

## The Plowman: Custodian of National Wealth Ignored

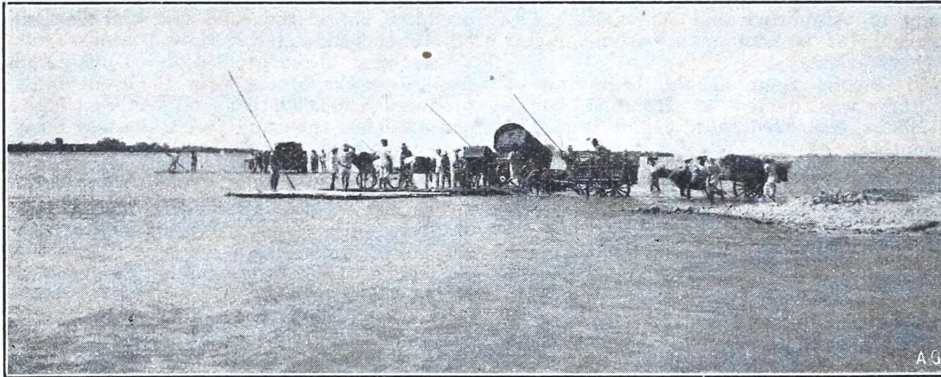
HIS SELF-IMPROVEMENT STILL A NEGLECTED TRUTH

BY MANUEL M. INSIGNE

On the extreme western border of the great Pacific, the Philippine group stands like a faithful sentinel guarding America's interest in the Far East and helping to preserve her sphere of influence in the Mongolian and Malayan fields of international relations. This group consists of more than three thousand known islands and four thousand unknown — all rigid and irregular but endowed by Nature with an unusually fertile soil, considered

to be the producers of the country's wealth and the best contributors to the national coffers. Thus we see a powerful element in the Philippine community, who, though neglected, are nevertheless entitled to all just consideration and favor; and above all, to the proverbial American altruism.

In the fields of commerce and industry, the American is contributing a great deal to the welfare of this Filipino friend. Here his theory of altruism seems to meet



Crossing Abra River at "Abra Gap." Where Gales Sometimes Sweep the Rafts Out to Sea. Commerce Is Greatly Retarded in the Ilocos Provinces for Want of a Bridge at the Abra River

to be one of the richest on the surface of the earth. "Tickle the ground in these islands and great wealth springs from the soil" was the statement of an old Spaniard.

In Japan, where the soil is not naturally very fertile, the small proportion of arable land is much overcrowded. Here is, therefore, an advantage of the Philippines over her empire neighbor; one could wander for days and weeks through an extremely fertile country without noticing the least sign of man's efforts to cultivate. The soil is mainly of decomposed volcanic rocks enriched by decayed organic matter. It yields luxuriantly both exotic and indigenous growths of tropical, subtropical and even temperate zone crops. The islands are productive of more than three hundred fiber plants of commercial and local value. Food producing plants grow in vast variety and profusion. There is, indeed, wealth in every inch of ground in these beautiful islands of the east. How to extract that wealth from the bosom of mother earth is a problem unsolved to the present day. There are hands, and millions of them, but hands are not enough without the necessary assistance of able men.

That the Americans are here for altruistic purposes seems a truism that needs no proof; but at the same time, a farce that must be admitted. When finally these islands were ceded to the United States through the Treaty of Paris by Spain, the policy of "indefinite retention . . . . . for the purpose of developing the prosperity . . . . . of the Filipino people" was clearly enunciated by succeeding Washington administrations. Under more than twenty-five years of America's tutelage, the Filipinos were able to improve considerably in various stages of life and in some lines of human endeavor. This is particularly true in politics—so much so that political progress seems to be a virtue, and economic stability a crime; notwithstanding the fact that a great majority of the Filipinos are destined

with a favorable impression in the way of paving the road of progress. But we of the Philippines, some of us, at any rate, are brother. But we of the Philippines are prone to ask the question: Is that the end of the perfect road?

The Filipinos are by nature and circumstance an agricultural people. It is not strange, therefore, that ninety per cent of the inhabitants are directly or indirectly interested in the improvement of their agriculture. Upon them the middleman depends for all the commodities to supply his trade. These people are the assets of a vigorous race whose achievements and contributions to the national wealth are the best means to redeem their country from economic bondage. In the light of sound reasoning, it must be admitted that the chief concern of every patriotic citizen in all walks of life should be towards the improvement of living conditions and all possible betterment of the circumstances of the plowman, the sturdy producer of wealth, the soldier of the soil.

The Philippines are inhabited by 11,632,762 souls. A vast majority are destined to be tillers of the land. These are the men who do not continually agitate themselves by partaking of the ceaseless bickerings and mud-slingings of political leaders. According to an impartial critic and observer, these people are a select group whose interests and affections are concentrated upon their families, their homes, their labors and their petty diversions and pleasures, and to the community to which they belong and for which they will die. They pursue their own happiness in life uninterruptedly; and their labors are to them a source of great pleasure. Generally speaking, an average Filipino of the agricultural element does not burden his mind with the momentary issues of political topics. A close and intimate study of a Filipino of this type reveals the fact he is by no means of a political enthusiast. He

understands that to subject himself to the constant grit and grind in the fields with a view to increasing his production, is just as important if not more patriotic, than crossing eight thousand miles of rolling sea to campaign for immediate independence.

The approximate land area of the Philippines in hectares is 29,629,000, 41.3 per cent of which is adapted to agricultural industries. Up to December 31, 1924, only 3,712,712 hectares were under cultivation, leaving approximately 11,102,088 hectares uncultivated, of the explored regions. It has been too often said that the Filipinos have progressed remarkably during more than twenty-five years of America's tutelage. This may be true in speaking of little trifles, but perhaps not of the real progress which they should make, if progress is at all desired. There is so much work left undone. The painful truth points us to a great percentage of Filipinos receiving no appreciable degree of improvement in the pursuit of their own happiness. Here the hypothesis of American altruism is badly in need of positive proof.

We cannot underrate nor overestimate the unhappy tribulations suffered by the uncultured Philippine farmers. Seeing them toiling in the vast valleys, unaided and neglected, is equivalent to listening to a vigorous protest against the vicious intolerance of their unscrupulous brethren—men who, like the Dead Sea, absorb everything and give nothing in the form of commensurate returns to the man behind the plow. Hence the need of a good Samaritan or a Simon to share with them the burden of their cross.

Barefooted, the Filipino farmer plods be-

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hind his primitive plow and his diminutive carabao day by day, exposed to the scorching heat of the tropical sun and the beating of the rain, while his brothers pass by him in comfortable limousines. A strange contrast, indeed, is before us. One is a producer of wealth, the other is a devourer of the same. Whatever may be the farmer's need to increase his produce,—which is possible only by the use of new methods and modern implements,—cannot be realized because of the indifference and lack of interest of those from whom he has the right to expect assistance. Yet these are the very men whom he provides with daily bread, by the sweat of his own brow. It is very natural, therefore, that he should shift his attention from his very kith and kin, to those from foreign lands who prove to be his disinterested and unselfish friends—the Americans.

In answer to his crying needs, a few kindly souls rushed to the rescue and tried to replace his age-old plow with modern agricultural machinery; and educated him in the importance and advantage of cultivation—not mere plowing. But unhappily, just as their efforts began to be rewarded with successful results, the personal interest of these very men also began to wane, and their enthusiasm dampened in a moment's notice. This is perhaps due to the fact that the same men have been lured by other attractions in the commercial fields where more money could be amassed with less effort exerted. And just as the Filipino began to realize the advantages of using such agricultural machinery as tractors, threshers, disc or steel-tooth harrows and other farm implements of general use, his American friends left him abruptly to his own primitive ways of farming.

When the tractors were introduced in the vast fields of sugar and other plantations, generally the result was a decided success. In places where agricultural machinery was available, the farmer could raise at least two crops of rice or corn in one season. This machinery led to the use of economical motor fuel in the Philippines. Quoting from the testimony of a few planters and hacenderos in Negros and Calamba, we read in part: "The Philippines are burdened with high prices for gasoline, kerosene and distillate, which rule at about double those quoted in Hawaii. This accounts for the very rapid development of alcohol motor fuel manufacture in the Philippines. The island of Negros at the moment has three motor fuel distilleries in operation with a fourth being erected, while Luzon has two such distilleries in operation. The daily production of these plants is rated at ten thousand gallons." The proprietors go on to say that the sugar planters are satisfied that by limiting themselves to the purchase of certain wellknown and established makes of machines, they can compete with animals in field operations. "We look, therefore, for an increase in the demand for tractors in keeping with the growing demand for motor fuel." This is the substance of the views of those planters and farmers who feel that it is impossible for the greatly expanded and rapidly growing agricultural industry to go back to the carabao.

In 1903, of the 2,827,704 hectares, 1,298,845 were under cultivation. These figures were increased during a period of fifteen years, when agricultural machinery began to invade the Philippine fields. The census of 1918 shows a total of 2,415,778 hectares of land cultivated out of 4,563,723 hectares (that is, under private title), or an increase of from 45.9 per cent of 52.9 per cent in fifteen years. The following table shows how the production of certain staples and crops were increased during the last five

years, showing the area cultivated, the quantity and value of crops produced and the average yield per hectare.

Year	RICE		Quantity Thousand Kilos	Average Kilos	Value
	Area Hectares				
1920	1,484,895		1,562,784	1,052	\$127,427,692.00
1921	1,673,381		1,783,577	1,066	78,946,340.00
1922	1,661,430		1,867,784	1,124	69,967,540.00
1923	1,675,870		1,882,992	1,124	74,737,945.00
1924	1,737,910		1,787,540	1,029	86,478,645.00

Year	TOBACCO		Quantity Thousand Kilos	Average Kilos	Value
	Area Hectares				
1920	101,123		64,894	642	\$ 13,382,973.00
1921	90,980		52,799	580	4,388,787.00
1922	59,870		29,927	500	3,009,935.00
1923	64,730		32,806	507	3,407,400.00
1924	72,090		43,323	601	5,752,710.00

*Centrifugal Sugar Mills and Their Production From 1920-21 to 1924-25  
All 34 Mills*

	Metric Tons
Daily Capacity in 24 hours	27,845
1920-21	162,117
1921-22	229,538
1922-23	224,320
1923-24	317,492
1924-25	483,367

The figures for the year 1924-25 are an estimate. The estimated national wealth of the Philippines in 1923 amounts to \$2,747,741,000.00 ninety per cent of which is contributed by the man behind the plow, either directly or indirectly.

The above figures show the gradual increase of production every year of the different crops in the Philippines in the Filipino crude way of producing them. We are left to wonder in the face of these facts how much more would the production be, if the Filipinos could be given the chance of employing and using modern agricultural machinery like the farmers in other civilized countries. Up to the years 1922 and 1923, different dealers in agricultural machinery seemed to be over enthusiastic. They introduced tractors, for example, of four or five makes. The result was a success as shown by the voluntary testimony of planters, proprietors and farmers. After a time, however, the enthusiasm seemed to have died out, suddenly, for reasons known only to the dealers themselves. Testimony from the buyers revealed the fact that the reason for the dampening of enthusiasm on the part of the dealers was not the lack of patronage but rather the lack of interest on the part of the men who handle the sales, to educate the Filipino in the use of these modern implements. The Filipino is willing to learn new ideas and introduce innovations. He is receptive of any modern change that may come to him through the help of his American friends. This was clearly shown in political and educational undertakings. But in agricultural changes the problem remains unsolved.

In the case of tractors, plantation men express their unmeasured satisfaction in the use of these machines. Having learned how to extract fuel from molasses for the use of tractors, they also realize that they are able to save a great deal in using the newly discovered motor fuel. This is another reason why they should demand, and they do demand, tractors. While the popularity of these machines is now limited only to the sugar plantations in the Philippines, no one should lose sight of the fact that vast fields of rice, abaca, corn, maguay, tobacco and other crops are yet untouched by the tractor.

This business was at a stand still during the past few years not because the demand was low but because the Filipino farmers

were confronted by serious difficulties in the use and operation of machinery. The dealers have left them with their new mach-

ines without the proper instructions to follow, or the necessary help, such as able mechanics and expert drivers. The result is that in many places the machines stand idle and rusty; and the farmer has had to go back to his age-old native plow and carabao. In this way the Filipino farmer, the man behind the plow, is neglected, a custodian of national wealth ignored, whose social position and standard of living constitute a paramount problem still unsolved to the present day, and whose self-improvement seems to be only a remote possibility. If it is true that "the sociological value of the business man as an envoy of peace and goodwill has long been recognized, whose good offices have won special recognition in the Philippines," what shall America do to ameliorate the social and living conditions of the soil tillers, who form a powerful element in the economic stability of these eastern islands?

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