

## Church Bells New and Old in Manila

By SEDDIE L. BURKHOLDER

Many Philippine Island stories have been written about the beautiful historic churches, but this story will be principally about bells, church bells in Manila.

Recently the writer had occasion to be in the walled city at the intersection of calles General Luna and Real, when her attention was attracted to extensive repairs being made on the St. Paul's of the San Agustin monastery. On the thick cement roof a gang of workmen were exerting every effort to lower a huge bell to the pavement below.

Further investigation disclosed that this bell had fallen through one of two towers that graced this church prior to the earthquake of June 3, 1863, when one of the towers was laid low by the terrific shock. This 7500-pound bell has lain dormant on that roof for sixty-four years, and now it will find its voice again. As this church was reconstructed of stone after 1599, when the former wooden structure had been destroyed by fire, some idea of the age of this bell can be arrived at. It must have tolled the knell of many a celebrated personage laid to rest in the vaults or crypts of the church.

In 1643, cannon were made of the church bells and iron grills from the windows of the churches and houses during trouble with the Dutch.

Trade between Mexico and Manila was carried on for centuries by means of Spanish galleons. At the safe arrival of one of these little ships on one of its annual trading trips, the whole city rejoiced. The streets were brilliantly lighted and the church bells rang out the glad tidings, for ocean trips in those days were fraught with many dangers.

In 1898, when the Spanish Governor-General of the Philippines heard of the advance of American troops on the walled city, he issued the following proclamation in the *Manila Gazette* of August 8, 1898:

"The closing of the gates of the city in the extreme contingency of having to blow up the bridges, will be announced to the inhabitants by the ringing of the cathedral bells which will be repeated by the other parishes.

"The churches and convents will be open day and night for the admittance of all who seek refuge there."

The American veterans, who entered Manila on the afternoon of that historical 13th of August, well remember how unnecessary this order was. It was a peaceable surrender of Spanish arms, and the American forces made the people understand that they did not come to wage war upon them, but to protect them in their homes, employments, and in their personal and religious rights.

Formerly, during the early days of American occupation, the church bells tolled out each and every hour, as well as the half hours, night and day, to say nothing of feast days and high mass in the Christmas season, when the loud bells rang out their clanging summons. Those inclined to be nervous advocated the passage of a city ordinance regulating bell ringing during sleeping hours of the night. Therefore, an ordinance regulating loud and unusual noises during certain hours was passed and is obeyed.

The largest bell is in the tower of the Santo Domingo Church. Being too big to swing, it is rung with a hammer. This is one of six really fine toned bells in the walled city, but the richness of their full tones is lost in the clang of lesser ones. Feast days, and there are many, these "beautiful bells, the devotion of the people, their music foretells".

As the American colony grew, so did the Protestant churches. The Episcopalians, under the guardianship of the distinguished prelate Bishop Charles H. Brent, erected the Cathedral of St. Mary and St. John on calle Isaac Peral.

In 1908, chimes were placed in position for ringing. There are nine of the bells and they were cast in one of the famous bell foundries in Westphalia, Germany. The foundry has been in operation for over four centuries and many of the workmen have descended from families who worked in the same institution generations back. The ceremony of casting these sweet-toned bells is of a religious nature. When the furnaces containing the hot metal are about to be opened, a signal is given, and every workman stands with bared head and a prayer on his lips while the metal is poured into the molds.

The nine bells on the Cathedral are tuned so that a simple air can be played. They are made of bronze, and about the top of each there is a verse of a hymn inscribed in raised letters, a different verse on each bell. Each bell is a memorial, the largest bell weighs more than a ton. This is a memorial to John Nichols Brown and Harold Brown of Providence, R.I., founders of Brown University. The second bell is dedicated to the memory of the officers and men of the United States forces who fell or died in the Philippines. The third is dedicated to British subjects who have spent their lives in the islands, and the fourth bears an inscription in honor of the officers and men of the corps of engineers of the army. The fifth and sixth bells are the gift of the 22nd U.S. Infantry, memorials to General Harry C. Egbert. The seventh is a memorial to Henry and Sofia Brent, father and mother of Bishop Brent. Dr. Wm. D. Noble, father of General Robert H. Noble, U.S.A., is the subject of the memorial inscription on the eighth bell, while the ninth is in memory of Rev. H. M. Torbett, who was an intimate friend of Bishop Brent.

Any evening at the sunset hour, strolling about the Luneta, the church bells for the evening vespers can be heard in the distance.

SEÑORES, N. W. "Jack" Jenkins: Philippine Education Company, 101-03 Escolta, Manila: paper, pocket-size, 277 pp., price P2.50 \$1.25; chimes of Manila and Manilans collected from the author's series in the old *Manila Times*: some clever, some so-so, some dyspeptic.

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