

# The Philippine Craftsman

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## SPAIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO PHILIPPINE AGRICULTURE.

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**A**GRICULTURE in the Philippines, according to later Spanish writers, might be believed to have begun with their countrymen's coming, while Dr. Regidor, a comparatively recent Filipino authority, attributed to Japan the invention of Filipino agricultural implements. But China, Japan's teacher, is now known to have been acquainted with these Islands almost as early as she was with the insular kingdom to their north, and pre-Hispanic conditions may yet be realized from a study of non-Christian tribes who never came under Spanish influence. Among the Ifugaos, for instance, are to be found effective cementless stone dams, irrigating ditches running for miles along precipitous hillsides, even crossing the faces of cliffs, and irrigated terraces extending for thousands of feet up the mountain sides, constituting, as Professor Worcester once wrote, "impressive examples of primitive engineering \* \* \* beside which the terraced hills of Japan sink into insignificance."

The Italian chronicler of Magellan's expedition too, was impressed with the abundance of provisions in the newly found archipelago, and mentions that the inhabitants nearly all tilled their own fields. Morga, almost a century later, regrets that the natives have forgotten much about farming, poultry and stock raising, and cotton cultivation since the Spanish conquest. This decline may be in part attributed to the rapacity of the "encomenderos," the Spanish conqueror's companions who were rewarded by making them feudal lords over the natives, partially to the advice of the friars who did not want their new converts' wealth to tempt Spaniards to such cruelties as had been practiced in the Americas, and in greater measure than to either of the foregoing, probably, to the unsettling influence of simultaneous sudden and radical changes in government, religion, and social and economic conditions.

Yet it is likely that among the *encomenderos*, rough soldiers of fortune but likewise ready, some saw and suggested improvements over old ways, and, as the religious teachers were mostly from Spain's country class, not a few of the friars probably proved proficient farmers.

Gov. Joseph Basco y Vargas in 1784 attempted to compel observance of paternal laws of the Indies which had come to be disregarded, but he was not political economist enough to recognize how much more important individual ownership of farms was than the distribution of community lands and that supplying capital to the farmers was the way to prevent usury. Of equally good intentions and wiser in its workings was the Economic Society of the Friends of the Country which he had founded three years earlier.

Of this society's strictly agricultural activities, the first was endowing a professorship of agriculture in 1823. At the same time a competition was opened for essays on "The Causes Which Hinder the Development of the Agriculture of the Country." Six years later, three machines for hulling rice were obtained from North America, and in the meanwhile, manuals on the cultivation and preparation of indigo (a reprint) and on the cultivation of coffee had been distributed. The society, too, encouraged the Government's project of establishing a bank which it was hoped would furnish capital to the planter.

Before 1850 investigation was made of the practicability of cultivating the poppy and making opium in the Philippines; cash awards were paid planters who had over 60,000 coffee plants in readiness for the second crop; a prize was offered for the invention of a machine for combing abaca fiber; support was given a second attempt to acclimate in the Islands the martin, a bird which destroys locusts; and an exhibit of Philippine products was provided for the London exposition.

Likewise Philippine sugar-cane seed had been sent to Hawaii, Cuba, and that of rice to Sevilla, in Spain; a horse and two mares of superior blood had been imported for breeding; attempts were made to acclimate tea from Java in the Philippines; data on silk culture were collected; and the propagation of sea-island cotton from seeds obtained from the United States, attempted.

In 1836 machines for hulling rice by steam power and on a large scale were introduced, and in 1834 abaca was exported for the first time. The manila hemp industry, as it was called, was developed through the American commercial house of Peele, Hubbell & Co., and supplied American shipping with cordage. A monument to Mr. Hubbell, the first American consul, who

inaugurated the trade, stands in Plaza Cervantes, Manila. In 1843 a steam machine for extracting abaca fiber was imported.

In 1854 a commission was appointed to report to the society upon the existing state of agriculture in the country and the obstacles which would have to be removed for its complete development, this materializing in 1859 in a project regarding agriculture and commerce.

May 26, 1862, the society recommended, in an exhaustive report, the establishment of a school of agriculture, combining practice with theory, in Manila, and three years afterward a monthly contribution was begun for the botanical garden, as a practical school of botany.

The next year the Batangas cattle fair was granted seven cash prizes; in 1867, ₱500 was appropriated to purchase plows, spades, and other farming implements for the sufferers from a terrible inundation in Abra and Ilocos; and in 1868, gold and silver medals were offered for monographs on "The Means which the Government and the Society Can Employ to Secure the Development of Agriculture in the Country." Among these means seem to have been considered the establishment of a savings bank and public loan office, and an annual fair and exposition at Manila. Likewise a commission was appointed to consider the possibility of an agricultural bank. Bulletins were published on the cultivation of coffee and cacao, the abaca industry, and the cultivation and manufacture of sugar.

The termination of the Government tobacco monopoly, in the early eighties, was a big advance, compulsory planting rules having even led at times to the whipping of farmers whose returns had been unsatisfactory.

Notable mentions are found of exporting rice, of a hundred kinds of rice from the Visayas, regarding getting two rice crops a year, and encouraging the use of wheat flour, probably in a time of rice shortage.

Nothing particularly new differentiates the present projects from the past, but the great contrast in policy is that individual initiative is fostered rather than governmental control, and in practice one cannot help but recognize that how is being *done* what formerly was *talked*.

Besides the name of Hubbell, in connection with abaca, there are those of Looney, an Englishman, who started the sugar industry in the south, and Reynolds, an Englishman naturalized in America, who began the copra trade. These three lines yet remain the Philippines' most important exports outside of tobacco.