

THE INDEPENDENT PHILIPPINE CHURCH.*

BY R. T. HOUSE.

OF the making of many religious denominations there is no end, and the various sects are not so monotonously similar as might be expected. The young Philippine Church has evolved an extremely original combination; namely, the ritual and church government of the Roman Catholic Church in which it took its origin, and the theology of Matthew Arnold.

Señor Retana is furnishing us information that to the most of us is absolutely new. His is the first extensive magazine article on the subject which has appeared in a European periodical, and aside from a few comments when the schism first declared itself, the institution has been almost unnoticed in America. Yet it would seem that a denomination which in six years has attained to a membership of four million, whose head is as thoroughly capable and devoted a character as Monseñor Gregorio Aglipay, and which numbers among its members such well-furnished and thoughtful individuals as the honorary bishop Don Isabelo de los Reyes, is worth studying in some detail.

The Philippine Church, like the Church of England, had its origin in political rather than religious exigencies. The conquering Spaniard asserted his superiority over the native Filipino in religious activity as well as elsewhere; and from the earliest appearance of a regularly organized Church in the Islands we find that the regular clergy is composed of Spaniards, while the native priests hold in most cases only subordinate positions and are mortally jealous of their ecclesiastical superiors. The native clergy, naturally the most enlightened class in the Islands, headed the movement which resulted in the Constitution of 1812, and took such an active part in the elections held in accordance with that instrument that the higher

* "La Iglesia Filipina Independiente," W. E. Retana, *Por Esos Mundos*, April, 1908.

Church officials leagued against them, and throughout the larger part of the nineteenth century not a Filipino held an important Church charge.

Appeals to the Church in Europe were ignored and revolutions were ineffectual; but when, in 1898, the Treaty of Paris gave the Archipelago to the United States, the native priests were quick to connect political separation with religious freedom. It is here that the then coadjutor bishop Gregorio Aglípay y Labayen came to the front.

Aglípay was born in the Province of Ilocos Norte, Island of Luzon, on May 7, 1860. The son of a poor agriculturist, a somewhat strange accident caused him to leave the plow and take up the text-book, at the age of seventeen. He was engaged in tobacco-culture, and the Spanish government was encouraging agriculture by forcing every planter to set out five thousand plants yearly. The year in question was a very dry one, and the young farmer decided that he would not waste energy and plants when the prospects were so unfavorable. The magistrate threw him into prison; and when he was released, he shook the dust of the tobacco-field off his feet forever. He entered a Dominican school in Manila, working as a servant in exchange for his board and clothing, but progressed so rapidly that he was soon given a post as student teacher which enabled him to secure a very thorough education without financial discomfort.

In 1889 he was ordained a priest in Manila, and for eight years he served quietly in one parish after another, till the governor of his province called him unexpectedly on a secular mission.

When General Primo de Rivas, with the help of a million pesos, persuaded Aguinaldo and a number of his lieutenants to withdraw to private life and cease making trouble, the revolutionist Makabulos refused the bribe and formed a revolutionary Junta in Tárlac. It was Priest Aglípay who went to this worthy, commissioned to offer him arms and the captaincy of a body of volunteers if he would turn his energies against the Americans. His mission was successful, but the report that he had had dealings with a revolutionist led to a charge of disloyalty. The charge was never pressed, however, as the young priest withdrew to seclusion in Manila and sought to prove his fidelity to Spain by translating into one of the native tongues Father Nozalada's bellicose polemic against the Yankees.

A little later the Spanish governor-general found it necessary to offer the colony certain concessions in the direction of self-government. Aglípay was one of the ambassadors sent to treat with the

rebels. But the train which bore him was captured by a band of the discontented, and he himself was made prisoner. Although he was allowed to return to Manila later, his errand was entirely unsuccessful.

When Aguinaldo returned to the Islands and began making trouble anew, Aglípay, an old friend and admirer of his, sought to dissuade him from risking excommunication by continuing the struggle against Spain; but excommunication did not seem as vital a matter to the General as it did to his clerical friend, and he fought vigorously till the Spanish withdrew. In fact the habit had grown so strong with him that he turned his arms against his former allies, and the young priest-diplomat-soldier—for Aglípay became one of the most active guerilla leaders in the current war with the Americans—received from the self-styled Dictator the title of Vicar-General of the Archipelago. Archbishop Nozaleda, however, showed his disapproval of his former protégé's new alliance by excommunicating him. This action put an end for a time to his ecclesiastical functions, and from 1900 to 1903 Gregorio Aglípay was the most thoroughly secular of guerilla leaders. When Aguinaldo was captured, his clerical lieutenant surrendered and even accompanied and aided Governor Taft in his circuit of conciliation.

In 1901, the much-enduring savant Don Isabelo de los Reyes, of whom more will be said later, returned from his period of Spanish imprisonment, announced his conviction, gathered from a study of conditions in both Spain and the Islands, that the Philippine Church could no longer thrive as a part of the European body, and was instrumental in the establishment of a new organization, of which Aglípay was made chief bishop. The new primate opposed the schism for some months, but finally submitted to the inevitable, and has been the Head of the Church ever since.

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The most interesting character among the leaders of the new movement is Don Isabelo de los Reyes, now resident in Spain, and holding the only honorary bishopric in the new organization. A resident of Manila from his early youth and a newspaper man by profession, he became, in a very independent and fruitful manner, a student of the Island folklore. Ethnologist, linguist and historian, he is a member of learned societies in Paris, Vienna and elsewhere and a very vigorous refutation of the assertion that nothing can be made of the Filipino.

Founder of the *Ilocano*, the first bilingual paper in the Province,

he preached the cause of his countrymen so boldly that the Spanish governor deemed it necessary to shut him up in the Manila prison. His pen continued as active as ever, and a memorial of him presented to his captor, and published later in Madrid, reiterates the identical principles that caused his incarceration. Instead of shooting him, as the world expected, General Rivera sent him to Castle Montjuich, at Barcelona, where he was confined for more than a year. As soon as he was released he established in Madrid the journal *Filipinas ante Europa*, in which, though bitterly anti-American, he preached Philippine liberty, secular and religious. He traveled all over Europe spreading a socialistic propaganda, and in 1901 he returned to his native Islands, where he was promptly thrown into prison by the American government. He emerged as stubborn and enthusiastic as ever, became the chief agent in the establishment of the new Church, as has been narrated, and played a most restlessly active part in local politics till his return to Spain two or three years later. He and his Spanish wife now reside in Barcelona, and he turns out fifteen to twenty magazine articles a month, dealing with questions of bewildering variety, religious, social, philological and literary.

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The doctrinal liberality of the new Church has been suggested at the beginning of the review. "Our church," says Reyes, "preaches the common holding of property, love that recognizes no boundaries, and freedom of science, and admits no dogmas." According to the *Revista Cristiana*, of Madrid, both priests and deaconesses may marry, "although, if it be possible, it is preferable that they remain free from the cares of a family in order that they may give themselves entirely to the service of the Lord." Thus far, only two priests in the entire society have married. Divorce is not permitted under any circumstances. But of all the doctrines and practices of the Church, the most thoroughly distinctive is that proclaimed by its Head in the words: "And above all, members are absolutely forbidden to attack other churches for any reason whatever."

The Church is governed by thirty bishops and nearly four hundred priests, several of which latter are foreigners; four or five are Spaniards. The official language of the new Church is Spanish.