

Rizal's Characters in Modern Setting

By Gregorio C. Borlaza

(First of a series)

THE Rizal law and the Spanish law have at least one aim in common: to make the Filipinos better acquainted with the works of great Filipino leaders of thought. Rizal is the foremost Filipino thinker, and two of his most important works are his novels, the *Noli Me Tangere* and the *El Filibusterismo*. In this series of articles the writer intends to present some of the characters in these novels, both in the setting of Rizal's times and in that of the present-day Philippines.

As this series of articles is primarily intended for school teachers we shall begin with the schoolmaster and perhaps give him a comparatively more detailed treatment than those following.

The schoolmaster was an unnamed school teacher for whom Don Rafael Ibarra, deceased father of Crisostomo Ibarra, the hero in *Noli Me Tangere*, had procured a house and whom the said Don Rafael furnished with the things he needed so he could pursue his profession (teaching). Out of more than two hundred pupils enrolled only about twenty-five were attending due to poverty, prejudices, a language of instruction which the pupil did not understand, an enforced use of corporal punishment which terrified and demoralized the pupils, and an unhappy, frustrated, and insecure teacher.

The schoolmaster was a kindly man with a natural sympathy for children, a keen sense of their needs, and a knack for experimenting with new teaching materials and more effective methods of instruction. He tried to discard the whip and found the results satisfying. "I later convinced myself," he said to Crisostomo Ibarra, "that it was impossible to reason out with the ferule and the scourge within sight, because fear upsets the most serene pupil, aside from the fact that a child's imagination is keener and he is more impressionable... I believed that above everything else, I should inspire the children with confidence, a sense of security and self-respect. Moreover, I believed that the daily sight of flogging killed compassion in the heart and extinguished that sense of dignity which is very hard to recover once it is lost..."¹ In other ways he tried to make the school life of his pupils happy. "I made them believe that they possessed

better qualities than was really the case and this belief, which they tried to live up to, spurred them to study, just as confidence leads to heroism... I kept on and noticed... that the child who was praised in the presence of others studied twice as hard the next day."²

No sooner had the schoolmaster discarded the whip, however, than he was sent for by the Spanish curate who was the most powerful man in town, and told to return to the use of the whip, otherwise the schoolmaster would be reported unfavorably to the *Alcalde*. Even the parents of the pupils, who themselves used the whip liberally at home, found fault with his sparing the rod. They accused him of spoiling their children who, they thought, would never learn without being constantly subjected to flogging.

With a bleeding heart the schoolmaster was forced to return to the use of the whip, and the pupils began to hate him all over again. He became sick because of the emotional strain, and he became more unhappy when he recovered and found that his pupils were not happy to see him back. He tried to introduce something useful into the classroom and he made use of functional materials printed in Tagalog. "Seeing the impossibility of teaching them Spanish and translating so many books," he told Crisostomo Ibarra further, "I tried to replace them little by little by short quotations from useful books in Tagalog such as the *Treatise on Manners*, by Hortencio and Felisa, a few agricultural manuals and so forth. Sometimes I myself translated such little works as the history of the Philippines by Father Barranera..."³ He copied a map of the province which he saw in the provincial capital and used it as visual aid. These things, he did in the hope that his pupils would remember him, less bitterly in afteryears, but again he was blocked by the same elements that had compelled him to stop sparing the rod.

In addition to the foregoing frustration the schoolmaster was subjected to indignities in the presence of his pupils, and he noted that "The children do not respect the teacher the moment they see him ill-treated

¹ Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* (Translated by Feliciano Basa and Francisco Benitez), Oriental Commercial Co., Inc., San Juan Rizal, 1933, pp. 177-178.

² *Ibid* p. 178

³ *Ibid* p. 181

and failing to assert his rights... a teacher needs prestige, a good name, moral strength, a certain independence..."⁴

These things—prestige, dignity, a certain independence — the schoolmaster could not have, but he had to sacrifice his pride and go on teaching because "... I must make a living, as I have a mother to support, and I have yielded to my fate as a corpse is tossed about by the rolling waves."⁵

The present day teacher is much happier than the schoolmaster we have just presented. He is not only permitted but even required to use the dialect as the medium of instruction in the lower primary grades and as an auxiliary language in the upper grades. His tenure of office is protected by the Civil Service, and he is forbidden, not required, to use corporal punishment. He is comparatively better paid, although his present salary has not given him and his family a sufficient degree of financial security. Many of his kind still have to sacrifice their sense of dignity and go on teaching because they have a family to support!

The Noli's schoolmaster would find himself happier if he could return to life and to teaching in the present-day schools in the Philippines, but there are a few, fortunately vanishing, forces he would still have to contend with. There are still some parents who think instruction in their days was better than that of the present and who do not believe in soft pedagogy or in the use of the dialect. The Spanish curate is no longer there to make his life miserable and to threaten his security of tenure, but his place has been taken over by some politicians who make a sham of the merit system and make teachers toe the line or face the prospect of banishment to remote places, non-promotion, or persecution for electioneer-

⁴ Ibid p. 174

⁵ Ibid p. 176

ing after an election.⁶ And there are still a few old fashioned school officials, fortunately getting fewer and fewer each year, who interrupt their recitations and find fault with their methods in front of their classes; resent the mere attempt on their part to explain their own sides of a question; transfer them to undesirable stations ostensibly "for the good of the service" but actually due to political pressure or other non-valid reasons; often threaten them with poor efficiency ratings on an efficiency card which many of them have never been permitted to see since they entered the service; etc. This type of school officials have been gradually yielding to a more democratic one, but enough of them are still around to remind the schoolmaster of his unhappy days.

Perhaps the schoolmaster would be happy to find many of his ideas vindicated — the use of the dialect, (Tagalog) as the medium of instruction, the wisdom of which has been demonstrated by the Iloilo experiment; the adoption of functional materials; and the use of visual aids. But it might sadden him to find that the holding power of the schools, though improved, is still weak,⁷ and perhaps he would not be exactly happy to see the products of the new system — the teen-age gangsters in urban centers; the children who seem to have lost the traditional reverence for their elders; and the young people who have come to worship science to the extent of believing that they have no more use for God.⁸

The school master would certainly hate to see the Spanish curate restored to the position he occupied in his days, but he would probably realize that religion, which he once hated because he hated the man who stood for it, has its intrinsic value and its valid place in the education of the child.

⁶ Yay Marking, Lesson Plan for Politicians, Women's Magazine, September 13, 1957, p. 4.

⁷ Ibid p. 11

⁸ We Created God! U.P. Man Says — Headline, Sentinel, Manila, August 31, 1957.

Every Municipality Should Have A PHS

By Pedro T. Orata

(Second Installment)

1. Let's Have More, not Fewer, Public High Schools

IN THE previous article, I tried to show that closing public high schools that do not meet certain standards because of financial difficulties is not the solution to the "crisis in the public high schools." Such a policy will solve the problem by killing the patient. The operation will be successful but the patient dies as a result of it.

As I said, the only ones to profit from it would be the owners of private high schools to which the students will go after the public high schools are closed; furthermore, they will pay more for less education. They will pay, not only for the inferior education that they get, but also the profit of the private school owners who are in the business, not for education, but for the money that they can make on the students. They will get pure academic instruc-