

José Rizal

The Lord gazes at the Philippine Islands

(The beginning of a satirical novel)

I

Having been banished to oblivion by the inhabitants of the earth, it has been centuries since God the Father had abandoned the business of this world, leaving its management to the saints and other idols in vogue whom the people worshiped in their madness. He devoted his attention to other suns and planets, more beautiful and bigger than ours, on whose surface a pure and simple cult was rendered to the Eternal Creator. Each time His omnipotent gaze encountered our little ball which, covered with clouds, rolled in the infinite space, he withdrew it in disgust, like a resentful father at the sight of an ungrateful and bad son. And thus the earth, abandoned to its idols, became enveloped in misery and grief. Darkness descended on its surface, and in its bosom passions howled furiously like reptiles locked up in their dens. And the crying of the unfortunate ones and the voices of the victims filled the air, pierced the clouds and rose to the throne of the Almighty.

Finally the Eternal Creator took pity and one day, putting on his eyeglasses, said to himself: "Let's see what is going on among the asses on their orange-colored sphere!"

God looked at the earth and by chance he saw precisely a group of islands, mostly mountainous, surrounded by tempestuous seas and shaken by convulsive tremors, as if they were coated with quicksilver. And God saw men of different races and color, some with a skirt and others with trousers, the top of whose head was shaved, leaving a circle of hair around it, while the heads of others were shaven in the opposite way, with a large lock of long hair in the center, like that of women. And they were all playful in a mischievous way and saying a lot of nonsense attributed to Him, the Eternal Father, and others joked and said even more nonsense in the belief that they were pleasing Him.

The Eternal Father believed that He was seeing visions. He adjusted his eyeglasses and looked more attentively.

And He saw that some who lived without doing anything oppressed and enslaved the rest, belittled them, fooled them, and still not satisfied, insulted and mocked them. But what surprised the Eternal Father most, was that they were all dissatisfied, and in truth, the oppressors more than the oppressed.

“Good gracious!” He muttered shaking his head in disgust, and stroked his beard. “Looks like things are going badly on those small islands. Oh, come here!” He added in a loud voice, calling the archangel Gabriel who passed by.

Gabriel approached Him.

“Do you know the name of those green islands scattered there below, with strange inhabitants and even stranger customs?”

Gabriel looked.

“Of course!” he replied. “Because I used to have a temple and a square there!”

“You, little Gabriel, you have a temple there and a square!” the Eternal Father exclaimed surprised. “You allow yourself such luxuries ...”

“Bah! But they have already dispossessed me! They have given them to a friar. Everything comes into the hands of the friars there!”

“Friars, you say? What kind of beast is that?”

“Well ... a friar, a friar is hard to figure out”, Gabriel replied perplexed. “A friar ... there's the *quid*¹. I don't understand it myself!”

“And what is the name of those little islands?” asked God, while he looked at the earth with great curiosity.

“Well, Philippine Islands!”

“Aha! So those are the notorious Philippines, from which comes so much ... But tell me, why do they have a name that sounds Spanish, when according to what I hear, their inhabitants don't speak that language?”

“That's another *quid*, Eternal Father,” replied Gabriel, who had become fond of the word when he was in the Philippines. “The inhabitants of those islands are subject to the Spaniards!”

“Subjects, Gabriel, subjects you say? I have created men free, men are born free ..., all men are equal ...!”

“That's another *quid*!”

“Stop those *quids*, Gabriel, and explain yourself better.”

¹ Latin word for *what*. (“That's the question”).

"Good gracious! If I had to explain to Your Divine Majesty what is going on there below we would not understand each other in seven days ..."

"But at least explain to me how, since I created the earth for man, for him who cultivates it, and having made all men free and equal, the inhabitants of those islands have become subject to the Spaniards?"

"Well ... one Alexander VI, in the name of your Divine Majesty ..."

"What, what? In my name? Gracious!" interrupted the Eternal Father, losing his self-control. "Who is this Alexander VI?"

"Well, that's another *quid* ... uhm", replied Gabriel, who could not forget his bad habits. "This Alexander VI, who pretended to rule the world in the name of Your Divine Majesty, was a rascal who poisoned many, had amorous relations with his daughter ..."

"Jesus, Mary!" interrupted the Father, as he made the sign of the cross. "Jesus, Mary! And this rascal reigned in my name, *Sanctus Deus!*"

"Since Your Divine Majesty no longer paid attention to the earth ... when the master sleeps, the servants and thieves have a holiday!" Gabriel replied with a certain tone of reproach. "Everybody knows that this Alexander was a cunning scoundrel, so he was cursed and condemned by all honorable men throughout Europe and civilized America, and his name has become synonymous with the words immoral, assassin, poisoner, intriguer, incestuous ... Only, only on those little islands he is esteemed. There they have an entire street dedicated to him which they named after him!"

"Is that true? Is that country mad?" But he continued, "You were saying that that scoundrel, abusing my name ..."

"... gave those islands to the Portuguese!"

"To the Portuguese? But didn't you say that those islands are subject to the Spaniards? What has become of my name and my prestige?"

"That's another ... I say, I'll explain. Alexander VI took advantage of your oversight, and divided the earth between the Spaniards and the Portuguese ..."

"But who gave him permission to dispose of the earth, that wasn't his?"

"Bah, bah! It shows that Your Divine Majesty has been unaware of what is happening on earth for a long time. Well, the Popes stopped at nothing. They regulate the heavens, your kingdom, Divine Majesty, and Your Divine Majesty yourself!"

"Regulate me, regulate heaven, you say?" cried God the Father, who rose up.

"Ay, ay!" Gabriel said. "And not just the Popes, who after all adopt certain attitudes and a certain seriousness, but the last friar, the last monkey, as we used to say there in Manila, pretends to send you orders, making you a kind of executor of their wishes."

"*Sus Maria, Sus Maria*. How is that possible?" cried the Father, holding his venerable head: "*Oh tempora, oh morals!*"²... But go on, go on. You say that he divided the earth between the Portuguese and the Spanish. And Spain bought them?"

"No sir, on the contrary! A Portuguese who had a friend in those places won them for the Spaniards ..."

"A Portuguese? So he became a traitor to his motherland? I don't understand you!"

"Yes, Father, he became a traitor to his motherland, but he apologized by saying that his king didn't want to increase his wages."

"And because of that he became a traitor to his king and his motherland? What did they do with him afterwards?"

"Erect a monument to him in the Philippines and baptize the streets with his name, just as they did for the other."

"Another! But do they honor all the rascals over there?"

The Archangel Gabriel folded his wings. "You know, I don't have my church anymore," he muttered.

"But Portugal. What did she do then?" asked the Father, who was interested in the tangle.

"She protested, and Charles, king of the Spaniards, taking into account the reasons and a good sum of money that he needed then, renounced to Portugal whatever rights he might have to those islands."

"And Portugal took them then?"

"No, Father. Charles again sent other expeditions to take possession of them without success, until his son eventually subjugated them by means of treaties, partly by good promises."

"And that Charles and his son have monuments on the Philippines?"

"Not yet, but they will have in due course," replied Gabriel.

"And what did Alexander do when he saw that his orders were not followed? He protested, and tried to establish order?"

"Oh no! He had already died, poisoned in his turn. But strange if he took his orders seriously!"

"And what did the people say when they saw my sacred name damaged in such settlements?"

"What could they say, Eternal Father, but that You don't exist, or that if you do, you abandoned them?"

² "Oh what times! Oh what manners!"

The old God covered his face and then with a sorrowful look he asked: "Let's see, Gabriel. Since you have been in those islands, and it seems like you know them well, what do you think is advisable to remedy their ills?"

"The Eternal Father asks for my opinion?"

"Yes, my son, for their voices have even reached me, and I would like to put an end to so much misery."

"If it was up to me, I would take possession of those islands ..."
And Gabriel made an expressive gesture, as if he crumbled something with his fingers. "Like this, Eternal Father, like this, and I would create new islands with new inhabitants. Like this, like this!"

"Well, well," replied the old God in a fatherly tone. "It shows that you are young and not used to making mischief. Maybe you are still resentful because you have been deprived of your temple and your square, that were given to ... what do you call him?"

"Friar!"

"That's it, friar! What a strange name. I can't remember creating something like that! But don't be vengeful, do like me. Look, they call me the God of Vengeance, me, while I am merciful! I gave them everything and I don't have a temple there. I, who have made all men free, and they abuse my name to destroy my work. And yet, not only I don't take revenge, but still I wish to make them happy."

"Well, well," replied Gabriel. "As Your Divine Majesty does not like to follow my advice, please ask that of the others who enjoy great fame in the Philippines. There is precisely San Andrés, patron of Manila, whose name day every year is celebrated elaborately, with flags, processions, drums, judges, disguised agents, whining and other antiques!"

And after the Archangel had paid his respects, he withdrew.

II

"Listen, Andrés, what do you know about the Philippines?" the old God asked an old man, passing by with a cross in the shape of an X.

The old apostle, who heard himself questioned, was scared and dropped the cross when he heard the name of the Philippines.

"Well, what do you advise me to do to establish order in Manila?" the Father continued in a sweet voice, seeing that the other was speechless.

San Andrés grimaced upon hearing the words *order* and *Manila*, and entrusted himself to all the saints.

“Go ahead, speak! What do you advise?”

“I, Lord, I ... nothing, nothing!” said the apostle at last. “I have nothing to do with that country, and I don't want to associate with those people. I am a peaceful saint, of little words. Besides, I am not a man of learning. May they leave me in peace, for they already gave me enough trouble.”

“But aren't you the patron saint of Manila?”

“No, no ... yes ... yes ...no, Father, ... that's to say, yes ... yes ... but no ... no ... no.”

“But man, make yourself clear.”

San Andrés touched the back of his neck, and fanned himself with the end of his cape, for he was feeling a tension like when he was crucified. Making an effort he was at last able to say:

“Look, Your Divine Majesty, I am innocent! The story is this. Years after the Spaniards took possession of those islands, many Chinese came who wanted to take them over in turn. There they fought and killed each other. I didn't interfere in anything, how could I? But the victors, in order to sanction their possession and to give it an appearance of justice, wanted to involve me, attributing their victory to my intervention – God help me! – saying the battle took place on my saint's day, as if I had anything to do with what was done on that day. But the beauty of it is, that that day was not my saint's day at all, because the Spaniards made a mistake in the calendar, as a result of having navigated following the sun. So Your Divine Majesty can see how innocent I am of the imputation.”

“And on whose saint's day was the day of the battle?”

“How do I know, Eternal Father,” replied San Andrés, getting ready to leave. “Apparently it is a certain *Proculo* or a certain *Evasio*. The calendar has many saints, late them take responsibility!”

They looked for the saints he referred to, but the little angels didn't know them, and the Eternal Father asked, without losing his patience: “But let's see, what religion is followed in the Philippines?”

The blessed angels looked at each other. They asked each other with their eyes, like children who didn't learn their lesson, until one of them, naughtier and bolder than the rest, a real *enfant terrible*, replied: “The Christian religion!”

“Who said that my religion prevails on those islands?” asked a clear and sonorous male voice. “Who dares to slander?” A tall man with a serious and stern appearance, with a gallant face and a majestic posture, came forward among the blessed ones, searching the bold

little angel with his eyes. In heaven they called him Jesus, and he was one of the greatest founders of religions. The talkative angel was very scared and confused. He hid behind his companions who mocked him and said to him: "Aba, you definitely deserve it!"

"What religion is practiced then in the Philippines?" the Eternal Father asked again, looking at everyone. "Do those islands have no religion at all?"

Jesus became more severe and stern than ever, so many who looked at him didn't dare to speak. Finally someone who was much older replied. He was of the Mongolian type, with a mustache and a bushy beard, with brown skin and slanting eyes. After much ceremony and bowing he said in an insinuating and calm voice:

"The righteous Jesus has spoken the truth. His religion is not observed in the Philippines, and I dare say that his teaching is completely unknown there. But allow your unworthy disciple Kung Tsen to remind you that, though it is true that your divine laws do not prevail there, on the other hand there they misuse your name and in your name commit crimes and outrageous iniquities. I know because my country is a neighbor of the Philippines and many heathens from my country become Christians for purposes more or less reprehensible, more or less dishonest!"

Kung Tsen's words have much weight in heavenly circles, so that Jesus, without being annoyed replied in this way: "I agree with Kung Tsen, but I can't be held responsible for the abuses committed in my name by some hypocrites, a race of serpents, vipers, whitewashed graves. If the name of the Father is misused, what wouldn't they do with mine? My teaching is written down and though deformed, it shines there, protects. They abuse my name because people forget me, because they don't remember that I, who preached love and charity, cannot accept any form of tyranny or oppression. I taught them to reason, to analyze, to investigate, then why do they close their eyes? Is it my fault if there are blind and stupid people on earth? To what ridiculous degree do they want to drag me, by worshipping me in parts and my vitals, forgetting my teachings, the moral basis of my work, the spirit of my preaching? I deny that race of hypocrites, and I would already have protested a long time ago if I didn't know that my mother was involved in the prank."

"Excuse me, son," replied a good woman, with a sweet face and a merciful look. "They have abused my name even more than yours, and if I haven't complained, to avoid causing you any displeasure. Look, there they trade with my love, with my feelings. They use my name to get the last centavo from the poor, to ruin the married women, to stain

the virgins, to immerse entire families in ignorance and misery. Now they paint me black, now brown, now white – I who have always lived on my work and have never asked for alms from anyone. I had to go from town to town, from house to house, begging in order to satiate those who live in gaiety and abundance with gold. They make me a cloak for their dirty linen and love affairs, seller of rosaries, scapulars and belts, and if sometimes they dress me well, it is for the purpose of making more money, like they do with a circus dancer. And not satisfied with that, they attribute to me needs and weaknesses, they suppose that I'm vengeful, greedy and harsh. Sometimes they place me in enmity, contradiction and rivalry with myself, they let me take a bath, dance. They dress me in ridiculous robes, and they commit all kinds of heresy and mischief with me. Now that you know, I beg you, my son, to take me from these islands, because I cannot bear any more humiliation. Leave the saints there to deal with them. Agustín, Domingo, Ignacio ³ are there ..."

"*Nequaquam!*" ⁴ Saint Augustine protested. "They have used me badly there. My sons, if they are not simple writers, are quack preachers – the best among them is a comedian. I give them to you as a present."

"Mine are too fat!" replied the lanky St. Francis mournfully. "I'd rather hang out with my little animals. Let Ignatius take care of them, he is the most cunning and enterprising."

"With a lot of faith and willpower I might be able to do something," replied Ignatius of Loyola with his delicate smile. "My sons are well disciplined and obey my rules. But your sons, my dear Dominic, despite my kindness towards them, try to obstruct my enterprises, to expel me ... If you could intervene ..."

"Who? Me, intervene?" replied Dominic.

"Yes, every day! First they make me jump with my scapular and my star of false stones. They are capable of anything when you threaten to take their business away. Let the Nuncio and St. Peter resolve the matter."

"Who's talking about me?" asked a catarrhal voice, like that of an old janitor. It was St. Peter who came forward with his bald head and his hands full of ink.

"We were saying," replied St. Dominic, "that you ought to settle things in the Philippines, since you have a Pope ..."

"Please do me a favor, and don't talk about the Pope, please!" St. Peter interrupted. "See how my hands are covered with ink for

³ St. Augustine, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius Loyola.

⁴ "No way"

marking indulgences. I am baffled. Nothing less than putting the Philippines in order! What if they hang me? So I have to put things in order in the Philippines, where my sons serve as servants, as equals, while your own sons suck the country dry! You do it yourself, and if not, let them do it themselves."

After saying this he left, because he had heard a knock on the door.

"Yes, let them do it themselves!"

"Leave them alone!"

"Pray to God and help yourself!"

"Every country gets what it deserves!"

"Tyrants exist because the oppressed tolerate them!"

"He who tolerates everything suffers the consequences!"

The saints said these and many other things out of fear of going to the Philippines. Seeing them all fleeing from the danger, the Eternal Father was perplexed.

"But let's see. Let's find out first what's going on in the Philippines ... Which one of you is up to date? No one? Gracious! But is there no Filipino over here ..."

"Yes, Eternal Father, there are many," replied St. John, who was in charge of the statistics of heaven, "but they're so strange and so ..."

"It doesn't matter, let them come. We will try to get something out of them. I have created everything from nothing!"

"The Filipinos, *oy!* The Filipinos! Those who have been in the Philippines!" cried the angels from all over heaven.

III

An extraordinary activity was noticed among the groups of inhabitants of heaven. Many of the Filipino's were asleep, others were hiding, believing they were going to be inspected, to be asked for their residence certificates, or to be made to work for free in public works etc., as they were accustomed to do on earth.

When the little angels saw them, they winked at each other and pointed their fingers at them. The virgins suppressed their smiles and covered their faces with a fan to exchange a few words. The old women put on their glasses to see better, and the archangels, cherubim and seraphim, who could not forsake their dignity, nudged each other and coughed.

Soon a line appeared which end was lost in the distance and became longer and longer. At the head of them walked the most distinguished, the oldest, those who had sour faces and a Good Friday three o'clock look. The young people with a modern look and affable manners lagged behind, the first ones not allowing them to mingle with them.

St. John the Evangelist introduced the first and mentioned his merits and qualifications. He was a Spaniard with a stiff mustache and an even stiffer look. He had died in Manila of dysentery.

"His Excellency Policarpio Rodríguez Mendez de la Villaencina, a great Filipinologist, authority on the country, according to himself, who travelled all over the islands, knows the *Indio* inside and out, and knows why, how and in what way the Philippine Archipelago does not go forward!"

"*A la bonne heure!*" ⁵ exclaimed the Eternal Father, as he opened his arms. "Well, talk, enlighten us, inspire us!"

The whole heaven became quiet, including the naughty angels, and the indiscreet virgins stopped winking and smiling. Sir Policarpio, and so on, and so on, coughed two or three times, looked right and left with great disdain, and spat with such force that his saliva hit St. Dominic right in the middle of the top of his head.

Without bothering to ask for forgiveness, he coughed again and began to speak in a slightly tipsy voice. "Pay attention and know that I know the country and I have an experience ... well! All these people here would have liked to have it and I am not talking about Your Divine Majesty that ... you already understand me! Don't let anyone come to me with sugar-coated tales. I call a spade a spade, because that's how I am, I like clarity, to the point! I've said it, there!"

And he spat again through his other fang and his saliva hit precisely the ear of the good St. Francis.

The Eternal Father, who had listened to the speech of Sir Policarpio attentively, stood with open mouth.

"But why, how and what ...?"

"Please note, know that I know the country well, and I have an experience"

"Keep quiet, good man, be still!" the man behind him interrupted. "You don't understand what's being said. We are not in Manila, but in the celestial court."

The one who spoke was a handsome man with very distinguished manners.

⁵ Just in time.

“Good!” said the Father, addressing the second speaker. “You seem to know the Philippines better, enlighten us.”

The person referred to smoothed his moustache, looked around him with a calm smile and remembering the choir of virgins stood up straight and said in a sweet and sonorous voice: “Sacred Divine Majesty. The modesty that has always characterized me in all public functions which I have attended – and sometimes presided – from the people's street meetings to the August sessions of the parliament of my country ...”

“To the point, man, to the point!” Sir Policarpio interrupted him.

“Man, don't be rude! Let me speak!”

“Keep quiet, man!”

“You are jealous!”

“Heavenly music!”

They got angry and would have started to fight if St. Michael, the head of public order up there, had not intervened and pacified them. The Eternal Father ordered them to withdraw. The little angels and the virgins tried to hold back their laughter.

An old woman followed, laden with scapulars, candles, accessories, belts and other trifles.

“This is Mrs. Antonia, born in the Philippines,” said St. John. “She wasted all her fortune buying those trinkets and has mumbled prayers for eighty years!”

“Back!” said the Eternal Father, “This man. What does he know about the Philippines?”

“This,” St. John continued, “is the head of a *barangay* who died in prison because of debts.”

“And what does he know about the country?” asked the Eternal Father.

“The curate, sir, the tax lists, sir, the curate, the tax lists, the tax lists, the curate ...” chattered the miserable man.

“Let him go!” said the Eternal Father, sighing.

“This is a lawyer who held high positions in the country because he served the friars well.”

“Let's see. Let the lawyer speak!”

The lawyer, who was plump and slow, became excited, resting now on one foot, now on the other and coughed, without being able to utter a word, and finally ended by belching. The virgins and the little angels could no longer restrain themselves and burst out in the most silvery laughter.”

“Silence,” said the Eternal Father. “Now, speak, here you are among friends, have confidence.”

When he heard these affectionate words, the man began to cry and so he was made to withdraw. The Eternal Father frequently touched his beard.

"The next man enjoyed fame for being the smartest in his time. He had always been in power, was judge, governor, director, etc."

"Well, well, tell us about the Philippines. I want to be informed."

"Ah, Your Divine Majesty wishes to be enlightened? Well, go to the friars, consult the friars, hold on to the friars, flatter the friars, side with the friars, agree with the friars ..."

"Well, go back to the friars!" commanded His Divine Majesty, becoming stern.

St. Michael grabbed the man, kicked him at a certain point and he flew to the earth, where on arrival he became a bowl of clay and ended up in the infirmary of a convent.

"How come such individuals were allowed to enter my kingdom without first being purified? What was St. Peter doing?" said the Eternal Father meanwhile with great impatience.

St. John introduced an old man who came forward with much pretended seriousness. "This is one of the big guns in the Philippines," said St. John. "He was a friar all his life ..."

"Aha! So this is a friar!" exclaimed the Eternal Father, looking curiously at the ridiculous old man. "Let's see how the friar will explain himself! Well, speak."

"Well, sir, here where you all can see me," said the funny old man, "I am a miracle. I have made the country wealthy, trying to get all the money out of it. I have flooded it with pastoral letters that have not been read. I sang *Te Deums*, believing that the earthquakes had ended, and the earthquakes returned. I have endowed silly books with indulgences in order to make them respectable and the public laughed loudly. With the people's money I have built ships, to defend them against the infidels, and the infidels got the ships, and the money disappeared ... Well, I've made the Philippines happy, I've made it laugh, laugh and laugh and they must still be laughing until now."

"So the poverty I see is not true ..."

"No, indeed, no sir, there is no poverty there! At my death I left to each of my heirs eight thousand pesos, and remember that I had many heirs. Two or three in every town I've been to! Poverty, no, indeed, no sir! Your Divine Majesty may ask all these friars. You can see how fat and round they are? Well, they have just arrived from the country. Your Divine Majesty can see all is in abundance there!"

“Go away, get out of my sight!” shouted the Eternal Father on seeing so much impudence and foolishness. “Go away, before I get angry and send you to earth, transformed into filthy animals.”

The Filipinos withdrew, confused and deeply regretful, because there were some among them who could have said something discreet and sensible about Philippine affairs. But as they were in the end, no one suspected their existence!

After a few moments of reflection, the Eternal Father addressed Jesus in a stern voice. “Since on earth they commit odious injustices in your name, it is necessary that you go down there and investigate the evil, and inform me about what happens there so it can be remedied.”

“Among the Pharisees again?” Jesus asked, turning pale.

“Yes, among them again! If you had written down your laws and words, if you had expressed yourself clear and precise, your historians would not have forged you, nor corrupted your teachings with their interpretations, nor abused your authority! What discussions, what disputes, what wars and persecutions you would have saved mankind and how rapidly you would have advanced!”

Jesus bowed his head and sighed.

“But, fear nothing,” the Eternal Father continued with more sweetness. “This time the bitter cup will pass you by, because you, wiser with the memory of the past, will try to go unnoticed and avoid as much as possible contact with the Pharisees and Scribes. It will not be necessary for you to be born from a virgin mother, which is difficult there, because, according to what they say, it is a sin to evade conjugal duty ... It is also not necessary to wait fourteen years, on the contrary, it is necessary for you to get there as an already grown up man, because if you are born there and educated there, you will grow up ignorant, you will be mistreated, and I will have difficulty to bring you back to reason. Avoid discussions with the doctors of law, because they certainly won't let you escape from them alive, and they will call you a rebel. God save you from having to throw out of the temple the sellers and merchants, because they will bring a case against you. And above all beware of calling the thousands of Pharisees you will find there snakes or a race of vipers. Go, go down then for the love of humanity, for the prestige of your name, and so that the passion which you suffered would not be harmful to the people, be very patient, be careful, be observant.”

And the Eternal Father, turning to Saint Peter who had come back, said: “And you, why did you let so many imbecile and inhuman men, who need centuries of purification and atonement, enter my

kingdom? Because you have guarded the gate badly you will return to earth."

St. Peter cried out loudly and fell on his knees. "But Lord, I was very busy marking indulgences!" he said, clasping his hands together.

"You will return to earth and accompany Jesus on his pilgrimage," the Eternal Father continued firmly. "Since you have left successors on earth who pretend to be substitutes of Jesus, it is proper that you go with him, because there are many people there committing abuses in your name!"

The two had no other alternative but to bow their head, and after they had received the Father's blessing, they sadly went away.

"Lord," said St. Peter crying to Jesus, "this time we can't escape! You have no idea how they do things there in the Philippines, but I have some news. Pilate at least washed his hands, but there, there they defile them. When the Jews crucified you, they did not persecute either your mother or your relatives, or even your disciples. But Master, in the Philippines, ah, in the Philippines ...! There in Judea, even with the cross on your shoulders, the women still showed you their sympathy, but in the Philippines you have not been accused yet and they have already denied you, so that they would not become suspects. Woe is me! Oh, oh!"

"Courage, Peter, courage. The fault is ours! You have left the keys there below and in founding my church I made a play of words with your name, and the rascals took advantage of it. This teaches me not to make puns about serious and grave matters!"

IV

As they came near the earth, Jesus became more and more sad and pensive. His manly face was sorrowful and you could say that the night had descended on his features. He found that earth, for which he had shed his blood, preaching love, was with the same vices as before, perhaps even worse. Tears, mourning and despair on one side, selfish laughter, gay blasphemies on the other. And everywhere the wretched and discontented humanity was plagued with unquenchable passions. Just like before, the poor were the victims of the rich ... the weak a prey of the strong. Laws for the disinherited, duties for the needy class, and for the rich, for the powerful, rights and privileges. Above this sea of misery and tears he saw, like small barren islands, some smiling and serene faces looking sadly around them. But the waves roared

furiously about, throwing their bitter foam towards them, condemning them, slandering them, insulting them. And amidst the shouting he heard his name Jesus.

“Horror!” Jesus wailed, covering his face. “Horror! So much pointless suffering, so much freedom of choice in vain ... It would have been better if I had left mankind to redeem itself, to develop its own natural powers and the luminous spark with which the Eternal Father has endowed it! Why, if man was able to reveal so many profound secrets from the dark bosom of nature and formulate his divine laws, why couldn't he also discover and make shine the moral germ that God placed in his conscience and in his heart?

“Was it coincidence, that it's easier to analyze the properties of metal hidden in the depths of the earth, than the demands of conscience that speaks to us all the time? What use is my martyrdom if so many thorns would emerge from so few fruits? What became of my work, of my passion and death? Have I suffered so that my name will sanction injustice, drown the conscience of man, and dim his mind?”

St. Peter followed the Master with great difficulty.

“Lord”, he said, “we're getting closer ... but, what is the matter with you, Master, that your forehead is covered with blood. You are crying and your tears are blood ... It could be said that you are in trouble again in Gethsemane ...”

Jesus shook his head mournfully.

“May I feel nothing more than the pain of death,” he replied. “I would prefer a thousand deaths, a thousand Gethsemanes, above the sorrow that now overwhelms me. When someone dies for love or for the belief that his death will do some good, death is a pleasure. But when after death, after suffering, comes disillusion ... Oh! Could I not convert myself into nothing, annihilate myself completely, destroy my conscience for not seeing the disastrous consequences of my work. I have come to earth as light and people have used me to turn it into darkness. I have come to comfort the poor and my religion gives favors and pleasures to the rich. I have come to destroy superstition and in my name superstition flourishes and rules over earth perfectly. I have come to redeem nations and in my name provinces, kingdoms and continents have been subjugated, entire races have been reduced to slavery or completely disappeared. I have come to preach love, and in my name, for trivial distinctions, for the cunning of the vain, people have thrown themselves at each other and have spread death and desolation over the earth, sanctifying crime with the prestige of the divine. Horrible absurdity, monstrous error, astonishing blasphemy!”

And Jesus wept bitterly and disconsolately.

“Yes,” he added, “it is appropriate, it is my duty to redeem mankind once again from the abyss it has fallen into, and though I suffer a thousand more eternal deaths, I am not afraid ... Go away fear, away with fear! This time it won't just be love, it'll be love, duty and justice that will drive me to sacrifice ...”

“What, Lord, are you thinking of allowing yourself to be crucified again?” St. Peter asked trembling.

Jesus, lost in meditation, did not answer. They were approaching the Philippines and were able to catch a glimpse of the tall mountains that crowned the islands, spread over the shining surface of the water that was phosphorescent in the light of the stars. In the distance they saw the red crest of a volcano, like a bloodstain on that unfortunate land. It started to brighten in the east, the precursor of dawn.

St. Peter, uncomfortable with the turn the decisions of the Master were taking, was rightly afraid to enter the Philippines. So, taking advantage of an opportunity the moment they passed an island that did not belong to the group, said to Jesus: “Master, it would be very convenient for us to stop on this island, in order to prepare ourselves for such a dangerous journey. It is necessary to first determine the circumstances in that pen, and just like you fasted for forty days and forty nights before facing the Jews, let's spend three months here, because you can't take enough precautions with the Filipinos.”

St. Peter hoped to distract his Master or at least gain time to avoid entering the Philippines. Jesus, absorbed in his meditations, allowed himself to be guided by St. Peter, who took advantage of the opportunity and brought his Master to the island, landing on a solitary place not far from the town. It was dawn and the houses that could be seen were white, square and with many windows, like pigeon coops, standing on the slope of the mountain that formed the island.

Because it was necessary for them to leave their heavenly garments behind them for the pilgrimage they were going to undertake, Jesus managed to turn his cape into a dark blue suit with a good cut, without following the rules of fashion. He cut his beard and long hair, and in order to get the true look of a Filipino he stooped a little, like a man accustomed to obedience and submission. Seeing him disguised like that, even the Pope himself, despite his infallibility, would take him for a Filipino of a good family who is traveling for pleasure.

St. Peter for his part, who had heard in heaven that the Chinese were the best-off in the Philippines, thought it advisable to convert himself into a Chinese, and asked the Master for permission to do so. But he was not very successful. Because of his baldness he had barely

enough hair for a row, so he looked like a bald Chinaman. He had some hair left for a mustache, converted his cape into loose trousers and changed his tunic into a Chinese shirt, making him look so ridiculous that Jesus, when he saw him, had to use all his seriousness to avoid bursting out in laughter.

They entered the city which was beginning to become lively. The houses opened and the streets filled with servants, workers and sailors, mostly Chinese. St. Peter, with his dress and queue, acquired the ability to speak Chinese and understood that they were in a Chinese port called Victoria, ruled by the subjects of the Queen of England.

"We don't fit in here," said St. Peter. "We are on Chinese territory that is ruled by Protestants." And he said to himself: We fled from the rain and have fallen in the sea.

And very sad and worried about his fate the good St. Peter walked on with distrust, inwardly cursing his decision to go to that island. In the Philippines, a country of Christians, at least he was known, and no matter how bad it was, it was worth more than the good that had yet to be known.

Jesus, who looked everywhere as if searching for something, observed some big houses that were alike, built in the same style, and it occurred to him that they could be hospitals or some public buildings for charitable purposes. But St. Peter, who had a bad idea of the English and the Chinese, said it they were probably barracks. It seemed impossible to him that such unbelievers might have something else. And to remove the doubt they approached a young man, apparently a Eurasian, and asked him.

"These are of the Dominican fathers!" the young man replied.

"Of the Dominican fathers!" repeated St. Peter admiringly.

"Master, these houses belong to the sons of Dominic."

Both looked at the houses in amazement and admired their splendor.

"And Dominic made us believe that his sons had taken a vow of poverty," said St. Peter.

"Don't be surprised, Peter," said Jesus. "If I remember well, they have missions in China. Maybe the task is so great that they need thousands of missionaries to live here for the work of conversion."

They walked further and saw another long row of houses, not so big, but reasonably well built.

"These must indeed be barracks," said St. Peter to himself, and asked a man if they were barracks.

"They are from the Dominican fathers!" the man replied.

"Gracious!" said St. Peter. "And those I see there, that are painted red and white?"

"Also from the fathers! They are all owned by the fathers," the man replied, gesticulating widely and pointing to many streets. "The fathers have a lot of houses, here, there, everywhere."

"Aha, aha! So there are many Dominicans here?"

"No, only two!"

"Two only? And who lives in those houses?"

"The Chinese."

"The Chinese. Christians without a doubt."

"No!"

"How come? Chinese infidels live in houses built by Dominican Catholics?"

"Yes. The Chinese pay well and the fathers receive a lot of money and they have many millions in the banks and ..."

"And how did they become so rich? Do they work hard, do they cultivate the soil? Are they engaged in industry?"

"No!"

"But where did they get the money to build so many houses?"

"From the Philippines! The Indios give them a lot money!"

"So the Indios of the Philippines must be very rich."

"No, they are very poor! They live in bad houses."

"Poor, well, I don't understand! And the Dominicans build houses for the heathen Chinese with money from the Philippines, while in the Philippines, the Christians live in miserable huts!"

"Yes."

St. Peter approached his master to share his doubts with him, but he found himself sunk in deep meditation.

From the spot where he was, Jesus saw the patio of a large building, some distance away. There were many men, all dressed the same, busy lifting off the ground and putting back some balls which seemed somewhat heavy. There was someone who seemed to be supervising the work."

"That's the prison," said an Englishman, who was called and asked by Jesus. "There live the convicts, the thieves, the counterfeiters, the hardened criminals, the murderers. What you see is one of the tasks to which they are sentenced. There are also other tasks, consisting of weaving burlaps and mats, and turning the crank etc."

"And these wretches are all heathens?"

"No, among them are Christians. They have different nationalities, there are also some Englishmen, because here we make

no distinction between the criminals. We have men there who held high positions in the government of the colony.”

“And your prestige?” asked St. Peter. “Don’t you protect your prestige like the Spanish do in the Philippines?”

“Our prestige is not in our faces, but in our morality,” replied the Englishman without even looking at St. Peter, dressed as a Chinese.

St. Peter agreed that the Englishman, despite everything, might be right in appreciating moral prestige above race. But it was said that he was very proud and very conceited of his system, that the Catholics of the Philippines should understand him better, firstly because they were Catholics and secondly because there he enjoyed quite a reputation.

They continued their walk and their observations, and St. Peter was very surprised that despite the fact that it was a country of infidels, you could walk around safely. There were no carriages that knocked over pedestrians. The Englishmen did not abuse the Chinese. The policemen did not rob or harass the poor, and if anyone, no matter how rich and prominent he was, abused an outcast, he was taken to court, where he was tried in a short time without much administrative hassle. Without the complainant having to spend a lot of money, without him having to go from one office to the other, wasting time and, after being beaten, becoming a victim of the administrative red tape. As St. Peter lost his distrust, he approved the government of that island and planned to live there forever instead of going to the Philippines.

The cunning saint suggested to Jesus our Lord: “Master, wouldn’t it be better if we have a house here, where you can spend the forty days of fasting?”

“Why fast,” answered Jesus, guessing Peter’s intention. “I need all the strength of my body and soul. I need my entire being to be in perfect balance to face the difficulties of my mission ... Why fast? My body, conceived without the slightest blemish, is not an enemy of my spirit, that I should weaken it.”

St. Peter understood the logic of the answer. “But Master,” he replied, “it will not be too much for us to stay here, to study the conditions of the country we are going to visit. We can ask for shelter from the Dominicans who have so many houses, because as I see it, the fields are not habitable.”

Jesus agreed to St. Peter’s proposal, and after they had inquired about the house of the Dominicans, they went there.

“A beautiful building!” St. Peter exclaimed when he saw the monastery or palace, that was inhabited by two brothers of the

procuración ⁶. “I am sure, Master, that they will give us free hospitality and will treat us like brothers.”

Unfortunately for them, they arrived at a bad time. The friar procurator had just lost a case against a Filipino that day, over a paltry issue of a salary that he didn't want to pay. He believed he could have his way, given the wealth of his order, and the case had reached the higher court of the city, scandalizing everyone. But the English judges were not intimidated and did justice, and the grand friar had to pay what he owed in accordance with law and justice.

So on that day he was in a bad mood and, when the servant announced the callers and their purpose, thinking they were Filipinos he threw them out of the procurator's house without ceremony, saying that the *Procuración* was not for beggars, and if they couldn't pay for a house, they might stay on the street.

St. Peter had not yet recovered from his admiration. Decidedly everything was turning into the opposite. He had thought ill of the city and found it free. He thought the friars were hospitable and found them strict and greedy. Only Jesus was sadder and more pensive.

They both went to a hotel and stayed there. And while they waited for a boat that would sail bound for the Philippines, instead of spending their days in the desert or in solitude, because they were among the living and lived in villages and towns, they devoted themselves to the study of the customs on earth, and walked every day through the streets and made interesting notes.

In the city Victoria the news spread that a mysterious stranger, perhaps the son of a Raja who traveled incognito, was in town to study and make notes, with the intention of going to the Philippines afterwards, to study that country. This news aroused the interest of the many residents of Victoria who maintained relations with the Archipelago, especially the religious corporations, which had extensive properties there, and wanted to maintain and preserve their questionable prestige at any price.

And so it happened one morning, that while Jesus was meditating in his hotel room, he was visited by a gentleman with pleasant manners, sweet words and compliments every step of the way.

“Excuse me,” said the unknown man, “for introducing myself in this manner and maybe bother you, but I heard that you are thinking of going on a pleasure trip to the Philippines ... Perhaps to study the country ... maybe with a government commission ... perhaps to write a book ...”

⁶ The procurator's office

The unknown caller smiled, but Jesus moved his head in an ambiguous manner, in such a way that the caller could not discover the traveler's object.

"As we know the country," continued the unknown caller, "and we have numerous friends and partisans there ... we ..."

"Bad start," said St. Peter.

As most of the rental houses belonged to the Dominicans, they found it useless to look for a house and they decided to embark for the Philippines. They went to the beach and there they learned that a boat would leave in a few hours. However, the captain demanded to see their passports.

"What passport?" said Jesus. "I'm a Filipino – do I need a passport to return to the Philippines? Since when do you need a passport to enter your own home?"

The captain said that the government required it and that the travelers had to get them. Jesus paid three and a half pesos, and St. Peter sixteen pesos because he was a Chinese. St. Peter was furious.

"Master, in our time the world was not like this! There was more freedom, more brotherhood among nations! Didn't you say that we are all children of your father?"

"Yes, Peter, I've said that repeatedly and I wish I had never said it! Some repeat it now in order to effectively exclude others."

"Bad start of the journey, Master, bad start!" mumbled St. Peter as he boarded the boat.

On a beautiful morning they entered Manila Bay.

St. Peter, who had been very seasick during the voyage, was extremely happy to finally leave the ship. The China Sea was different from that of Galilee where he had been. And his Master would not perform any miracle to calm the waves. When he glimpsed in the distance to the city, he became very talkative and with his rooster on his arm he bothered everyone with questions.

"What is that building we can see on the left, with two towers that are embattled like a feudal castle, or a refuge for bandits in Samaria?"

"That is the Church of St. Dominic!" replied the sailor.

St. Peter almost let go of his rooster.

"Church! ... St. Dominic!" he repeated in surprise. "Dominic is living here like a feudal lord, and we in heaven thought that he was so ... Without doubt he has a lot of wealth there?"

"A lot? Oh no!" replied the sailor. "It would be very foolish to leave their money in the church. They have it elsewhere!"

"But how did they acquire so much wealth?" asked St. Peter. "Do they work hard? Do they till the soil? Are they engaged in industry? ... If I remember correctly, Dominic told me that his sons have a vow of poverty!"

The sailor who understood him did not answer.

"And that large round dome that I see on the right, what is that?"

"The Cathedral of St. Peter!"

"Confound it!" exclaimed St. Peter, letting go of his rooster.

"Confound it! What name did you say?"

"St. Peter."

"My cathedral, mine, mine, something that's mine! And I didn't even know it. The rascals who came from earth didn't tell me anything, nothing. But I'm glad, I'm glad!"

In his desire to leave the ship, forgetting his precautions against the Philippines, he prepared to land. But a sailor reminded him that he had to wait first for the prescribed visit of the inspector and wait for the official permission to disembark.

"But I have permission," replied St. Peter. "Hey, I have a passport that cost me sixteen pesos."

"It's useless!"

"Why? But when we arrived in Victoria, the colony of Victoria, we had no need for a passport or permission, and that is a country of Chinese and of unbelievers!"

"That is precisely the reason, but this is a land of Catholics!"

"For that reason?"

"For the same reason. The Catholics call everyone brother!"

"Ah!" St. Peter exclaimed, and without understanding a word he considered himself convinced.

After two hours of waiting – because whoever was in charge of making the visit was chatting cheerfully with his friends – the captain's longboat came to inform them that they would be quarantined at Mariveles.

"What? We have to stay in quarantine?" protested St. Peter indignant.

"Yes, because we come from a dirty port."

"But didn't you tell me during the trip that many streets in Victoria are cleaner than those of Manila?"

"Not because of that," replied the sailor. "It is because there's cholera in Victoria."

"Ah! But didn't you also tell me that there is cholera in Manila and that your wife died of it, and that the pastor did not allow her to be

buried, because she died without confession? Then why are they preventing our entrance?"

"Because regulations must be followed! Here they are strict with regulations, you understand?"

"Ah!" St. Peter exclaimed again, without understanding any better than before. "And tell me, shall we stay in Mariveles for forty days?"

"No, man, only three days."

"That's nothing. Then why do they call it quarantine?"

"Because quarantine means one, two or three days!"

"Ah! But, my question is, what use is that? I'm going to demand back the sixteen pesos I paid. I'm going to protest!"

St. Peter remembered that the Chinese do not protest, and sighing he begged his Master to change him into any other inhabitant of the earth.

"Yes, Peter, but your passport? You know that the Eternal Father has instructed us to avoid any entanglement with the authorities."

St. Peter cursed the moment it occurred to him to change into a Chinese. At the end of the three days they had spent off Mariveles, they were notified that they could enter Manila. But the ship's cargo of fruit was already spoiled and its trade was ruined.

"Bah," said St. Peter, "we can sell the silk handkerchiefs."

But the corporal on duty wouldn't allow him to land without first inspecting his suitcase, and on seeing the handkerchiefs he voluntarily appropriated two of them. St. Peter let him do it to gain his goodwill, so that he may give him the guide without whom, he was told, he could not disembark.

"You'll see when I reach my cathedral and they find out who I am!" he said to himself.

A carabiner who spotted him suspected him of smuggling and inspected him from head to toe. St. Peter protested vehemently and if he still had his sword, he would certainly have cut off the ear of the carabiner.

"Prisoner, prisoner!" cried the carabiner full of joy, when he discovered a roll of Mexican pesos. "Prisoner!" And he dragged him, holding him by his arm.

"But they're mine, they're mine!" shouted St. Peter.

"Precisely!" replied the carabiner.

St. Peter thought the carabiner was crazy. That the country was truly incomprehensible.

Jesus saw that he was in difficulties, and remembering the recommendation of the Eternal Father he wanted to take revenge on

Peter for his conduct towards him in Jerusalem, when he denied him. Now in turn he wanted to deny Peter. But his good and noble heart prevailed and he followed the two.

The carabiner took St. Peter to a nearby police station where a Spanish officer and several carabinieri were present.

They took all the pesos he had with him and then they took his statement. Jesus, seeing that they were going to prosecute his disciple, wanted to intervene. In the same tone in which he spoke to the Pharisees, when they asked him if they ought to pay tribute to Caesar, he said to the European officer: "Show me one peso of yourself!"

The officer, who had never read the Bible, did not suspect the trick that was being prepared for him. Without knowing what that Indio had in mind, he pulled out of his pocket a Mexican peso, identical to St. Peter's pesos.

"This coin is yours and are you spending it in this country?"

"Of course, because that's from my salary. The government pays us with that money."

"Well, if these pesos are allowed in this country, and are used by the government itself, then why do you confiscate what this Chinese person is bringing? And if you are going to accuse him for that, why don't you accuse your government?"

The officer didn't know what reply for a moment. He was confused.

"Because we don't want Mexican pesos here," he replied angry.

"Then why don't you throw what you have into the river?"

"No, we need it."

"Have you taken a vow of poverty?"

"Aba! what vow of poverty!" replied a carabiner. "We would be rich now if we would have taken the vow of poverty."

The officer thought Jesus was joking with him, and he could find no reasons in reply to his questions. He got angry and called him a reformer and anti-Spaniard. As a result, he ordered the soldiers to carefully inspect him.

They searched his pockets and found the diary that Jesus had written to present to the Eternal Father. When the officer read his comments about the quarantine his face lit up with diabolical laughter.

"Well! I already sensed that you are a rebel," he shouted at Jesus. "Ah, rascal! Ah, rebel! You attack established institutions, you indulge in making observations, and now you find that what we are doing is reprehensible and ridiculous. You criticize the quarantine. Bring him to jail and prepare the charges right away."

When St. Peter saw that things were taking a bad turn, he began to sneak away little by little, taking advantage of the confusion. And when he heard that his Master was called a rebel, going back to his bad custom, he went out of the station and walked away as quickly as possible. Unfortunately it was the middle of the day and there was not one rooster to crow. He had a vague idea of the meaning of the word rebel, that he had heard from someone in heaven, and without thinking of others, only of being in danger, he abandoned his Master.

And You, oh *Maykapal*, vanquished deity of my ignorant ancestors, who cowardly fled upon the arrival of the Augustinians and other friars. I thank you for having provided me with muscles for laughing, to celebrate the pleasant things which the God of the strong, your master and conqueror, has created. My ancestors were unfaithful to you, but now you are avenged of their cowardice and neglect. If you ever can get a passport and wish to visit your former dominion, do so and you will see extraordinary things. The *Tikbalang* and the *Tianak*, your former companions, are still there, and we ourselves have hardly made any progress in religion. You will recognize at once the grandchildren of your worshippers, and if you are a little cunning and you wish to perform miracles, you can recover your dominion.

Maykapal, Maykapal, impotent and useless God, stop me from laughing, give me back tears!

(End of manuscript.)

About this book

The original manuscript of this story, written by José Rizal, is in the National Library of Manila. The story has no title, but it was filed under the name:

Una visita del Señor a Filipinas (Principios de una novela satírica).

It was first translated from Spanish into English in 1957, by Mrs. Encarnación Amoranto Alzona, a Filipino historian, educator and suffragist. She was the first Filipino woman to obtain a Ph.D. and became National Scientist of the Philippines.

Mrs. Alzona used a photocopy of José Rizal's manuscript, borrowed from the Bureau of Public Libraries in Manila.

This English translation was published with the title 'The Lord Gazes at the Philippine Islands' in the book: *Rizal's Prose*. As part of the series *Writings of José Rizal: Volume III – Book Two*; Centennial edition, Manila 1962.

According to the editor of a Spanish edition of Rizal's story, similar characters appear in a few booklets published in Madrid in 1889 under the pseudonym 'Dimas Alang'. A pseudonym José Rizal also used in Paris as a correspondent for the Spanish newspaper *La Solidaridad*. This story may origin from the same year.

About this story the editor says:

"This manuscript undoubtedly goes further than the two booklets that had been published, and its length shows that it should have been a novel. However, despite the genius and ingenuity of the story, Rizal left it unfinished. Perhaps because he thought that the personification of his own Jesus Christ exceeded the bounds of anti-clerical controversy."

(Isaac Donoso Jiménez in: José Rizal, *Prosa selecta – Narraciones y ensayos*; Madrid, 2012)

Unfortunately we will never know how this satire would have ended.

This edition is based on the English translation by Mrs. E. Alzona.

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