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The Indolence of the Filipino

José Rizal

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EDITOR'S EXPLANATION

Mr. Charles Derbyshire, who put Rizal's great novel *Noli me tangere* and its sequel *El Filibusterismo* into English (as *The Social Cancer* and *The Reign of Greed*), besides many minor writings of the "Greatest Man of the Brown Race", has rendered a similar service for *La Indolencia de los Filipinos* in the following pages, and with that same fidelity and sympathetic comprehension of the author's meaning which has made possible an understanding of the real Rizal by English readers. Notes by Dr. James A. Robertson (Librarian of the Philippine Library and co-editor of the 55-volume series of historical reprints well called *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, so comprehensive are they) show the breadth of Rizal's historical scholarship, and that the only error mentioned is due to using a faulty reprint where the original was not available indicates the conscientiousness of the pioneer worker.

An appropriate setting has been attempted by page decorations whose scenes are taken from Philippine textbooks of the World Book Company and whose borders were made in the Drawing Department of the Philippine School of Arts and Trades.

The frontispiece shows a hurried pencil sketch of himself which Rizal made in Berlin in the Spring of 1887 that Prof. Blumentritt, whom then he knew only through correspondence, might recognize him at the Leitmeritz railway station when he should arrive for a proposed visit. The photograph from which the engraving was reproduced came one year ago with the Christmas greetings of the Austrian professor whose recent death the *Philippine Islands*, who knew him as their friend and Rizal's, is mourning.

The picture perhaps deserves a couple of comments. As a child Rizal had been trained to rapid work, an expertness kept up by practice, and the copying of his own countenance from a convenient near-by mirror was but a moment's task. Yet the incident suggests that he did not keep photographs of himself about, and that he had the Cromwellian desire to see himself as he really was, for the Filipino features are more prominent than in any photograph of his extant.

The essay itself originally appeared in the Filipino forthrightly review, *La Solidaridad*, of Madrid, in five installments, running from July 15 to September 15, 1890. It was a continuation of Rizal's campaign of education in which he sought by blunt truths to awaken his countrymen to their own faults at the same time that he was arousing the Spaniards to the defects in Spain's colonial system that caused and continued such shortcomings.

To-day there seems a place in Manila for just suets, missionary work as *The Indolence of the Filipino* aimed at. It may help on the present improving understanding between Continental Americans and their countrymen of these "Far Off Eden Isles", for the writer submits as his mature opinion, based on ten years' acquaintance among Filipinos through studies which enlisted their interest, that the political problem would have been greatly simplified had it been understood in Dewey's day that among intelligent Americans the much-talked-of lack of "capacity" referred to the mass of the people's want of political experience and not to any alleged racial inferiority. To wounded pride has the discontent been due rather than to withholding of political privileges.

Spanish Philippine history has curiously repeated itself during the fifteen years of America's administration of this archipelago.

Just as some colonial Spaniards seemed to the Filipinos less creditable representatives of the metropolis than the average of those who remained in the Peninsula, so not all who now pass for Americans in the Philippines are believed here to measure up to the highest homestandard.

Sitters in swivel-chairs underneath electric fans hold hopeless the future of the land where men do not desire to be drudges just as did

their predecessors who in wide armed lazy seats, beneath punkahs, talked of Filipino indolence.

Ingratitude, to-day as then, is the regular rejoinder to the progressing people's protest against paternalism, and altruistic regard for their real welfare is still represented as the reason why special legislation should be provided when Filipinos prefer the same laws as govern the sovereign people.

Though those who claim to champion the Philippines' cause apparently are unaware of it, these Islands have a population strangely alike in its make up to the people of America; their history is full of American associations; Americans developed their leading resources, and American ideas have inspired their political aspirations. It betrays blindness somewhere that ever since 1898 Filipinos have been trying to get loose from America in order to set up here an American form of government,

There seems now a prospect that insular legislation may make available to the individual the guarantees of personal liberty upon which America at home prides itself, that municipal self-government and provincial autonomy may become realities in the Philippines, and possibly even that both Filipinos and Americans may realize before it is too late how our elastic territorial government could be made to exact from them much less of their independence than the sacrifice of sovereignty necessary in Neutralization or internationalization.

Unwillingness to work when there is nothing in it for them is common to Filipinos and Americans, for Thomas Jefferson admitted that extravagance and indolence were the chief faults of his countrymen. Labor-saving machinery has made the fruits of Americans' labors in their land of abundance afford a luxury in living not elsewhere existing. But the Filipino, in his rich and not over-populated home, shutting out, as we do, oriental cheap labor, may employ American machinery and attain the same standard. The possibilities for the prosperity of the population put the Philippines in the New World, just as their discovery and their history group them with the Western Hemisphere.

Austin Craig,

University of the Philippines,
Manila, December 20th, 1913.

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I

DOCTOR Sancianco, in his *Progreso de Filipinas*, (1), has taken up this question, agitated, as he calls it, and, relying upon facts and reports furnished by the very same Spanish authorities that rule the Philippines, has demonstrated that such indolence does not exist, and that all said about it does not deserve reply or even passing notice.

Nevertheless, as discussion of it has been continued, not only by government employees who make it responsible for their own shortcomings, not only by the friars who regard it as necessary in order that they may continue to represent, themselves as indispensable, but also by serious and disinterested persons; and as evidence of greater or less weight may be adduced in opposition to that which Dr. Sancianco cites, it seems expedient, to us to study this question thoroughly, without superciliousness or sensitiveness, without prejudice, without pessimism. And as we can only serve our country by telling the truth, however bit, tee it be, just as a flat and skilful negation cannot refute a real and positive fact, in spite of the brilliance of the arguments; as a mere affirmation is not sufficient to create something impossible, let us calmly examine the facts, using on our part all the impartiality of which a man is capable who is convinced that there is no redemption except upon solid bases of virtue.

The word indolence has been greatly misused in the sense of little love for work and lack of energy, while ridicule has concealed the misuse. This much-discussed question has met with the same fate as certain panaceas and specifics of the quacks who by ascribing to them impossible virtues have discredited them. In the Middle Ages, and even in some Catholic countries now, the devil is blamed for everything that superstitious folk cannot understand or the perversity of mankind is loath to confess. In the Philippines one's own and another's faults, the shortcomings of one, the misdeeds of another, are attributed to indolence. And just as in the Middle Ages he who sought the explanation of phenomena outside of infernal influences

was persecuted, so in the Philippines worse happens to him who seeks the origin of the trouble outside of accepted beliefs.

The consequence of this misuse is that there are some who are interested in stating it as a dogma and others in combating it as a ridiculous superstition, if not a punishable delusion. Yet it is not to be inferred from the misuse of a thing that it does not exist.

We think that there must be something behind all this outcry, for it is incredible that so many should err, among whom we have said there are a lot of serious and disinterested persons. Some act in bad faith, through levity, through want of sound judgment, through limitation in reasoning power, ignorance of the past, or other cause. Some repeat what they have heard, without, examination or reflection; others speak through pessimism or are impelled by that human characteristic which paints as perfect everything that belongs to oneself and defective whatever belongs to another. But it cannot be denied that there are some who worship truth, or if not truth itself at least the semblance thereof, which is truth in the mind of the crowd.

Examining well, then, all the scenes and all the men that we have known from Childhood, and the life of our country, we believe that indolence does exist there. The Filipinos, who can measure up with the most active peoples in the world, will doubtless not repudiate this admission, for it is true that there one works and struggles against the climate, against nature and against men. But we must not take the exception for the general rule, and should rather seek the good of our country by stating what we believe to be true. We must confess that indolence does actually and positively exist there; only that, instead of holding it to be the cause of the backwardness and the trouble, we regard it as the effect of the trouble and the backwardness, by fostering the development of a lamentable predisposition.

Those who have as yet treated of indolence, with the exception of Dr. Sancianco, have been content to deny or affirm it. We know of no one who has studied its causes. Nevertheless, those who admit its existence and exaggerate it more or less have not therefore failed to advise remedies taken from here and there, from Java, from India, from other English or Dutch colonies, like the quack who saw a

fever cured with a dozen sardines and afterwards always prescribed these fish at every rise in temperature that he discovered in his patients.

We shall proceed otherwise. Before proposing a remedy we shall examine the causes, and even though strictly speaking a predisposition is not a cause, let us, however, study at its true value this predisposition due to nature.

The predisposition exists? Why shouldn't it?

A hot, climate requires of the individual quiet and rest, just as cold incites to labor and action. For this reason the Spaniard is more indolent than the Frenchman; the Frenchman more so than the German. The Europeans themselves who reproach the residents of the colonies so much (and I am not now speaking of the Spaniards but of the Germans and English themselves), how do they live in tropical countries? Surrounded by a numerous train of servants, never going afoot but riding in a carriage, needing servants not only to take off their shoes for them but even to fan them! And yet they live and eat better, they work for themselves to get rich, with the hope of a future, free and respected, while the poor colonist, the indolent colonist, is badly nourished, has no hope, toils for others, and works under force and compulsion! Perhaps the reply to this will be that white men are not made to stand the severity of the climate. A mistake! A man can live in any climate, if he will only adapt himself to its requirements and conditions. What kills the European in hot countries is the abuse of liquors, the attempt to live according to the nature of his own country under another sky and another sun. We inhabitants of hot countries live well in northern Europe whenever we take the precautions the people there do. Europeans can also stand the torrid zone, if only they would get rid of their prejudices. (2) The fact is that in tropical countries violent work is not a good thing as it is in cold countries, there it is death, destruction, annihilation. Nature knows this and like a just mother has therefore made the earth more fertile, more productive, as a compensation. An hour's work under that burning sun, in the midst of pernicious influences springing from nature in activity, is equal to a day's work in a temperate climate; it is, then, just that the earth yield a hundred fold! Moreover, do we not see the active European,

who has gained strength during the winter, who feels the fresh blood of spring boil in his veins, do we not see him abandon his labors during the few days of his variable summer, close his office—where the work is not violent and amounts for many to talking and gesticulating in the shade and beside a lunch-stand,—flee to watering places, sit in the cafés or stroll about? What wonder then that the inhabitant of tropical countries, worn out and with his blood thinned by the continuous and excessive heat, is reduced to inaction? Who is the indolent one in the Manila offices? Is it the poor clerk who comes in at eight in the morning and leaves at, one in the afternoon with only his parasol, who copies and writes and works for himself and for his chief, or is it the chief, who comes in a carriage at ten o'clock, leaves before twelve, reads his newspaper while smoking and with his feet cocked up on a chair or a table, or gossiping about all his friends? Which is indolent, the native coadjutor, poorly paid and badly treated, who has to visit all the indigent sick living in the country, or the friar curate who gets fabulously rich, goes about in a carriage, eats and drinks well, and does not put himself to any trouble without collecting excessive fees? [3]

Without speaking further of the Europeans, in what violent labor does the Chinaman engage in tropical countries, the industrious Chinaman, who flees from his own country driven by hunger and want, and whose whole ambition is to amass a small fortune? With the exception of some porters, an occupation that the natives also follow, he nearly always engages in trade, in commerce; so rarely does he take up agriculture that we do not know of a single case. The Chinaman who in other colonies cultivates the soil does so only for a certain number of years and then retires. [4]

We find, then, the tendency to indolence very natural, and have to admit and bless it, for we cannot alter natural laws, and without it the race would have disappeared. Man is not a brute, he is not a machine; his object is not merely to produce, in spite of the pretensions of some Christian whites who would make of the colored Christian a kind of motive power somewhat more intelligent and less costly than steam. Man's object is not to satisfy the passions of another man, his object is to seek happiness for himself and his kind by traveling along the road of progress and perfection.

The evil is not that indolence exists more or less latently but that it is fostered and magnified. Among men, as well as among nations, there exist not only aptitudes but also tendencies toward good and evil. To foster the good ones and aid them, as well as correct the evil and repress them, would be the duty of society and governments, if less noble thoughts did not occupy their attention. The evil is that the indolence in the Philippines is a magnified indolence, an indolence of the snowball type, if we may be permitted the expression, an evil that increases in direct proportion to the square of the periods of time, an effect of misgovernment and of backwardness, as we said, and not a cause thereof. Others will hold the contrary opinion, especially those who have a hand in the misgovernment, but we do not care; we have made an assertion and are going to prove it.

II

When in consequence of a long chronic illness the condition of the patient is examined, the question may arise whether the weakening of the fibers and the debility of the organs are the cause of the malady's continuing or the effect of the bad treatment that prolongs its action. The attending physician attributes the entire failure of his skill to the poor constitution of the patient, to the climate, to the surroundings, and so on. On the other hand, the patient attributes the aggravation of the evil to the system of treatment followed. Only the common crowd, the inquisitive populace, shakes its head and cannot reach a decision.

Something like this happens in the case of the Philippines. Instead of physician, read government, that is, friars, employees, etc. Instead of patient, Philippines; instead of malady, indolence.

And, just as happens in similar cases then the patient gets worse, everybody loses his head, each one dodges the responsibility to place it upon somebody else, and instead of seeking the causes in order to combat the evil in them, devotes himself at best to attacking the symptoms: here a blood-letting, a tax; there a plaster, forced labor; further on a sedative, a trifling reform. Every new arrival proposes a new remedy: one, seasons of prayer, the relics of a saint, the viaticum, the friars; another, a shower-bath; still another, with pretensions to modern ideas, a transfusion of blood. "It's nothing, only the patient has eight million indolent red corpuscles: some few white corpuscles in the form of an agricultural colony will get us out of the trouble."

So, on all sides there are groans, gnawing of lips, clenching of fists, many hollow words, great ignorance, a deal of talk, a lot of fear. The patient is near his finish!

Yes, transfusion of blood, transfusion of blood! New life, new vitality! Yes, the new white corpuscles that you are going to inject into its veins, the new white corpuscles that were a cancer in another organism will withstand all the depravity of the system, will withstand the blood-lettings that it suffers every day, will have more

stamina than all the eight million red corpuscles, will cure all the disorders, all the degeneration, all the trouble in the principal organs. Be thankful if they do not become coagulations and produce gangrene, be thankful if they do not reproduce the cancer!

While the patient breathes, we must not lose hope, and however late we be, a judicious examination is never superfluous; at least the cause of death may be known. We are not trying to put all the blame on the physician, and still less on the patient, for we have already spoken of a predisposition due to the climate, a reasonable and natural predisposition, in the absence of which the race would disappear, sacrificed to excessive labor in a tropical country.

Indolence in the Philippines is a chronic malady, but not a hereditary one. The Filipinos have not always been what they are, witenesses whereto are all the historians of the first years after the discovery of the Islands.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Malayan Filipinos carried on an active trade, not only among themselves but also with all the neighboring countries. A Chinese manuscript of the 13th century, translated by Dr. Hirth (*Globus*, Sept. 1889), which we will take up at another time, speaks of China's relations with the islands, relations purely commercial, in which mention is made of the activity and honesty of the traders of Luzon, who took the Chinese products and distributed them throughout all the islands, traveling for nine months, and then returned to pay religiously even for the merchandise that the Chinamen did not remember to have given them. The products which they in exchange exported from the islands were crude wax, cotton, pearls, tortoise-shell, betel-nuts, dry-goods, etc. [5]

The first thing noticed by Pigafetta, who came with Magellan in 1521, on arriving at the first island of the Philippines, Samar, was the courtesy and kindness of the inhabitants and their commerce. "To honor our captain," he says, "they conducted him to their boats where they had their merchandise, which consisted of cloves, cinnamon, pepper, nutmegs, mace, gold and other things; and they made us understand by gestures that such articles were to be found in the islands to which we were going." [6]

Further on he speaks of the vessels and utensils of solid gold that he found in Butuan, where the people worked mines. He describes the silk dresses, the daggers with long gold hilts and scabbards of carved wood, the gold, sets of teeth, etc. Among cereals and fruits he mentions rice, millet, oranges, lemons, panicum, etc.

That the islands maintained relations with neighboring countries and even with distant ones is proven by the ships from Siam, laden with gold and slaves, that Magellan found in Cebu. These ships paid certain duties to the King of the island. In the same year, 1521, the survivors of Magellan's expedition met the son of the Rajah of Luzon, who, as captain-general of the Sultan of Borneo and admiral of his fleet, had conquered for him the great city of Lave (Sarawak?). Might this captain, who was greatly feared by all his foes, have been the Rajah Matanda whom the Spaniards afterwards encountered in Tondo in 1570?

In 1539 the warriors of Luzon took part in the formidable contests of Sumatra, and under the orders of Angi Siry Timor, Rajah of Batta, conquered and overthrew the terrible Alzadin, Sultan of Atchin, renowned in the historical annals of the Far East. (Marsden, *Hist. of Sumatra*, Chap. XX.) (7)

At that time, that sea where float the islands like a set of emeralds on a paten of bright glass, that sea was everywhere traversed by junks, paraus, barangays, vintas, vessels swift as shuttles, so large that they could maintain a hundred rowers on a side (Morga;) that sea bore everywhere commerce, industry, agriculture, by the force of the oars moved to the sound of warlike songs (8) of the genealogies and achievements of the Philippine divinities. (Colin, Chap. XV.) (9)

Wealth abounded in the islands. Pigafetta tells us of the abundance of foodstuffs in Paragua and of its inhabitants, who nearly all tilled their own fields. At this island the survivors of Magellan's expedition were well received and provisioned. A little later, these same survivors captured a vessel, plundered and sacked it, add took prisoner in it the chief of the Island of Paragua (!) with his son and brother. (10)

In this same vessel they captured bronze lombards, and this is the first mention of artillery of the Filipinos, for these lombards were useful to the chief of Paragua against the savages of the interior.

They let him ransom himself within seven days, demanding 400 measures (cavanes?) of rice, 20 pigs, 20 goats, and 450 chickens. This is the first act of piracy recorded in Philippine history. The chief of Paragua paid everything, and moreover voluntarily added coconuts, bananas, and sugar-cane jars filled with palm-wine. When Caesar was taken prisoner by the corsairs and required to pay twenty five talents ransom, he replied; "I'll give you fifty, but later I'll have you all crucified!" The chief of Paragua was more generous: he forgot. His conduct, while it may reveal weakness, also demonstrates that the islands were abundantly provisioned. This chief was named Tuan Mahamud; his brother, Guantil, and his son, Tuan Mahamed. (Martin Mendez, Purser of the ship Victoria: Archivos de Indias.)

A very extraordinary thing, and one that shows the facility with which the natives learned Spanish, is that fifty years before the arrival of the Spaniards in Luzon, in that very year 1521 when they first came to the islands, there were already natives of Luzon who understood Castilian. In the treaties of peace that the survivors of Magellan's expedition made with the chief of Paragua, when the servant-interpreter died they communicated with one another through a Moro who had been captured in the island of the King of Luzon and who understood some Spanish. (Martin Mendez, op, cit) Where did this extemporaneous interpreter learn Castilian? In the Moluccas? In Malacca, with the Portuguese? Spaniards did not reach Luzon until 1571.

Legazpi's expedition met in Butuan various traders of Luzon with their boats laden with iron, wax cloths, porcelain, etc. (Gaspar de San Agustin,) plenty of provisions, activity, trade, movement in all the southern islands. (11)

They arrived at the Island of Cebu, "abounding in provisions, with mines and washings of gold, and peopled with natives," as Morga says; "very populous, and at a port frequented by many ships that came from the islands and kingdoms near India," as Colin says; and even though they were peacefully received discord soon

arose. The city was taken by force and burned. The fire destroyed the food supplies and naturally famine broke out in that town of a hundred thousand people, (12) as the historians say, and among the members of the expedition, but the neighboring islands quickly relieved the need, thanks to the abundance they enjoyed.

All the histories of those first years, in short, abound in long accounts about the industry and agriculture of the natives: mines, gold-washings, looms, farms, barter, naval construction, raising of poultry and stock, weaving of silk and cotton, distilleries, manufactures of arms, pearl fisheries, the civet industry, the horn and hide industry, etc., are things encountered at every step, and, considering the time and the conditions in the islands, prove that there was life, there was activity, there was movement.

And if this, which is deduction, does not convince any minds imbued with unfair prejudices, perhaps of some avail may be the testimony of the oft-quoted Dr. Morga, who was Lieutenant-Governor of Manila for seven years and after rendering great service in the Archipelago was appointed criminal judge of the Audiencia of Mexico and Counsellor of the Inquisition. His testimony, we say, is highly credible, not only because all his contemporaries have spoken of him in terms that border on veneration but also because his work, from which we take these citations, is written with great circumspection and care, as well with reference to the authorities in the Philippines as to the errors they committed. "The natives," says Morga, in chapter VII, speaking of the occupations of the Chinese, "are very far from exercising those trades and have even forgotten much about farming, raising poultry, stock and cotton, and weaving cloth AS THEY USED TO DO IN THEIR PAGANISM AND FOR A LONG TIME AFTER THE COUNTRY WAS CONQUERED." (13)

The whole of chapter VIII of his work deals with this moribund activity, this much-forgotten industry, and yet in spite of that, how long is his eighth chapter!

And not only Morga, not only Chirino, Colin, Argensola, Gaspar de San Agustin and others agree in this matter, but modern travelers, after two hundred and fifty years, examining the decadence and misery, assert the same thing. Dr. Hans Meyer, when he saw the unsubdued tribes cultivating beautiful fields and working energeti-

cally, asked if they would not become indolent when they in turn should accept Christianity and a paternal government.

Accordingly, the Filipinos, in spite of the climate, in spite of their few needs (they were less than now), were not the indolent creatures of our time, and, as we shall see later on, their ethics and their mode of life were not what is now complacently attributed to them.

How then, and in what way, was that active and enterprising infidel native of ancient times converted into the lazy and indolent Christian, as our contemporary writer's say?

We have already spoken of the more or less latent predisposition which exists in the Philippines toward indolence, and which must exist everywhere, in the whole world, in all men, because we all hate work more or less, as it may be more or less hard, more or less unproductive. The *dolce far niente* of the Italian, the *rascarse la barriga* of the Spaniard, the supreme aspiration of the bourgeois to live on his income in peace and tranquility, attest this.

What causes operated to awake this terrible predisposition from its lethargy? How is it that the Filipino people, so fond of its customs as to border on routine, has given up its ancient habits of work, of trade, of navigation, etc., even to the extent of completely forgetting its past?

III

A fatal combination of circumstances, some independent of the will in spite of men's efforts, others the offspring of stupidity and ignorance, others the inevitable corollaries of false principles, and still others the result of more or less base passions has induced the decline of labor, an evil which instead of being remedied by prudence, mature reflection and recognition of the mistakes made, through deplorable policy, through regret, table blindness and obstinacy, has gone from bad to worse until it has reached the condition in which we now see it. (14).

First came the wars, the internal disorders which the new change of affairs naturally brought with it. It was necessary to subject the