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Letter from Jogjakarta

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Notes and Comment

Letter from Jogjakarta

Curiously enough, the first thing that struck me when I got to Indonesia was the almost next-to-nothing knowledge that I had of a country with which we have so much in common. As we rode by train from Djakarta to Jogjakarta, a trip of about eleven hours, I thought to myself that the rice fields and coconut groves that stretched out before me could very well have been those of Bulacan or Laguna. The men and women who worked together in the fields were as sun-tanned and weather-beaten as our farmers back home. It would seem that nature, sun and rain, and the rice that's grown in the fields induce a pattern of life that makes the Indonesian farmer very much a brother to the Filipino. There is this difference that here they are blessed with more rain and a better irrigation system. So it is not uncommon to see golden stretches of rice ready to harvest alongside patches of green seedlings ready for another planting. By a certain munificence of nature combined with human ingenuity it is harvest time and planting time in Indonesia the whole year round.

Everything that grows here is lush. I have seen plants that are mere shrubs and bushes back home which here grow into moderate-sized trees. The chico, which they call *sawo* here, bears a fruit almost the size of a fist. And when you find one that is a dwarf compared to this "sawo Java", they will tell you that is "sawo Manila". Nature above in the form of rain and below in the form of a very fertile soil makes Indonesia a very rich country.

As long as we are talking about sun and rain, it will be good to mention here that Indonesia exhibits a weather that is also similar to that of the Philippines. However, the rainy season here comes during December and on to April and May. Typhoons are unknown. And it is a blessing that there are no typhoons, because with the type of tile roofing they have here, I have visions of pools of water coming through the ceiling should the rain come slanting, whipped about by

the winds. The tiles of the roof in the form of rather flat sluices hold together simply by their own weight; no cement or mortar or nails hold them in place. Generally, Indonesia is cooler, if one can speak of coolness, compared to the Philippines.

There probably are more dialects here in Indonesia than we have in the Philippines. Bahasa Indonesia is the official language. It is surprising how many Indonesian words are similar to either Tagalog, Ilocano, Pampango, or Visayan. Indonesian is not a fully developed language. It does not have, for example, future and past forms for verbs. One must use adverbial expressions of time to indicate when the action takes place. As an official language Indonesian finds wider acceptance here than Tagalog at home. The newspapers use it; radio broadcasts are in Indonesian; and it, too, is the medium of communication in the schools. Even before it was made the official language, the people used Indonesian in the market place. As a second language English is in great demand.

Today the thirst for education in Indonesia is very great. Classrooms from kindergarten to courses of higher education in the universities are packed. Schoolbuildings more often than not see three shifts of students through the day from early morning to late in the evening. Because here in Indonesia people travel not so much in cars as by bicycles, a bicycle is as much a part of a student's gear as his books. Their years of schooling are divided into primary, six years; junior high school, three years; senior high school, three years; and finally, university courses. A student wishing to qualify for a higher level must pass a state examination. This they administer to students as early as the sixth grade. In the senior high school they have three divisions: "A", mainly languages and literature; "B", math and the sciences; "C", economics. A student is assigned to one of these divisions according to the marks he gets on his report card from junior high school. Having been in the classroom only about two or three weeks, I am not in a position to judge the quality of the education nor the ability of the students.

It would seem that the Indonesians are a very religious people. God or the gods play a large part in their lives. I think this is the explanation for that beautiful reverence that Indonesian Catholics show when they are in church. The most immediately striking quality of Indonesian Catholicism is the reception of Holy Communion on Sundays. As a rule, all who go to Mass receive Communion, so that the distribution of Communion easily takes ten to twenty minutes at every Mass. And just as many young men receive Communion as do women and young ladies. The sight of so many people receiving Communion is very edifying and consoling. Vocations, at least here in Central Java, are plentiful and very promising.

Here in Central Java, and particularly in Jogjakarta, the people are known to be very *halus*. The word means gentle and well man-

nered. One is received into a house with many a bow and word of greeting. Guest and host alike in a very natural fashion vie in showing deference to each other. Even in business and in offices this trait of gentility is to be found. In his dealings with others it is the concern of the Javanese never to give the slightest offense.

The Indonesians have many excellent qualities and a culture all their own. They are trying their best to preserve these, guarding them from being overwhelmed by Western influences. They easily outdo the Philippines in censorship of movies and the type of advertisement that gets into their papers. Their youngsters here are much better protected. Again, I believe this care comes from their religiousness and from a deep sense of the sacred.

As a young nation Indonesia is faced with many problems. We may compare Indonesia to a youngster coming into his adolescence. This "youngster" nation is conscious of new life, new powers. It is drawn by forces and attractions from the outside. Yet it has a history behind it which it cannot completely ignore. I suppose that is the challenge to the leaders of the country today: to see Indonesia through these difficult years to political, social and economic maturity.

Many times I have used the word Indonesia. But really I use it as one who has seen Indonesia only from the island of Java. One who gives impressions about the Philippines from his stay on Luzon will not necessarily say things that are unqualifiedly true of Mindanao. Sumatra, Kalimantan (Borneo), Bali, Flores, and Celebes are bound to show a different face.

JOSE BLANCO

The Poet's Worth

The poet brings to us the touch of the intangibles, the poet brings to us the breath of freedom and the benison of truthful eyes when we look at men and things. Yet in our age, which is surely aching for such gifts, the poet is dishonored by being praised — and unread.

Yet he alone can make us see clearly because freshly. Scholars with their university degrees are and should be respected. But the men of learning, one comes to see, gather and inspect and moderate and refine *old* thoughts, but seldom furnish startling *new* ones. Each scholar, however original, must needs be original in a scholarly way. He is held within bounds by the sea to which he belongs; his greatest advance can only be the latest mark of the spent wave on the beach, an infinitesimal farther lapping. What if the whole direction of the wave be wrong? What if the march of modern thought's tide have, by some cataclysm, been whirled around and the advance, looked at