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There is a story in Philippine folklore abouta mango tree and a bamboo tree. Not being ableto agree as to which was the stronger of thetwo, they called upon the wind to make thedecision. The wind blew its hardest. The mango treestood fast. It would not yield. It knew it wasstrong and sturdy. It would not sway. It was tooproud. It was too true to itself. But finally itsroots gave way, and it tumbled down. The bamboo tree was wiser. It knew it wasnot as robust as the mango tree. And so everytime the wind blew, it bent its head gracefully. Itmade loud protests, but it let the wind have itsway. When finally the wind got tired ofblowing, the bamboo tree still stood in all itsbeauty and grace. The Filipino is like the bamboo tree. Heknows that he is not strong enough to withstandthe onslaughts of superior forces. And so heyields. He bends his head gracefully with manyloud protests. And he has survived. The Spaniards cameand dominated him for more than three hundredyears. And when the Spaniards left, the Filipinosstill stood – only much richer in experience andculture.

The Americans took the place of theSpaniards. They used more subtle means ofwinning over the Filipinos to their mode of livingand thinking. The Filipino embraced theAmerican way of life more readily than theSpaniard’s vague promise of the hereafter. Then the Japanese came like a storm, like aplague of locusts, like a pestilence –rude, relentless, cruel. The Filipino learned to bowhis head low, to “ cooperate” with the Japanese intheir “ holy mission of establishing the Co-Prosperity Sphere.” The Filipino had only hate andcontempt for the Japanese, but he learned tosmile sweetly at them and to thank themgraciously for their “ benevolence andmagnanimity.” And now that the Americans have come backand driven away the Japanese, those Filipinoswho profited most from cooperating with theJapanese have been loudest in their protestationsof innocence. Everything is as if Japanese hadnever been in the Philippines. For the Filipino will welcome any kind oflife that the gods offer him. That is why he iscontented, happy and at peace.

The sad plightof other peoples of the world is not his. Tohim, as to the ancient Oriental poet, the past isalready a dream and tomorrow is only a visionbut today, well-lived, makes every yesterday adream of happiness and every tomorrow avision of hope. This may give you the idea that the Filipinois a philosopher. Well, he is. He has not evolved abody of philosophical doctrines. Much less hashe put them down into a book, like Kant, forexample, or Santayana or Confucius. But hedoes have a philosophical outlook on life. He has a saying that life is like a wheel. Sometimes it is up, sometimes it is down. Themonsoon season comes, and he has to go undercover. But then the sun comes out again. Theflowers bloom, and the birds sing in the trees. You cut off the branches of a tree, and, while themarks of the bolo are still upon it, it begins toshoot forth new branches – branches that arethe promise of new color, new fragrance, newlife. Everywhere about him is a lesson inpatience and forbearance that he does not haveto learn with difficulty.

For the Filipino live in acountry on which the gods have lavished theirgifts aplenty. He does not have to worry abouttomorrow. Tomorrow will be only another day –no winter of discontent. If he loses hispossessions, there is the land and there is thesea, with all the riches that one can desire. There is plenty to spare – for friends, forneighbors, and for everyone else. No wonder that the Filipino can afford tolaugh. For the Filipino is endowed with thesaving grace of humor. This humor is earthy asbefits one who has not indulged in deepcontemplation. But it has enabled the Filipino toshrug his shoulders in times of adversity andsay to himself, “ Bahala na.” The Filipino has often been accused ofbeing indolent and of lacking in initiative. And hehas answered back that no one can help beingindolent and of lacking in initiative. And he hasanswered back that no one can help beingindolent and lacking in initiative who lives underthe torrid sun which saps one’s vitality. This seeming lack of vitalityis, however, only one of his means of survival.

He does not allow the world to be too much withhim. Like the bamboo tree, he lets the winds ofchance and circumstances blow all about him; and he is unperturbed and serene. The Filipino, in fact has a way of escapingfrom the rigorous problems of life. Most of hisart is escapist in nature. His forefatherswallowed in the moro-moro, the awit and thecorrido. They loved to identify themselves withthe gallant knights battling for the favors of fairladies or for the possession of a hallowed place. And now he himself loves to be lost in the throesof modern romance and adventure. His gallantry toward women – especially comelywomen – is a manifestation of his romantic turn ofmind. Consequently, in no other place in theOrient are women so respected, so adulated, andso pampered. For his women have enabled theFilipino to look upon the vicissitudes of fortune asthe bamboo tree regards the angry blasts of theblustering wind. The Filipino is eminently suited to his romanticrole.

He is slender and wiry. He is nimble andgraceful in his movements. His voice is soft, andhe has the gift of language. In what other place inthe world can you find people who can carry on afluent conversation in at least three languages? This gift is another means by which theFilipino has managed to survive. There is noinsurmountable barrier between him and any ofthe people who have come to live with him –Spanish, American, Japanese. The foreigners donot have to learn his language. He easilymanages to master theirs. Vently, the Filipino is like the bamboo tree. In its grace, in its ability to adjust itself to thepeculiar and inexplicable whims of fate, thebamboo tree is his expressive and symbolicnational tree. It will have to be, not the molavenor the narra but the bamboo.