

RETURN TO MANILA

The ceremony in Malacanan Palace when General MacArthur formally returned civil control of the Philippines to President Osmena and his Government had a symbolism that surely will not be lost on the Filipinos and the other peoples of the Far East, that is, if it is supported with good deeds, as no doubt it will be. As George Jones points out in a dispatch to this newspaper, the Malacanan ceremony only formalized what already had been fact since President Osmena's landing at Leyte last October. But things of the spirit often are as important as those of the substance.

The symbolism, of course, rests in the fact that civil control of the Philippines is being restored to the Filipinos at the earliest possible moment. And not to a puppet Filipino Government but to one that is in direct and legal succession to the Quezon Government freely elected at the last opportunity the Filipinos had to express their political wishes. Even the most unlettered Filipino, or other Asiatic, must see the difference between the Malacanan ceremony and that staged by the Japanese on Sept. 25, 1943, when they installed, by a hand-picked National Assembly, the collaborator Jose Laurel as "President-elect of the Republic of the Philippines." The Japanese promised the Filipinos a civic mace and gave them a lash. They promised co-prosperity and that turned out to be a one-way street. They promised the Filipinos bread and gave them stones to eat instead.

The difficulties ahead of President Osmena are many. It may be months before the Philippines are cleared entirely of Japanese. He and his Government must allay whatever bitterness lies between the guerrillas, who took to the hills when the Japanese came, and the many Filipinos who stayed behind at their desks or on their farms and carried on as near normal pursuits as possible under Japanese domination. It may take the wisdom of a Solomon to draw the line distinctly between active collaboration and unwilling acquiescence. Too, there probably will be friction at times between Filipino civil government officials and American military commanders in borderline cases where civil and military interests overlap and conflict. But these problems will be worked out, in good faith. General MacArthur's long and deep interest in the Philippines is a guarantee to the Filipinos of that.

Only one more step remains to be taken before the Filipinos are really free. By joint Congressional resolution, it lies in President Roosevelt's discretion to advance the date of Philippine Independence before the date previously set, of July 4, 1946. President Osmena expressed the hope that full independence could be announced on Aug. 13 this year, which will be the forty-seventh anniversary of the landing of American troops in Manila during the Spanish-American War of 1898. "Thus occupation day would become Philippine Independence Day," he said. It would be a happy occasion for all Asia should circumstances permit that to be done.