in Malolos Republic, as it is now and will be in the future and till the end of time. Politics has always been dirty as evidenced by rivalries, jealousies, and bickerings that produce disgraceful incidences, such as the feuds between Paterno and Mabini, between Gen. Luna and Buencamino, and between Gen. Mascardo and Gen. Luna. These are due to dirty politics. Third reason, this letter also reveals the break-up between Mabini and Aguinaldo till death and beyond death. Mabini, sapagkat siya'y tao lamang, resented his dismissal as adviser, president of the Cabinet and secretary of foreign affairs and the disapproval of his appointment as chief justice. No wonder, when Mabini in the last chapter of his *Memoirs* (written in Guam), he blamed Aguinaldo for the failure of the Philippine Revolution. There's a moral lesson to be heeded in this Mabini's letter that is — Do not

antagonize people because some day what you antagonize may become your enemy and will do you bad. That is why I do not antagonize people. So after I die, they cannot say anything bad against me.

Now, the second letter, that was February 5, 1900, by an American general, Joseph Wheeler who asked Mabini for the names or members of the Mabini Cabinet and the Paterno Cabinet. At the same time, he sent a questionnaire for Mabini to answer. Mabini complied although he hated the Americans. But, being broad-minded intellectually, he courteously complied with the request. He furnished the names and the answer to the rest of the questions. There should have been three cabinets, namely, the Mabini, Paterno and Luna Cabinets, but the third cabinet was aborted because Luna was assassinated in Cabanatuan on June 5, 1899. That time, he was about ready to overthrow the Paterno Cabinet and formed his own cabinet with himself as head and secretary of war. As a matter of fact, the list of the cabinet, which Luna was organizing, was published in the *La Independencia* on June 3, two days before he was killed. Had Luna not been assassinated there would have been three cabinets. But the third one, was *if*. The word *if* in history means many things.

Now the last letter is about the signing of the oath. Dr. Alzona was right that Mabini's health broke down during his exile in Guam for eating too much canned goods everyday. So he had to sign the oath of allegiance to the U.S. when he was set free, in accordance with the Amnesty Proclamation of Pres. Theodore Roosevelt on July 4, 1902.

Gov. Taft, his worst enemy, wanted to stop that, and even wrote a letter to Secretary of State Elihu Root not to allow Mabini to go home, because he was the most dangerous Filipino and was an ardent advocate of rebellion and insurrection. But Secretary Root did not mind Taft's letter because Mabini's homecoming was a *fait accompli*. The Amnesty Proclamation was already proclaimed and all the exiles in Guam had returned home.

Mabini and Ricarte together arrived at the same time aboard US Transport *Thomas* in Manila on February 26 about 1903. Mabini took the oath because he wanted to go home. Ricarte refused to take it so that he was deported to Hongkong. Now, summing up, the three letters, are valuable documents in the study of the Philippine Revolution. Historians should read and know them to write a better account of the Philippine Revolution. It is to be hoped that Dr. Alzona would reveal more historical letters, like these "Three Letters of Mabini" and her precise English Translations.