The Social Cancer: A Complete English Version of Noli Me Tangere

José Rizal

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The Social Cancer

A Complete English Version of Noli Me Tangere from the Spanish of José Rizal

By

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THE NOVELS OF JOSÉ RIZAL

Translated from Spanish into English

BY CHARLES DERBYSHIRE

THE SOCIAL CANCER (NOLI ME TANGERE) THE REIGN OF GREED (EL FILIBUSTERISMO)

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I

"We travel rapidly in these historical sketches. The reader flies in his express train in a few minutes through a couple of centuries. The centuries pass more slowly to those to whom the years are doled out day by day. Institutions grow and beneficently develop themselves, making their way into the hearts of generations which are shorter-lived than they, attracting love and respect, and winning loyal obedience; and then as gradually forfeiting by their shortcomings the allegiance which had been honorably gained in worthier periods. We see wealth and greatness; we see corruption and vice; and one seems to follow so close upon the other, that we fancy they must have always co-existed. We look more steadily, and we perceive long periods of time, in which there is first a growth and then a decay, like what we perceive in a tree of the forest."

FROUDE, _Annals of an English Abbey_.

Monasticism's record in the Philippines presents no new general fact to the eye of history. The attempt to eliminate the eternal feminine from her natural and normal sphere in the scheme of things there met with the same certain and signal disaster that awaits every perversion of human activity. Beginning with a band of zealous, earnest men, sincere in their convictions, to whom the cause was all and their personalities nothing, it there, as elsewhere, passed through its usual cycle of usefulness, stagnation, corruption, and degeneration.

To the unselfish and heroic efforts of the early friars Spain in large

measure owed her dominion over the Philippine Islands and the Filipinos a marked advance on the road to civilization and nationality. In fact, after the dreams of sudden wealth from gold and spices had faded, the islands were retained chiefly as a missionary conquest and a stepping-stone to the broader fields of Asia, with Manila as a depot for the Oriental trade. The records of those early years are filled with tales of courage and heroism worthy of Spain's proudest years, as the missionary fathers labored with unflagging zeal in disinterested endeavor for the spread of the Faith and the betterment of the condition of the Malays among whom they found themselves. They won the confidence of the native peoples, gathered them into settlements and villages, led them into the ways of peace, and became their protectors, guides, and counselors.

In those times the cross and the sword went hand in hand, but in the Philippines the latter was rarely needed or used. The lightness and vivacity of the Spanish character, with its strain of Orientalism, its fertility of resource in meeting new conditions, its adaptability in dealing with the dwellers in warmer lands, all played their part in this as in the other conquests. Only on occasions when some stubborn resistance was met with, as in Manila and the surrounding country, where the most advanced of the native peoples dwelt and where some of the forms and beliefs of Islam had been established, was it necessary to resort to violence to destroy the native leaders and replace them with the missionary fathers. A few sallies by young Salcedo, the Cortez of the Philippine conquest, with a company of the splendid infantry, which was at that time the admiration and despair of martial Europe, soon effectively exorcised any idea of resistance that even the boldest and most intransigent of the native leaders might

have entertained.

For the most part, no great persuasion was needed to turn a simple, imaginative, fatalistic people from a few vague animistic deities to the systematic iconology and the elaborate ritual of the Spanish Church. An obscure _Bathala_ or a dim _Malyari_ was easily superseded by or transformed into a clearly defined _Diós_, and in the case of any especially tenacious "demon," he could without much difficulty be merged into a Christian saint or devil. There was no organized priesthood to be overcome, the primitive religious observances consisting almost entirely of occasional orgies presided over by an old woman, who filled the priestly offices of interpreter for the unseen powers and chief eater at the sacrificial feast. With their unflagging zeal, their organization, their elaborate forms and ceremonies, the missionaries were enabled to win the confidence of the natives, especially as the greater part of them learned the local language and identified their lives with the communities under their care. Accordingly, the people took kindly to their new teachers and rulers, so that in less than a generation Spanish authority was generally recognized in the settled portions of the Philippines, and in the succeeding years the missionaries gradually extended this area by forming settlements from among the wilder peoples, whom they persuaded to abandon the more objectionable features of their old roving, often predatory, life and to group themselves into towns and villages "under the bell."

The tactics employed in the conquest and the subsequent behavior of the conquerors were true to the old Spanish nature, so succinctly characterized by a plain-spoken Englishman of Mary's reign, when the war-cry of Castile encircled the globe and even hovered

ominously near the "sceptered isle," when in the intoxication of power character stands out so sharply defined: "They be verye wyse and politicke, and can, thorowe ther wysdome, reform and brydell theyr owne natures for a tyme, and applye ther conditions to the manners of those men with whom they meddell gladlye by friendshippe; whose mischievous maners a man shall never know untyll he come under ther subjection; but then shall he parfectlye parceve and fele them: for in dissimulations untyll they have ther purposes, and afterwards in oppression and tyrannye, when they can obtain them, they do exceed all other nations upon the earthe." [1]

In the working out of this spirit, with all the indomitable courage and fanatical ardor derived from the long contests with the Moors, they reduced the native peoples to submission, but still not to the galling yoke which they fastened upon the aborigines of America, to make one Las Casas shine amid the horde of Pizarros. There was some compulsory labor in timber-cutting and ship-building, with enforced military service as rowers and soldiers for expeditions to the Moluccas and the coasts of Asia, but nowhere the unspeakable atrocities which in Mexico, Hispaniola, and South America drove mothers to strangle their babes at birth and whole tribes to prefer self-immolation to the living death in the mines and slave-pens. Quite differently from the case in America, where entire islands and districts were depopulated, to bring on later the curse of negro slavery, in the Philippines the fact appears that the native population really increased and the standard of living was raised under the stern, yet beneficent, tutelage of the missionary fathers. The great distance and the hardships of the journey precluded the coming of many irresponsible adventurers from Spain and, fortunately for the native

population, no great mineral wealth was ever discovered in the Philippine Islands.

The system of government was, in its essential features, a simple one. The missionary priests drew the inhabitants of the towns and villages about themselves or formed new settlements, and with profuse use of symbol and symbolism taught the people the Faith, laying particular stress upon "the fear of God," as administered by them, reconciling the people to their subjection by inculcating the Christian virtues of patience and humility. When any recalcitrants refused to accept the new order, or later showed an inclination to break away from it, the military forces, acting usually under secret directions from the padre, made raids in the disaffected parts with all the unpitying atrocity the Spanish soldiery were ever capable of displaying in their dealings with a weaker people. After sufficient punishment had been inflicted and a wholesome fear inspired, the padre very opportunely interfered in the natives' behalf, by which means they were convinced that peace and security lay in submission to the authorities, especially to the curate of their town or district. A single example will suffice to make the method clear: not an isolated instance but a typical case chosen from among the mass of records left by the chief actors themselves.

Fray Domingo Perez, evidently a man of courage and conviction, for he later lost his life in the work of which he wrote, was the Dominican vicar on the Zambales coast when that Order temporarily took over the district from the Recollects. In a report written for his superior in 1680 he outlines the method clearly: "In order that those whom we have assembled in the three villages may persevere in their settlements, the most efficacious fear and the one most suited to their nature is that the Spaniards of the fort and presidio of Paynaven [2] of

whom they have a very great fear, may come very often to the said villages and overrun the land, and penetrate even into their old recesses where they formerly lived; and if perchance they should find anything planted in the said recesses that they would destroy it and cut it down without leaving them anything. And so that they may see the father protects them, when the said Spaniards come to the village, the father opposes them and takes the part of the Indians. But it is always necessary in this matter for the soldiers to conquer, and the father is always very careful always to inform the Spaniards by whom and where anything is planted which it may be necessary to destroy, and that the edicts which his Lordship, the governor, sent them be carried out .... But at all events said Spaniards are to make no trouble for the Indians whom they find in the villages, but rather must treat them well." [3]

This in 1680: the Dominican transcriber of the record in 1906 has added a very illuminating note, revealing the immutability of the system and showing that the rulers possessed in a superlative degree the Bourbonesque trait of learning nothing and forgetting nothing: "Even when I was a missionary to the heathens from 1882 to 1892, I had occasion to observe the said policy, to inform the chief of the fortress of the measures that he ought to take, and to make a false show on the other side so that it might have no influence on the fortress."

Thus it stands out in bold relief as a system built up and maintained by fraud and force, bound in the course of nature to last only as long as the deception could be carried on and the repressive force kept up to sufficient strength. Its maintenance required that the different sections be isolated from each other so that there could be no growth

toward a common understanding and coöperation, and its permanence depended upon keeping the people ignorant and contented with their lot, held under strict control by religious and political fear.

Yet it was a vast improvement over their old mode of life and their condition was bettered as they grew up to such a system. Only with the passing of the years and the increase of wealth and influence, the ease and luxury invited by these, and the consequent corruption so induced, with the insatiable longing ever for more wealth and greater influence, did the poison of greed and grasping power enter the system to work its insidious way into every part, slowly transforming the beneficent institution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries into an incubus weighing upon all the activities of the people in the nineteenth, an unyielding bar to the development of the country, a hideous anachronism in these modern times.

It must be remembered also that Spain, in the years following her brilliant conquests of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, lost strength and vigor through the corruption at home induced by the unearned wealth that flowed into the mother country from the colonies, and by the draining away of her best blood. Nor did her sons ever develop that economic spirit which is the permanent foundation of all empire, but they let the wealth of the Indies flow through their country, principally to London and Amsterdam, there to form in more practical hands the basis of the British and Dutch colonial empires.

The priest and the soldier were supreme, so her best sons took up either the cross or the sword to maintain her dominion in the distant colonies, a movement which, long continued, spelled for her a form of national suicide. The soldier expended his strength and generally

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