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The Britannica on the Philippines

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Notes and Comment

The Britannica on the Philippines

THE 1957 edition of the yearly supplement of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* devotes some 31 pages to a special report on the Philippines. The occasion is the completion of our country's first decade of independence. Filipinos will discover with gratification that the report written by Mr. Albert Ravenholt is not just another of those quaint travelogues in which very transient foreigners speak patronizingly of jeepneys, high-living if empty-headed social butterflies, and bare feet in the palace. Mr. Ravenholt, apart from being a member of the American Universities Field Staff and a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*, is a frequent visitor to the Islands. He is furthermore (as is evident from the report) an interested student of things Philippine. An acknowledgment is made in a prologue to the article of his liaison with Dr. H. Otley Beyer in connection with the preparation of the report, although the editors carefully point out that responsibility cannot be fixed on the "dean of American scholars in the Philippines" for any of the statements made by Mr. Ravenholt.

While the subject is delimited by the title to "a decade of independence," a good half of the article is devoted to a painstaking albeit concise discussion of Philippine geography, history, anthropology, and sociology. The author has coupled with his perspicacity (and his integrity as a reporter) a manner of expression which is studiously inoffensive. The stock charge has often been that Filipinos are indolent; but Mr. Ravenholt finds that Filipinos have "a casual attitude toward life in general" and as a result, they are "lighthearted and carefree to an extent seldom found in other people." This casual attitude, furthermore, is ex-

plained in the paragraph immediately preceding its mention: the "discipline of nature" is more moderate than that felt by peoples in temperate zones; Filipinos have never experienced the grinding competition for survival as it is known in overpopulated countries; and the multiplicity of languages has discouraged verbal exactness. Instead of the "mañana habit," the author speaks of "an optimistic and less methodical cast to the national outlook."

Only when he strives for "local color" does Mr. Ravenholt allow himself a few sweeping strokes. He says that the ordinary Filipino husband, having given his wife all his pay, "receives an allowance for his personal use which he may bet on cockfighting, spend on *tuba* . . . or lend to his friends." Earlier in the article Mr. Ravenholt points out that one out of every ten Filipinos lives in greater Manila. Considering that cockfighting is illegal in Manila and in some other population centers, and considering further that in these places, a stiff shot of cheap gin is more readily available than a *pasók* of *tuba*, the ordinary Filipino husband must go to an awful lot of bother in order to spend his allowance.

Mr. Ravenholt's intimacy with little understood facts of Philippine history and his detached evaluation of these facts can and should put many a local demagogue to shame. The Filipino who has allowed impassioned slogans to take the place of incontrovertible records in his study of history will take umbrage at what Mr. Ravenholt presents as our "heritage from Spain." For one thing, he begins the examination of Spanish administration in the Philippines from the time of Legaspi's coming and not from the middle 1800s. This allows the reader to evaluate correctly what the author calls the "creative role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines." For while the author has profound respect for the aspirations of the 19th century Filipino (he cites the heroic martyrdom of Dr. Rizal and the three martyr-priests), he also soberly looks at the more than 200 years before the revolution and says that the "energetic work of the priests for the first time gave the Filipinos a sense of a larger unity that reached beyond clan and local chieftain to include other men of like habits and tastes—particularly among prominent land-owning gentry—in neighbouring provinces or islands." It will be remembered that in his lectures delivered in Manila last year, the British historian Dr. Steven C. Runciman repeatedly emphasized this very point.

The rest of Mr. Ravenholt's report begins with a recitation of American achievements in the Philippines. These are impres-

sive, and the Philippine record during World War II is correctly cited by the author as a mark of Filipino gratitude to America.

In sizing up the first ten years of Philippine independence, Mr. Ravenholt's competence in reporting becomes apparent. In discussing the problems of the young republic, Mr. Ravenholt brings up two points that could well stand underscoring, and both pertain to education. "At a time when the republic is in critical need of rational leadership, the public schools are deteriorating at a pace that disturbs all conscientious educators. Most notable is the lowering in standards of English instruction; reputable colleges find that up to half their freshmen applicants do not command sufficient English to master their textbooks..." Ang again, "...the Philippines lacks the centres for research, particularly in the humanities, from which could come the ideas the republic requires to chart its own sound course." These items we quote with no further comment.

An introductory note, presumably by the editors, seems to assume a somewhat unwarranted optimism for the success of the American-sponsored Point Four program in Asia, on the grounds of the success of what has come to be called the "Philippine experiment." If in the expression of this optimism, one is supposed to expect the "less developed countries of Asia" to turn to the ways of democracy in quick time, then attention must be called to a statement made by Mr. Ravenholt in his report: "Filipinos are heirs to the 'most effective large scale European missionary enterprise in the Orient.' It was this work, continued through more than three centuries of Spanish rule followed by a half-century under the United States flag, that so fundamentally sets the Philippines apart from the rest of Asia."

In other words America's successful "Philippine experiment" had a ready-made launching platform—one that, unfortunately, the other countries of Asia do not quite possess to this very day. The acceptance of democracy postulates the acceptance of a particular system of values. Where these values do not exist or are vaguely understood, democracy must ever remain incipient or stunted. Democracy thrives best in a Christian climate, for only in such a climate can the growth be expected of that deep and lasting respect for individual dignity so necessary to the operation of democratic processes.

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