

- The record of Philippine institutions of higher education has improved during the last fifty years despite obvious handicaps.

THE PHILIPPINE PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN RETROSPECT

The organizers of this celebration of the Golden Anniversary of the passage of Act No. 2706 approved in 1917 recognizing the Philippine Association of Private Colleges and Universities has assigned to me this subject. It is quite appropriate for a man of over 70 years as I am. For somewhere in one of the ancient books we find these lines: "*The old men dream dreams and the young men see visions.*" A retrospect is in reality a dream of past events. It is a necessity for the mind and the emotion of man. To dispense with it is to be without a sense of history, thus to be thoughtless and hopeless, a pitiable victim of amnesia.

On the other hand, young men with vision are indispensable, for the experience of history tells us that people without vision perish.

For this purpose, our program makers are right when they assigned to our able young man, Dr. Narciso Albarracin, the subject of "The Private Schools: Today and Tomorrow," which provides us with a view of a bright actuality and a vision of an enhancing, encouraging, and effective assistance in our educational work. Then we need to realize, as the subject of our other speaker, Dr. O. D. Corpus, reminds us that our country is in a state of change.

In persuading me to accept my assignment, Dr. Cresencio Peralta, the active and able chairman of our program committee, told me that all I have to do on this occasion is to repeat what I have written in a booklet recently published with the title "The Case of Philippine Private Education." Frankly, I did not welcome his

suggestion for if I would closely follow it, I would have to waste two or three hours of the valuable time of this audience. Instead, I thought I would confine myself this evening to a few remarks on the development of our private schools since the first days of this century.

Long before the passage of Act No. 2706 in 1917 by the newly organized Philippine Legislature under the Jones Law, the Taft Commission, which was made up completely of American members, had passed a law creating the Department of Public Instruction in less than six months after it had began the exercise of its legislative powers. This took place on January 21, 1901. That law was primarily concerned with the organization of public schools but it provided that nothing in it should "be construed in any way to forbid, impede or obstruct the establishment and maintenance of private schools." Thus by implication, the operation of private schools was legally recognized and respected. This was to be expected of the American government which

has always been the advocate and protector of democracy, intellectual freedom, and free enterprise.

In those early years of the American occupation the private schools were still run after the Spanish model. The Spanish language continued to be used in the existing institutions of higher education. Their instructors and students were not sufficiently acquainted with the more modern American methods of instruction. Consequently, their graduates hardly had enough knowledge of English to meet the entrance requirements of the newly organized University of the Philippines and other government colleges or to qualify for civil service positions. Under such conditions there was much dissatisfaction with their courses and methods of instruction.

But in a few years, those private colleges began to realize the necessity of adopting the newer educational procedures; and as the government discovered that they actually reformed their courses and methods, a number of them received official authorization to confer de-

grees and award diplomas. This and other privileges encouraged more private institutions to apply for government supervision of their courses of study, methods of teaching, textbooks, and equipment in the expectation of receiving similar privileges. Consequently, the Department of Public Instruction's curricula and plans of study, which was the principal basis of official recognition, began to be voluntarily adopted by them. No compulsion was used to force any private college to follow government regulation; but it was the practical thing to comply with it for with the official symbols of distinction their graduates could be readily accepted in government schools and colleges and in the civil service.

But as Filipinos acquired greater knowledge and mastery of modern education and its administration, the rule of prescribing a uniform and rigid schedule of courses and other instructional ideas which obviously prevented initiative and experimentation in private colleges began to show its disadvan-

tages to Filipinos of thought and foresight. Without being consciously and widely felt, it created a real danger to individual freedom. It made authoritarianism superficially advantageous and insidiously preserved the colonial spirit of intellectual parasitism. The Filipino newspapers at that time showed a remarkable grasp of principle and moral independence when their editors criticized the action of the Department of Public Instruction under American control as an arbitrary threat to the freedom of education and the spirit of nationalism.

It is remarkable how those early ideas of Filipino writers were later practically upheld in their essence by those decisions of the United States Supreme Court and State courts on educational freedom handed down from the year 1923 to 1947. Their basic theme has coincided with past and present views expressed by liberal thinkers and progressive writers in America and European countries on education, specially higher education.

It is, therefore, strange that in 1917, when both Houses

of the Philippine Legislature were already in the hands of the Filipinos, Act No. 2706 was passed providing for compulsory inspection of private schools and colleges by the Department of Public Instruction. Still that law did not require a person to secure a permit for the opening of a private school. Uncritical observers considered this omission a defect of the system which in their minds was responsible for the poor education produced in private schools at that time as if a permit could necessarily assure an adequate educational quality.

At any rate in 1925, the Monroe Board of Educational Survey in the report of its findings on the condition of the Philippine educational system recommended legislation "to prohibit the opening of any school by an individual or organization without the permission of the Secretary of Public Instruction." Making the Secretary the Czar or dictator of Philippine private education, the Monroe Board suggested that certain conditions be laid down and followed be-

fore such permission should be granted. Those conditions are good provided they are intelligently, not arbitrarily and mechanically, applied by qualified official chiefs and supervisors. Realizing this prerequisite the Monroe Report particularly stressed the necessity of an adequate staff in the Department of Public Instruction to be composed of "men and women who have the scholastic, professional, and personal attainments" to pass on applications for opening private schools and to make their supervision effective and sensible.

Among the defects of private schools pointed out in the Monroe Report were the absence of a law or regulation which would prevent a person "disqualified by ignorance, greed, or even immoral character from opening a school"; the lack of sufficient knowledge of the science of education on the part of private school heads; the absence of teachers familiar with modern teaching methods; and the paucity of up-to-date textbooks and laboratory and library facilities.

Strangely enough most of the reasons for the weakness and defects of the private schools outlined in the Monroe Report were practically the same defects which the public schools also suffered according to the same Report.

The difficulty of securing new teachers with adequate qualifications was indeed felt not only by the private but also by the public schools. There were very few qualified ones available. In the public schools the Monroe Report stated that about 18 per cent of them had less than four years of training beyond the intermediate school; less than 33 per cent had an education equivalent to graduation from a four-year college. As to professional training, 68 per cent of them "had no professional work in education, however meager, in high school, normal school, college or university." Their teaching experience was meager and unsatisfactory.

These deficiencies were naturally present in the Filipino private schools at that time which received no gov-

ernment support of any kind. But as the record shows those Filipino private schools did not stagnate. They struggled to improve their faculty, their courses, and their products. Their graduates even at that time were able to provide the nation with much of the man-power needed in the professions, in private business enterprises, in education, and in government service.

In his book *The Philippines* published in 1945, Dr. Joseph R. Hayden makes this noteworthy remark: "By 1929, the schools which had brought discredit upon the reputation of private education had either been eliminated or been brought up to standards of equipment, instruction, and administration which were comparable with those of public schools. As a result of these accomplishments, private education as a whole was rehabilitated in the eyes of the public." As Secretary of Public Instruction till November, 1935, these words of Dr. Hayden prove that the conditions of the private schools 5 or 6 years after the Monroe survey had markedly changed

for the better and, as a group, the private institutions no longer merited the criticisms indiscriminately cast against them in the past.

In another passage in his book Dr. Hayden categorically declared: "Both sectarian and non-sectarian institutions in many instances are taking advantage of *their freedom from state control* to adapt themselves more readily than government schools can to modern trends in education and to changing local educational needs. Through the secondary level, at any rate, the private schools are free to set higher standards than the Bureau of Education, which is limited by the capability of the average child and some of them have taken advantage of this opportunity." Whether we take these statements at their face value or with a grain of salt, coming from a man of responsibility, who was a scholar and was once Secretary of Public Instruction, they show that in general private schools had appreciably improved to the extent that they had adapted themselves to modern trends in

education more readily than public schools.

Without tiring this audience with a statistical comparison of the conditions of the private educational institutions at different periods in this country, it should be stated that in 1924, the total enrollment of private schools recognized by the Government was 73,246. In 1964-1965, the annual report of the Director of Private Schools shows a total enrollment of 1,379,868 students. In about 26 years, therefore, the increase of the student population in the private schools was more than 10 times while that of the country's total population was hardly 3 times. The number of college and university students alone two years ago reached a total of 390,454. There were 4,393 private schools from the kindergarten to the university level. In the collegiate and university level alone, there were 463 institutions of which 27 were universities.

Dr. Hayden commented in his carefully written book that "in addition to relieving the government of an appreciable proportion of the fi-

nancial burden of education, the private institutions of learning are making a distinctive contribution to the intellectual life of the nation."

The Director of Private Schools reported that for 1965-1966 the private secondary schools alone would have cost the government, if it had operated them, from ₱21,356,055 to ₱170,864,563 on the basis of the wide-ranging cost per student in different public high schools, or an average of about ₱96,000,000 a year. These figures do not include the cost of buildings and equipment. The same report states that more than 80 per cent of the college students of the country are in private institutions of higher education. In the academic year 1964-1965, the total number of college and university graduates from private institutions was 67,359. The degrees granted to them were in practically all careers and professions including agriculture, technology, medicine, teacher training, social sciences, philosophy, fine arts, nursing, etc.

This impressive record of

growth has not been confined to mere quantitative terms. A comparative study of both academic and professional achievements of their graduates as against those who have completed their courses in public secondary schools and colleges discloses a marked improvement of the competence and quality of their products. In most professions and areas of intellectual work, the average public school product is far from being superior to the private college graduate.

Given adequate freedom and encouragement to the spirit of initiative and creativity by the removal of government control on their academic activities and decisions, private educational institutions may reasonably be expected to strive after a superior degree of achievement in their work.

In retrospect, we need to remember that the tradition of higher education obtaining in this country today has its roots in the American system, a system based on diversity and liberty. While it is our duty to develop educational practices and

programs adjusted to our special needs and our national demands, we should not ignore the basic principles of that precious tradition of educational freedom if we do not want to see the growth of our educational institutions stunted and our educational system marred by the rigidity of ideas fostered by a policy of narrow standardization and uniformity almost amounting to regimentation.

It is time that we begin pulling down our monolithic

structure which mars the educational landscape of the democratic community we have chosen to establish and develop. This can be done only by adopting in actual practice the constitutional principle of autonomy for our institutions of higher learning. — V.G. Sinco, *From a speech delivered early this month to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the recognition of the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities.*

NOBEL PRIZE

The fact that the Nobel Prize was not accorded to me was doubly pleasant: first, because it saved me from the painful necessity of dealing in some way with money — generally regarded as very necessary and useful, but which I regard as the source of every kind of evil; and secondly, because it has afforded to people whom I respect the opportunity of expressing their sympathy with me, for which I thank you all from my heart. — *Leo Tolstoy.*