

Rizal As An Agriculturist

By HERMINIA M. ANCHETA

A country, like ours, after its rehabilitation and reconstruction has to cast her eyes and appraise her industries which among them can be of immense help in these processes. The Philippines is by and large an agricultural country.

Agriculture is of a paramount importance in the reconstruction of its ruthless destruction wrought by the invader. There is gold in the agricultural lands, vast virgin soil in our country. To speak of agriculture is to call to mind Jose Rizal's many sided-genius whose interest in farming was prominent. In the execution of this industry one necessarily has to fall upon some model. Rizal, that highest denominator of Filipino genius really creeps into our lives at all times and all reasons. He could very well serve as an inspiring spirit and a pattern of emulation for the

youth in particular. For it especially behooves the youth to strive to help preserve the remnants of human dignity and life.

The interest of Rizal in farming was evinced in his early years by his love of nature and outdoors. A charming description of his childhood home—a little cottage of nipa in the middle of a garden under the shade of the bananas and other trees reveals this interest.

Rizal concretely showed his liking for farming when he was deported to Dapitan. Being a scientist at heart, he discovered wonderful sources of specimens in Dapitan and the other parts of Mindanao. Some of the specimens he gathered from the coasts were shells, bugs, and new varieties of plants. He once wrote to his unforgettable friend, Blumentritt:

"In order to be happy I lack

only my liberty, my family, and my books. . . . But in recompense, I am very near nature, the murmur of the leaves, and I see the continuous waving of the palms agitated by the breezes."

As an agriculturist Rizal wanted others to love nature. When he taught his boys in Dapitan he included nature study in his curriculum. This subject consisted in helping Rizal collect his specimens of flowers, shells, insects, and reptiles.

He required his pupils to engage in practical farming activities. The recess period was then spent in building fires in the garden to smoke the plants and drive away the insects, or in manuring the soil and pruning the lanzones, nanca, and other trees.

The adult people of Dapitan were taught the use of modern agricultural implements which he had bought from abroad. He taught the Dapitan farmers how to use them to a great extent.

Once luck came along his way when a lottery ticket which he and the Commandant F. Equillen bought together won a second prize, the share of each being P6,000.00. Part of this money he spent in buying a piece of land along the bay a few hundred meters east of the town of Dapitan, and here he constructed his home made of bamboo. Here he lived with his wife Josephine.

Later on, however, he bought a rather extensive piece of land. Here he dreamed of building another Kalamba. He gave his sister Trinidad an attractive picture of the site to inspire her to join him. He wrote to her: "My land is half an hour from the sea. . . it is very poetic. There are *dalag* and *pako*."

To interest his mother, he told her of his land with 6,000 abaca plants, of their beauty, and of the fertility of the soil. Rizal could not be blamed for his enthusiasm because there came a time when his *lanzones*, *cacao*, *caluno*, *mango* and *nanca* were heavy with fruits.

This desire to build a new Kalamba was expressed in some fragments of a letter to his brother-in-law, Manuel Hidalgo. They run as follows: "You can come here and have a big hacienda. The government is going

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to grant three months' exemption from service ... All the people of Kalamba, Tanawan, Lipa, etc. can come with their implements. We will establish a new Kalamba!"

This was one of the instances when Rizal dreamed of establishing an agricultural colony. On one occasion, a colony was intended in Mindanao. It was in the sitio of Ponot where he thought of planting coco, coffee, and cacao. On this site he had in mind to raise four to five thousand heads of cattle. There was a good port nearby and plenty of water in the streams. The government gave him authorization for this project but later for unknown reasons the same government placed obstacles on the way.

Once again, when Rizal planned to found a Filipino colony in Borneo, his aim was to establish an agricultural colony. Among the plants he wanted to cultivate there was sugar cane.

There were other reasons which prompted Rizal to become a farmer. He did not want to dedicate himself to anything else but to agriculture. The only means by which he could assure his future. To quote his own words: "Although of speaking of agriculture I myself am not one by profession, I would remain here and dedicate myself very willingly to the soil..." "I am turning agriculturist because I hardly practice medicine here."

According to Father Pastells, this kind of manual labor was too common and vulgar for Rizal, but Rizal engaged in this work because he thought that planting coffee and cacao was one way of cooperating with God.

Rizal wanted his people to be farmers because he wanted them to love real manual work. It was his one great desire to make them see that real wealth in life is in the soil and that there is gold and life in farming. To engage in farming is to be nearer God, for are we not a part of nature itself?

In this time of scarcity of food and clothing one should learn lessons from Rizal's attachment to the soil. One way of solving the problem of food is to dedicate more time to planting vegetables and crops such as corn, rice, sugar cane, and others.

We likewise wished the people to engage in hard manual labor, which planting involves, in order to give them practice in the hardening process.

As an agriculturist Rizal was modern and scientific, a fact proved in the first paragraphs of this article. He was diligent and practical. For instance, from his sixteen hectares he could obtain an annual income of approximately two thousand pesos.

He delved into the secrets of plant, land, and discovered wonderful riches which he contributed to the progress of knowledge. He once turned his attention to horticulture and in

less than a week he planted over 500 pineapples in the lot near the government house, in addition to bananas and a few coconut trees. For a simple man to accomplish this in less than a week needs extraordinary diligence and will of iron. With the help of this students he formed a good-sized herbarium and noted the characteristics of each species.

He was loyal to agriculture, for he was a man not given to defeatism. On these occasions, he wanted to found an agricultural colony.

He was also economical. Rizal's activities as an agriculturist were part of the Rizal way. Thus if we wish to live the Rizal Way we should learn to like farming as Rizal did.

Nature never failed to stir the poetic urge in Rizal's soul. When he was in Dapitan he wrote a poem entitled: *Hymn to the Talisay Tree* as an indication of his love for tree planting. Recall the following lines:

*"Hail, O, Talisay!
Firm and untiring,
Ever aspiring,
Stately, thy gait
Things everywhere
In sea, land and air,
Shalt thou dominate."*

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