



THE CARABAO ~ THE FARMER'S FRIEND AND HELPER

by A. Litonjua

WHEN you see a carabao bathing in a muddy hole in the countryside, think of the many years it took its ancestors to travel from their earliest home in north-eastern India to the Philippines. From India they journeyed first through south-western and southern China. Then they went on Chinese boats called junks to the southern and southeastern countries of Asia. They made their homes in Siam, the Malay States, Japan, the Hawaiian Islands, and the Philippines. Others went westward from India. They made their way to swampy lands of southern Europe.

Some writers tell us that the carabao was introduced as early as the year 600 into Italy. Today carabaos plow the small fields of the farmers outside Naples, a big city in Italy. From Hawaii the ancestors of our carabaos went to Brazil and other countries of South America. In these tropical countries as elsewhere, they give milk to the people and they pull their heavy loads.

It is interesting to know the different names other countries give to this animal. The English name for the carabao is water buffalo. In Malaysia the people call it *kerbau*; in China, *niu*; and in India, *arnee*.

The carabao lives best in hot places with much rain. In fact, it loves to stay in the rain for hours. You and I cannot stay in the river four or five hours everyday without getting sick. The carabao can. You have heard that a duck likes to swim and

dive in pools and streams. But a duck cannot beat the carabao when it comes to bathing. The longer a carabao wallows in the water, the better he feels. It never gets sick from long and frequent baths because it has a very thick skin with very little hair on.

The carabao's skin has very few sweat glands. This means that a carabao sweats very little. After staying three or four hours in the sun, the carabao has to drench itself in some water hole. If it stays longer in the heat, it becomes restless and easily angered. It may even go mad. We sometimes read in the newspapers of crazed carabaos who run wildly along the fields and kill people. The heat makes them that way.

But when the carabao is well-cared for and treated right, it is a very friendly and useful animal. It plows the fields before rice planting. After the rice harvest it helps in the threshing.

The female carabaos are kept for the milk it gives and for breeding. The male carabaos or bulls are used for pulling sleds and carts and for plowing and harrowing.

The milk of the carabao is said to be richer in body-building contents than the ordinary cow's milk.

The carabao then is one of our best animal friends. It is one of the most useful helpers of a farmer. That is why we should be kind to it.