

Rizal's Characters in Modern Setting

(SECOND OF A SERIES)

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Don Jose Crisostomo Ibarra

CRISOSTOMO Ibarra is, in many ways, a self portrait of the author of the *Noli Me Tangere*. His being the son of a substantial landowner who has fallen from the good graces of the Spanish authorities; his having visited his sister and his sister's friend often at La Concordia in his youth; and his having been educated in Europe and returned to his native land with dreams of reforms for the progress of his country and the happiness of his people are very evidently autobiographical. Of course there are differences between Crisostomo Ibarra and Rizal, such as their ancestry and the early death of Ibarra's parents. These differences, however, are merely for literary purposes. It is very evident that through the lips of Crisostomo Ibarra, Rizal wanted to give his people his views on the social, educational, religious, and political reforms needed in the Philippines during his time.

Rizal was very much preoccupied with educational reforms. Thru the *schoolmaster* who was presented to the readers in the first article of this series, he expressed his views regarding the language of instruction, corporal punishment, teaching materials, vitalized instruction, etc., views which would still be good for the present community schools. Thru Crisostomo Ibarra, Rizal presented his idea of a good school building and implied that he believed in a balanced academic-vocational curriculum.

But Don Crisostomo Ibarra was more than a school founder. He was a lover and a social reformer who had to choose between one and the other. He could not attain happiness in marriage without abandoning the social reforms which he sought, and he could not work for reforms without sacrificing his love for Maria Clara. For as reformer he had to step on the toes of the Spanish authorities, who in turn could meddle with his love affairs, create incidents, fabricate charges against him, and throw him into jail without benefit of a fair trial. For love of his dead father who had been wronged and whose remains had been desecrated by the Spanish authorities, and for love of his country, he decided to sacrifice his personal happiness.

If Crisostomo Ibarra were to return to life he would be very happy to see so many public and private

schools not only in Manila but also in the provinces. The magnificent buildings of the public and private colleges and universities would delight him. Not in vain, he would think, did he risk his life at the laying of the cornerstone of his projected schoolhouse in his native town, San Diego, which was never to be completed, but which was to become a symbol and an inspiration for generations to come.

He would be happy, too, to note the emphasis placed on community education by the school system, and he would certainly be delighted to see the parish priest and the school officials working together, each independent of, but cooperating with, the other in the important task of community improvement.

If he looked for the civil guards he would be happy to find them replaced by the police and the constabulary, both composed of his own countrymen who, generally speaking, no longer abuse the people. And Oh! how we would enjoy visiting modern hospitals and clinics manned by competent physicians who have long since replaced the *de Espadañas*.

But not everything would be a source of happiness to him. He would perhaps be sad to note that there are still thousands of countrymen believing in superstitions; that the poor still live in filthy homes; still waste money on lavish fiestas; and are still victims of usury and greed. He could not fail to note that thousands of quack doctors are still enjoying their illegal practice and that some officers of the law are still resorting to the third degree in order to extract false confessions and using fabricated evidence to secure convictions. This type of law officers and those who extort money and connive with underworld characters would surely arouse his ire over again! Visiting the national library, which would remind him of those which he used to frequent in Europe, he would certainly be shocked to read in back issues of newspapers and magazines that as late as the post-war days, before Magsaysay became Secretary of Defense, some officers of the law could be so cruel to the people in Negros, in Cavite, in Nueva Viscaya, in Malinala, Pampanga, and in the barrio of Masilo, Pila, Laguna.

With regards to the country's school system it might sadden him to note that some of his country-

men, following his example after traveling abroad, have tried to introduce educational changes upon their return, but that they have done it so indiscriminately that the school system has not been adequately responsive to the needs, problems, and psychology of the people. The use as the language of instruction of a foreign language imposed by a power which wrested the Philippines from Spain at the turn of the century; the emphasis on occidental culture; and the adoption of textbooks, materials and methods which have been found satisfactory in America without considering the needs and limited resources of the Philippines would perhaps make him look back with pity and sadness as he returned to the other world.

Maria Clara

Maria Clara, a child of uncertain paternity, was acknowledged and raised as a daughter of Capitan Tiago, a wealthy landowner and businessmen. Her mother died soon after her birth, and Father Damaso, a Dominican friar, who stood as sponsor at her baptism, had a profound influence over her father and her upbringing. She was a beautiful girl who embodied the Filipino woman's modesty and charm, her filial obedience, and her faithfulness in love. Wealth and social position had not spoiled her into assuming an aristocratic Western air as less advantages have spoiled Doña Consolacion, wife of the Alferez, and Doña Victorina de Espadaña, wife of a fake Spanish physician.

Torn between filial obedience and love, she remained faithful to her love without defying her elders. Matched in marriage with a foreigner she never loved, she quietly bore her secret sorrows instead of flaring in open rebellion. She became ill and almost died in

the process. In the end she chose the nunnery as a compromise between the two.

If she were permitted to return and to observe contemporary life in the Philippines, Maria Clara would find the Filipino woman more educated, more self-reliant, and more competent in many ways. But she would find it difficult to believe her eyes when she saw women lawyers, physicians, engineers, and — of all things — politicians! It is only in remote rural areas that she could find women with the simplicity and shyness of the women of her vanished generation.

Going to the movies which have replaced the *moro-moro* plays of her days, she would perhaps shudder with fear lest her countrymen blindly adopt the Western ways of blind dates with their free necking and petting, whirlwind courtship, and easy divorce. Invited to a dance she would perhaps note how lavishly falsies and fancy trinkets are used to give a false impression of a charm which is not there, and which lacks the basic foundation of spiritual goodness and beauty. She would perhaps feel nostalgic as she saw young men and young women dancing the waltz, but she would certainly shudder to see her modern sisters going thru the gymnastics of the rock-n-roll and the calypso.

Called back to the other world, Maria Clara would leave the dance hall not knowing whether to be happy or sorry that she was born to her age and not to the present. Then, on second thought, she would perhaps wish she were born half a century later, for then there would have been no Spanish curates and no civil guards to frustrate her love for Crisostomo Ibarra and his for her. Instead of a brief, stolen meeting on the *azotea* she might then have enjoyed a perfect honeymoon followed by a normal married life.