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## EXCELLENT!! *Our Sense of History*

By Encarnacion Alzona



**B**EFORE THE establishment of the Commonwealth in 1935 Philippine education was entirely dominated by foreigners—first by the Spaniards and afterward by the Americans. Thus,

for more than four centuries since the coming of Spain the Filipinos had no direct voice in the determination of the type of education that they should have on account of their status as a subject people. However, leading Filipinos, the thinking and patriotic Filipinos, had not been altogether inarticulate during that long colonial period. Even under Spain, when they did not enjoy freedom of speech, they voiced their sentiments in respectful petitions in which they pointed out to the authorities the great need in this country for primary schools as well as schools of agriculture, trades, and fine arts. Such schools, though they left much to be desired, were eventually established and remained in existence until the end of Spanish rule in 1898.

Under the American regime the Filipino nationalists manifested great concern about popular education. Their most eloquent and brilliant spokesman, Manuel L. Quezon, later to become the first president of the Commonwealth, on the occasion of the installation in 1915 of Ignacio Villamor as the first Filipino president of the University of the Philippines, the highest institution of learning supported by the State, said:

“ . . . We are spending every available cent of the public coffers (for education) not only because we want our children to learn what they need to know in order to face successfully the

national problems of life and to satisfy their intellectual wants, but also in order that they may become patriotic Filipino citizens.

“Note please, ladies and gentlemen, that I said ‘Filipino citizens’, and I mean it.

“We want our boys and girls to be taught that they are Filipinos, that the Philippines is their country and the only country that God has given them; that they must keep it for themselves and for their children; and that they must live for it, and die for it, if necessary. This is the thought that I want strongly to impress upon the President of the University of the Philippines . . .”

THIS STATEMENT has not lost its aptness and timeliness to this day. In fact it might as well be repeated and pondered in this thirteenth year of our Republic when we are striving to maintain the institutions of a free society and to build a nation sufficiently strong and vigorous to resist the assaults of a new and formidable imperialism that is threatening to destroy throughout the world human freedom and dignity—the freedom and dignity that free men have won at the cost of so many painful sacrifices, so much blood and sorrow, and which are still denied to millions of men in the benighted regions of the globe.

The adherence of the Filipinos to the free institutions of the West can easily be appreciated by glance

ing at their past. The establishment of a Spanish rule here in the 16th century inevitably exposed the inhabitants of these Islands to Western culture. Among other things Spain introduced the Roman alphabet. By the 18th century it had replaced the indigenous ones, its use having become general throughout the Archipelago. The adoption of this Western form of writing had far-reaching cultural implications. For one thing it brought the Filipinos intellectually closer to the Western nations than to their Eastern neighbors and for another, it facilitated and hastened their reception of Western ideas. It is noteworthy that one of the cultural trends of our times is the movement in the Oriental nations which had adhered to their indigenous alphabets to adopt the Roman alphabet realizing its usefulness and convenience in a world that is fast contracting, figuratively speaking, due to scientific advancement and the resulting revolution in the means of communication and transportation as well as in the methods of warfare. In this respect the Filipinos enjoy a cultural advantage for having adopted it centuries ago.

**U**NWITTINGLY Spanish rule intensified the innate passion for education of the Filipinos. The Spaniards found the inhabitants of these Islands in possession of written languages and according to the first Spanish chroniclers

themselves, every man and woman here could read and write in their own characters, adding that they were so fond of reading their writings that the missionaries had to destroy them, believing them to be the cause of their slow conversion into Christianity.

This highly commendable literacy, however, was to decline markedly during the Spanish regime due to the change in the system of writing and the government's neglect of public education, which was one of the principal grievances of the Filipinos against Spain. When finally Spain, heeding the clamor for popular education, promulgated the Educational Decrees of 1863 that provided for the establishment of primary schools for boys and girls in the towns, the people still complained that she did not establish as many and as good public schools as were needed. It was significant that as soon as the Filipinos were able to establish a government of their own—the short-lived Philippine Republic (1899-1901)—they forthwith provided for free compulsory education and even created a university at Malolos—La Universidad Literaria—while war was still going on and they were fighting for survival against great odds.

Although Spain neglected the education of the masses, on the other hand she provided for higher education, establishing colleges and universities, not of course for



the benefit of the Filipino originally, but of the Spanish children who could not be sent for one reason or another to the mother country for their education. In the course of time and through persistence, driven by their passion for learning, select Filipinos gained admission to these educational institutions and even under the most adverse circumstances acquired an education equal to that possessed by the educated Spaniards. Thus arose an elite of educated Filipino intellectuals; imbued with Western ideas, culturally the equal of the educated Spaniards and in truth of educated men of all countries at that time.

THE RISE of an intellectual elite among the Filipinos had tremendous implications for the future of the country. For it was this elite that became the ardent champion of their oppressed country that clamored for better educational opportunities for their people, that provided the essential leadership in the popular movement not only for social but also economic and political reforms, that denounced in vigorous accents the excesses and abuses of the Spanish officials in the Islands, that inspired the masses to rise finally in armed revolt against Spain. An articulate and patriotic elite, it became the object of persecution quite understandably by the Spanish colonial authorities. These Spaniards were not stupid. They knew that the educated Filipinos—the *ilustrados* as they called them—were a real menace to Spanish sovereignty over this colony, or *La provincia española de ultramar*, as Spaniards preferred to call it. Rizal's mother, Teodora Alonso, clear-sighted and highly intelligent woman, with an accent of sadness said to her husband when the two were discussing the education of their gifted son who at 16 already held a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Ateneo Municipal de Manila: "Don't send him any more to Manila; he already knows enough; if he gets to know more, he'll be beheaded." Her prophecy was tragically fulfilled. And not only her son but many other Fili-

pino intellectuals in the flower of manhood met the same tragic end, sacrificed on the altar of Spain's imperialist design. Indeed, during the Spanish period in the Philippines higher education was intimately associated with unhappiness, with tears and sorrow.

Soon after the Americans had succeeded to destroy the ill-fated Philippine Republic, they organized a civil government for our country, filling some responsible positions in it with Filipinos drawn from our intellectual elite. They named Cayetano Arellano, legal luminary, chief justice of the Supreme Court and five other noted Filipino lawyers were made associate Justices—Victorino Mapa, Manuel Araullo, Raymundo Melliza, Ambrosio Rianzares, Julio Llorente, and Gregorio Araneta. Florentino Torres was appointed attorney general. To the second Philippine Commission, the highest legislative body then, were appointed Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera, Jose Luzurriaga, and Benito Legarda. Many other educated Filipinos—lawyers, physicians, engineers, surveyors, accountants, pharmacists, teachers, skilled penmen—all trained during the Spanish era, were drafted into the government service.

**O**THER FILIPINO intellectuals, such as Rafael Palma, Jose Palma, Fernando Ma. Guerrero, Cecilio Apostol, Epifanio de los Santos, Rosa Sevilla, Florentina

Arellano, and Jose Abreu, were active in journalism, writing for the organ of the Filipino nationalists—*El Renacimiento*.

These Filipino intellectuals spoke and wrote in Spanish, so that for the first three decades at least of the 20th century, Spanish was the most used official and journalistic language in the Philippines. This being so, the official documents in our archives—the records of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government—pertaining to that period as well as the writings of many of the thinkers who then flourished were in the Spanish language. Hence, when the



learned Senator Claro M. Recto was asked at a public forum held under the auspices of the Order of the Knights of Rizal on May 15, 1959 by a university professor as to whether he was in favor of the teaching of Spanish, without the least hesitation he replied in the affirmative, citing the reason just stated. In truth the Spanish language has become part and parcel of our culture and a command of it is rightly regarded by the intellectuals as an essential part of the equipment of the educated Filipino. It is fortunate there are still Filipinos possessing a mastery of this Western language, for enlightened governments in the world today are encouraging the study of modern languages in response to the demands of world politics and international trade. They realize that the possession of as many modern languages as one can acquire gives many advantages not only to their possessor but also to the country to which he belongs. Filipinos in general have an aptitude for learning languages and two or three modern languages will certainly not be an intellectual burden to them. The Spanish-educated Filipinos at the arrival of the Americans in a short time acquired an admirable command of English.

**WHAT** FORTHWITH endeared the first Americans in the Philippines to our people was their zeal in opening public schools and in teaching the Filipinos the Eng-

lish language even before the pacification of the country. For this reason Filipinos lavish praises on those pioneer American teachers.

As a result of the introduction of the principle of freedom of education by the Americans, private schools have multiplied and flourished in this country. Today, as an evidence of their prosperity, they are housed in imposing edifices and they are constantly enlarging their plants despite the fact that they rely solely on tuition fees for their maintenance, a phenomenon that arouses the wonder of many a foreign observer. Their large number and prosperous condition clearly demonstrate the continuing passion for education of the Filipinos upon whom they depend for their support.

Higher education received an impetus in 1908 with the creation of the University of the Philippines, which is patterned after the American state university. The private educational institutions officially recognized as universities are now twenty, thirteen of them being established in Manila and its environs and seven are found in the Visayas, and this in a country with a population of only 23,000,000 or so. And more astounding is their enrollment. One private university at Manila boasts of a student body of 38,000 including its primary and secondary schools. In addition to these universities there are a number of institutions of collegiate rank.



THESE PRIVATE educational establishments have a peculiarity that has perturbed many a thinking Filipino. Some of them are controlled by foreign nationals. And the question is asked: Should we allow foreigners to educate future Filipino citizens? Did not Plato long ago sound the danger to the State of such a practice when he said:

"Youth is the time when the character is being molded and easily takes any impress one may wish to stamp on it. Shall we then simply allow our children to listen to any stories that anyone happens to make up and so receive into their minds ideas often the very opposite to those we shall think they ought to have when they are grown up?"

Concern about this singular educational condition was voiced recently in the very hall of our Senate by a brilliant member of that body who advocated that the heads of all educational institutions controlled by foreigners should be Filipinos to insure that the youth they were educating would turn out to be patriotic Filipinos.

Several years ago the government prescribed that such school subjects as the History of the Philippines and the social sciences were to be taught only by Filipinos. Apparently this is not a sufficient safeguard. It is not enough to require of the classroom teacher a sympathetic understanding of the history of the Filipino people and a sincere respect for

their aspirations. Most important of all in any educational organization are the capitalists who control its financing. It is their attitude that in the final analysis determines the quality of education in the school.

**A** FURTHER reason for concern about these private schools is that they are patronized by a large number of leading Filipino families, for there is a prevailing notion that they provide a higher standard of instruction than those under Filipino control and the public schools. Presumably their graduates will be the social and political leaders in our communities.

Yearly our higher schools graduate thousands of young people. These holders of college and university degrees today constitute our treasure and our problem. Already some observers are expressing alarm at the increasing number of unemployed intellectuals and the possible consequences of this social phenomenon on peace and order in the country. It seems timely therefore that our educators pause and reexamine our educational concepts and practices. Are these degree-holders unemployed because the education they were given did not stress individual self-reliance, dignity, and industry, or are these virtues unfashionable? Are our educational institutions more concerned with quantity rather than quality? They might

as well ponder these and similar questions.

With regard to self-reliance, some instances come to our mind that seem to indicate that this virtue is on the decline. Noticeable is the widespread habit of many citizens of seeking the assistance of public officials, even of Malacañang, in the solution of their personal problems, cluttering up the government offices daily. There is the common impression that everything, even if it is contrary to law, can be obtained through proper connections, or perhaps through bribery. In Tagalog parlance the word for it is *pakiusap*, a failing that can be traced to the Spanish colonial administration when bribery was rampant in official transactions, perhaps the best explanation for the weakness and inefficiency of







that government. How many upright persons and honest government officials have lost cherished friends because of their refusal to go against the law, to honor the *pakiusap* system of administration?

THE PRACTICE of *pakiusap* has dire implications for our educational endeavors. Because of it and the popular belief in its efficacy, doubt is growing in certain quarters that training, ability, and intellectual excellence are necessary in securing jobs or attaining public distinction. The awareness that jobs and other things as well are obtainable through influence or proper connections certainly does not encourage the youth to cultivate their talents or to apply themselves seriously to their studies. Neither does it help create a favorable environment for edu-

cation or the pursuit of excellence. Armed with a diploma, even if it were a mere scrap of paper, a young man can get what he wants provided he cultivates the right persons. Moreover, do not they see around them men and women possessing no academic training, no intellectual ability, no virtue whatever, in high and distinguished public positions? Still fresh in the memory of many of us was the case of a man notorious for his uncultivated and undisciplined mind who attained political eminence and intoxicating popularity. After his remarkable achievement, he became the favorite topic of conversation and one often heard smart students saying that they would not study hard inasmuch as intellectual attainments were unnecessary in rising to the political summit. Indeed the task of the educator is rendered arduous in a society that chooses to bestow its favors on its undeserving and incompetent members.

Even some parents of students resort to *pakiusap* whenever their children receive due punishment from school officials for some misdemeanor or failure to meet the scholastic standard of the institution. There are mothers who shed tears in pleading for leniency for their erring children and if they fail to get the desired result, they withdraw them from that school. Thus, sometimes parents can be held responsible for the lowering

of academic standards and the undermining of school discipline.

THE BANEFUL practice leads also to the loss of personal dignity. Forgetting their dignity men and women holders of college and university degrees stoop to begging for positions and favors from those in power. Have our people lost their traditional sense of dignity? In our history we read that dignity was one of the outstanding virtues of our ancestors. To preserve their dignity they were willing to suffer poverty and woe to anyone who dared to hurt it. The revival and popularizing of this virtue would be a desirable educational aim for it is highly essential in winning the respect of our fellowmen here and abroad. Our government would be better respected if the men and women in it are imbued with a deep sense of dignity.

Have our schools failed to impress upon our youth the value of industry? In the history of our people industrious men and women were very much admired by their contemporaries. Even today in our communities the industrious man is extolled while his opposite is derided or taunted. In our folklore we have the story of *Juan Tamad* (Juan the Lazy), holding up in ridicule a lazy man.

GNACIO VILLAMOR has left us a little volume entitled *Industrious Filipinos* based upon a series of lectures he delivered early in

this century under the auspices of the *Sociedad de Conferenciantes Filipinos* headed by the cultured Judge Estanislao Yusay. Dedicated to the Filipino youth it consisted of short biographies in English of 40 Filipinos among whom were Rizal, Benedicto Luna, Pedro Cui, Mateo Cariño, Jose Ma. Basa, Luis R. Yangco, Roman Ongpin, Clemente Jose Zulueta, Isidro de la Rama, Enrique Mendiola, Gregorio Araneta, Datu Undaya Amai Kurut, Esteban Jalandoni, Valerio Malabanan, Aleja de la Cruz, Lorenzo Guerrero, Gregorio Crisostomo, and Manuel Artigas. They were men who, working in diverse fields of human endeavor under very trying conditions, contributed in large measure towards the building of our nation. After reading that book one cannot help but feel proud to belong to a nation that has produced such exemplary citizens who would be an asset and an honor to any people.



A young independent nation like ours undoubtedly has a pressing need for industrious men and women, if our Republic is to survive. As Ignacio Villamor and other Filipino thinkers had said, no people could progress unless they were industrious. It would dishearten them to behold so many idle men and women walking aimlessly or just standing at street corner frittering away valuable time, or the long queues of men and women before the ticket windows of the cinemas in the City of Manila morning and afternoon, during normal working hours.

Among other agencies our schools perhaps can help remedy this deplorable situation by introducing into the school program activities that are calculated to develop habits of industry among the students. And our educators might consider these questions: Is there too much play and too little work in the school? Are the stu-

dents devoting too much time to joining or holding elaborate parades, costly floats, queen or beauty contests, dances and the like?

**N**OW AND THEN a bold commencement speaker does not hesitate to say that many college graduates are unfit for their chosen callings. In plain language the quality of their training is so poor that they could not be employed. To what could this be attributed? To the indiscriminate promotion of students regardless of their grades, as in the public schools? To academic laxity? To huge classes, so huge that teachers have to use a microphone to be heard by those in the back seats? To incompetent teachers? To lack of proper guidance or counselling? Or to family pride and conceit which he has no aptitude whatsoever?

Criticisms of our public and private education made in good faith should stimulate our educators to scrutinize our educational system rather than to cast aspersions on the critics. Being a human institution there is always room for improvement in it.

Our school curricula can certainly profit from a periodic scrutiny. It is possible that there may have accumulated in our educational cupboard considerable trivia that ought to be thrown away. For example, is it advisable to spend the time of the senior high-school students who are between



fourteen and fifteen years old in the discussion of "dating, steady date, blind date, when to date, courtship, engagement, honeymoon, etc.?"\* Obviously lifted from some foreign source, the terms alone being peculiarly American colloquialism; are they suitable for fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys and girls whether from the psychological or pedagogical point of view? These customs are alien to us Filipinos and are frowned upon by our elders. Such matters are decided within the family. By dignifying them as class material for discussion, they assume an undue importance in the minds of young boys and girls and turn their attention away from their academic work.

ALSO IN THE materials for study there may have crept in misleading if not altogether erroneous subject-matter. Take, for instance, the outline entitled *Philippine Problems* for secondary schools. Item No. VII in this outline is "Religious Problem". We have no religious problem in the Philippines. Our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and here adherents of diverse religious sects live in peace, unmolested, free to worship according to their beliefs and to carry on their church activities without hindrance. They receive the equal protection of the

\* Revised Teaching Guides for Secondary Schools Health Education, Division Bulletin No. 6, s. 1969, Division of City Schools, Manila, Bureau of Public Schools.

law. This is one of the freedoms of which our Republic can boast.

In addition there seems to be in the secondary schools an undue proliferation of courses in Philippine subjects; such as, Philippine History, Philippine Problems, and Community Problems. Some practicing teachers believe that there is much overlapping and repetition in the teaching of these subjects which, being so closely related, can very well be combined into a single course, leaving their detailed study to the higher schools. In the zeal of filling the minds of students with Philippine information, education runs the danger of becoming parochial. And at this time of rapidly expanding knowledge, the civilized man will soon cease to be civilized if he is left behind. The early introduction of students to the world of science has become imperative in order to stimulate as early as possible their interest in the undoubtedly important study of science which it is hoped will furnish the remedy for human ills.

The catalogues of our higher schools likewise contain numerous academic offerings which prompt us to ask these questions from the pedagogical standpoint: Do these institutions have a sufficient number of qualified professors to handle these courses? Do they have adequate library facilities and laboratories that such courses require? Unless they do, these courses will

be treated very superficially and students will derive little benefit from them.

**A**LTHOUGH at the start we implied that with the establishment of the Commonwealth education passed on to the control of Filipinos, nonetheless it has remained under American influence. This is inevitable in view of the following factors: (1) Our educational system is patterned after the American; (2) The language of instruction is American; (3) All the books used until lately are by American authors and even those by Filipinos are in the majority adaptations of the American-educated. It is also no secret that America has continued her active interest in Philippine education to this day, as it is clearly demonstrated by the existence here of such agencies as the U.S. Educational Foundation, ICA, and Philippine Center for Language Study, the presence of American consultants and exchange professors in our educational establishments, and the continuous award of scholarship, travel, and leadership grants to Filipino citizens not only by the American

government but also by private American foundations.

Of course America's cultural activities are not confined to the Philippines alone. Being a world power she maintains cultural establishments in many other countries as well. Because of her far-flung cultural interests her rival Soviet Russia accuses her of "cultural imperialism."

America has also many well-equipped and famous colleges and universities whose doors are open to the nations of foreign countries, including the Philippines. In general the Filipinos who had studied at these institutions are great admirers of America.

It is not therefore strange that the Philippines, though independent, should remain in the cultural orbit of America. No other power has done as much as she in preserving and promoting cultural ties with her former dependency.

Here then are a few implications for education of certain forces in our distant and recent past. Manifestly Philippine education of the present day is the product of historical circumstances.

\* \* \*

*"Hear about the elephant who got his trunk caught in his mouth and swallowed himself?"*