

Romantic Episodes in Old Manila Church and State in the Hands of a Merry Jester—Time

By PERCY HILL

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IV

THE CROSS SINISTER

In the latter part of the 18th century Don Alonso Pacheco, an old retired captain of infantry, one of the *invidios*, as the Spaniards call them, had his residence within the walls of old Manila. It was on calle Santa Lucia, the street that takes its name from the day, in the year 1600, on which the redoubtable de Morga somehow managed to float ashore on his mattress after his engagement with the Dutch privateer commander, Van Voort. That the city was not taken and sacked by the audacious Dutch pirates was considered a miraculous deliverance.

A small pension from the Spanish crown enabled Don Alonso to support his family. To be sure, it was not a large family. They were only four, Don Alonso and his wife, Doña Saturnina, their daughter, a very sprightly creature, Señorita Inez, and an ancient and distant relative, Doña Paula, not by any means too old to indulge some sly mischief-making at Don Alonso's expense if opportunity offered. Doña Saturnina was stern and domineering; where her husband was concerned her arms were always akimbo and her temper ready primed for the match. At the time our story begins she was, of course, no longer young. Her figure was not one to take pride in, and it was rendered the more corpulent by her fondness for rich sweets and wines. According to gossip—however, her reign over her husband had begun rather early.

In the small parish back in Spain where they were married, there was a miraculous well, the waters of which, if drunk by one newly married, were supposed to give power to rule over one's household. It was said that immediately after the nuptial benediction had been pronounced, Don Alonso left his bride at the altar and ran hastily to the well to drink. Doña Saturnina was not so easily outwitted. She had procured a bottle of the water before leaving for the church, and concealed it beneath her wedding veil. She now availed herself of it, and drank while Don Alonso ran.

One of Don Alonso's greatest trials was that his stout wife was very devout. Her confessor regularly had from all the captain's secrets and small *pecadillos* as well as her own, and she always appeared greatly horrified when her embarrassed husband complained of the indiscreet bounds of her devotions. Silence of Doña Paula upon such occasions convinced Don Alonso that he had no support from her. As to his daughter Inez, she was just at

the age when a lover is the most important thing in life, and nothing else matters. In her position as a sort of general factotum and duenna to Inez, Doña Paula was quite safe from the ire of either party in the frequent wordy quarrels. Whatever may be said of Spanish pride, and much may be said for it, in Spanish households there is a surprising freedom from restraint. Dependents do not feel the haughtiness that may dominate elsewhere, and they need not be obsequious.

In the matter of a suitor for his daughter's hand, Don Alonso had made a tactical error. He had already declared his choice, the son of an old comrade-in-arms living on calle Cabildo; and of course it fell out, as quite naturally it would, that the young man, Don Toribio, was not pleasing to Inez and was unacceptable to her mother. He had, they argued, neither career nor expectations. His suit did not prosper, the captain was once more exasperated at the perversity of his family. After violent yarning the question over, he determined that for once he should stand his ground; the family arrayed against him and things were soon on a war basis. Don Alonso's acquaintance with siege and onfall, sally and ambush was profound; a limp, a crippled leg, and a torso mottled with memories of many a hand-to-hand encounter, were full warrant to the crown in decreeing him a pension; for where Spanish arms had contended in the eastern seas during the last half of the 18th century, there Don Alonso had been, a gallant cavalier at the head of his men.

Trophies of conflict adorned the walls of his home, the *trabuco*, pistols and halberds; on his daily afternoon promenades he carried his trusty Toledo sword, with its plain ivory hilt and its supple steel blade. But pose and strut and expostulate as he might, his women remained firm against Don Toribio's marrying Inez. They would not surrender.

His cholera rose still more when he found their choice to be a young medical student in Santo Tomas University. Like all soldiers, he had an undying hatred for members of the quill and parchment, with whom he readily catalogued students of law or medicine; so, when the student was encouraged while Don Toribio was contemned, the failing old captain felt the first twinges of apoplexy.

Don Ricardo was the student's name. He was a boisterous young fellow, of a good family in distressed circumstances, dependent upon the galleon trade to give them the scanty existence; for their share in the trade was very small and the risks of every voyage were very grave indeed. However, when Don Ricardo should have his diploma from the university there would be patients enough, whether his remedies were good or ill. All would then be well, and he soon rich. He was, moreover, violently in love with Inez and as much sear upon having her for wife as he was upon having ancient old Santo Tomas for his alma mater. With the one ambition, Don Alonso was not concerned; the other he was still resolved to thwart by what means he could.

In those days the University of Santo Tomas was the principal seat of learning in the islands. It was founded in 1605, long before any institution of its type in America. Its professors, of the regular clergy, were resplendent in green togas trimmed with scarlet. They enjoyed many privileges, while the graduates were the foremost men of the colony—often called, by the Spaniards of those old times, the Republic, probably from the church's predominant participation in its affairs, decided by the votes and councils of the friar communities.

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. The course of Don Ricardo's love not running smooth, his thoughts strayed more to the possession of Inez as wife than to possession of a diploma from Santo Tomas; his medical studies suffered from his melancholy; Inez was a lodestar that drew his mind away from the art of Galen and Hippocrates; she was indeed a ravishing Spanish beauty and could not fail to turn the head of any youth upon whom her beauty beamed with graciousness.

But Don Alonso was ever on guard. When Don Ricardo would go in the evening with his guitar to pour out his soul beneath Inez' window, it was never a dainty white scarf that beckoned over the casement, but always the angrily bobbing nightcap of the old captain, who would accept no parley. However, Inez found ways of communicating with her lover, who was never allowed to grow really disheartened. As to her father, she endeavored in vain to soothe his feelings with his favorite dishes, prepared by her own dainty hands, that beseeched him with caresses when he expressed appreciation. All this had no more effect than the gentle admonitions of the genial friar, the father confessor of the family. So, all else failing, stratagem was resolved upon.

It was arranged between Doña Saturnina and Don Ricardo at one of their apparently casual street meetings, and the first steps were that both mother and daughter assumed a martyr attitude in Don Alonso's presence, quite upsetting him with their remonstrances. Doña Saturnina prophesied that the wrath of Holy Church would fall upon him for his bitterness; the stocky friar, made privy to the scheme, added his warning to weight the argument.

The family worshipped at San Agustín Church. Like all good Spanish Catholic families, they rarely missed a morning mass; and anyway, they were always especially admonished by the deep tones of the organ and the shrill voices of the *tiples*, plainly to be heard on calle Santa Lucia. After the stratagem had been planned, Doña Saturnina made it a point to enter the church first, her usual custom in any case, to dip her finger tips and make the sign of the cross, as do millions of good Christians every day.

Habit is of course a part of life itself; upon this invariable habit Don Ricardo had based his stratagem.

Next morning when the family returned from mass, all pointed to Don Alonso with expressions of dismay and pretended horror. On his forehead was the faint outline of a cross, in black. A mirror revealed the truth of all they said. Plainly worried, Don Alonso tried to pass it off as a joke: They all said with one voice it was not, and that it was a visitation. Next morning, the same thing happened, and the

following morning, Sunday, as well. Don Alonso consulted his closest friends, who referred him to the learned clergy. But the clergy could explain nothing, nor allay his fears. Consensus of opinion among them was that Don Alonso had committed some terrible sin, and that this was a divine visitation in consequence of it: the cross sinister only appeared after he had been to mass, outwardly in a state of grace but inwardly bearing rancor in his heart.

Truth was that Don Alonso was old. Worry quickly led him to fear. When Doña Saturnina perceived it, she intimated that the black cross might be a warning from heaven itself for him to withdraw his opposition to Don Ricardo. Again her husband's anger overcame him, but next morning the cross sinister reappeared and the lamentations of the family were renewed. Don Alonso's neighbors, knowing nothing of the strategem, began making their own conjectures; even his old military cronies began shunning his company; no longer could he visit them, and over a generous glass of Valdepeñas or Rioja review the old campaigns.

It was too much. Don Alonso abandoned his custom of a daily *paseo* and became low in spirit. At length he capitulated outright: he walked in constant fear and had quite lost his appetite.

Don Ricardo, apprised quickly enough of all that happened, now renewed his serenades, and his adored Inez was no longer forbidden to drop a rose or *sampaguita* blossom from the window and breathe her love in sweet whispers over its grilled casement. The wedding soon came and all went happily with the young couple; the eyes of the jovial father confessor twinkled as he blessed them. The great bells of San Agustín chimed their merriest, sounding out the glad tidings to all Manila. There was a banquet and a ball at Don Alonso's house on Santa Lucia. *Fandangos* and *jotas* and *cariñosas* were danced with all vivaciousness and grace in honor of the groom in his braided tight garments and the bride in her rustling silks and gorgeous *mantilla*. Toasts were drunk without number; the fiddle, the guitar and the hautboy made the day noisy if not precisely harmonious, and long into the tranquil night the revelry lasted. The guests divided into groups: those who had memories and those who had hopes were equally gay, what with the wine and the music and the beaming countenance of the father confessor.

The secret of the happy ending was that Don Ricardo in his study of chemistry had learned certain of the properties of nitrate of silver. It was this that Doña Saturnina touched to her fingers, and when she dampened them in the font and gave her hand to Don Alonso, of course the cross he made on his forehead was outlined in black. It may not have been quite ethical, but Inez loved Don Ricardo no whit less for having the wit to think of it; and it was never gossiped about until Don Alonso had gone to a brave soldier's just reward in another and less quizzical world, where, if there are windmills, they need not be contended against.

Rubber In The Philippine Typhoon Belt.

A. H. MUZZALL

In order to get more data on the controversy as to whether or not rubber can be grown in the typhoon regions of the Philippines, a party was organized, composed of several technical men from the bureau of forestry and the Bureau of agriculture, accompanied by me, to go to Sorsogon to study conditions on the plantation of the Alkazar Rubber Company.

The rubber plantation of the Alkazar Rubber Company is situated about 20 kilometers from Legaspi, on the road to Sorsogon. This plantation was established in 1912 by a German by the name of Frank Hoelzl. The land was cleared of secondary jungle and planted in rubber. Part of the area was interplanted with rice for two years. The seeds were obtained from Singapore and planted in seed beds on the property. When the trees were about six months old, they were transplanted in the field at distances varying from four to six meters. After about two years, due to the death of Mr. Hoelzl, the plantation was abandoned and the secondary jungle again took possession. The present owner, Mr. Alkazar, has started to clear up the property and bring the trees into tapping.

Due to the continuous rainfall during the month of January while the party was on the property, no records of yields could be made, but over 350 trees were marked and prepared for tapping and a study made of their present condition. It is estimated that there are about 6000 trees now living in an area of approximately 20 hectares. Naturally, these trees vary greatly in size due to the lack of care which they received. None of the trees show a size which is expected of a 12 year old tree.

The soil is very patchy. There are places where the growth is very good and the soil is deep. In other places, the soil is very shallow, being underlaid sometimes with a layer of adobe and sometimes with basalt. Among trees planted on the shallow soil where the tap root was not allowed to develop, we found many windfalls. The fact that these trees were blown over and still living instead of being broken off is evidence that the strong winds are not as much responsible for the damage done, as the poor soil conditions.

The general topography of this country is rolling and good sized trees were noted on tops of knolls where they were exposed to the wind, but had not been blown over because of the well formed tap root.

The present owner has begun tapping operations and plans to make plain sheet which will be marketed in Singapore for the present. The crop is already contracted for at Singapore market prices. There are several other small groves of rubber in this region and a great many people in the locality have started additional plantations of their own. The Alkazar Rubber Company has sold during the last few months over 80,000 seedlings to various people.

The principal drawback to large plantations in this district is the continual rainfall, which lasts for several weeks at a time. The individual plantation, or a

plantation which requires only a few laborers, will not be seriously hindered by this continual rainfall because owners can tap heavier during the periods of good weather and rest the trees during the rainy weather.

It would not be practicable to handle a large labor force along these lines. Also, due to the variation in the soil, this country is better suited to small areas planted and operated by individuals.

The persistent propaganda by the enemies of Philippine rubber development, alleging the destructiveness of typhoons, should receive a definite setback by the fact that rubber is growing successfully in the heart of the typhoon belt. It has already been definitely proved that there are hundreds of thousands of acres outside of the typhoon belt. The probability is, no region in the Philippines should be eliminated from the potential rubber land due to typhoons. That is, plantations operated by individuals or where a small labor force is required. The fact is that the crowns of these trees growing at Sorsogon showed practically no damage from wind and that the trees were not broken off. These that were uprooted showed defective root systems, due to the underlying rock, and would undoubtedly be broken off in any of the rubber producing countries. The people in this district should not hesitate to plant up small areas of rubber where the soil is fertile and deep for they will be assured of a good return on their rubber.

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