

SCHOLASTIC TRIUMPHS AT ATENEO DE MANILA

ENROLLMENT IN ATENEO MUNICIPAL SCHOOL

In 1872, Rizal was sent by his parents to study in Manila. And so he did. He entered Ateneo Municipal. As what usually happens, Rizal was discriminated by his classmates and professors, mainly because he had only a little knowledge about Spain, and also the fact that he was from Calamba, Laguna. He was also a late enrollee, so that added up to the situation.

But in spite of the negative things that happened to him during this time, he also experienced good things. The Jesuits taught them about the educational system like discipline, character building and religious instruction. Because of that, he learned about the real value of education in a person's life, and of course, to be strong despite of all the people who were trying to pull him down. He also experienced and went through hispanization, which made him a kind of better in Spanish than using his own language – Filipino.

He wrote, "To the Filipino Youth". In his poem, he enlightened the readers about the truth – which Filipinos must be standing and being proud of what they are, and not just be slaves of somebody else. He also mentioned the famous quote that the youth is the hope of our nation. Lastly, he ended with a thanksgiving to God, and praise to our country's youth by saying that wherever he may be going, he would always be proud of the Filipino youth. Aside from the poem, he also wrote, "The Intimate Alliance between Religion and Education".

Rizal took the entrance examination at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran on June 10, 1872. Paciano accompanied. Rizal when he took the said exam, which covered reading, arithmetic, and Catholic doctrines. After passing the qualifying examination, Rizal sought admission at the Ateneo Municipal. Although José Rizal, now eleven years old, had passed a good entrance examination in Manila in June, 1872, he nearly failed to matriculate in the Ateneo in July, because he is a late registrant, and because he looked so little, so slender, so young Father Magin

Fernando, the college registrar, was at first very firm in denying Rizal's admission. He would not have been admitted at all but for the intercession of Dr. Manuel Burgos, a nephew of the recently executed Dr. José Burgos.

When finally the boy was accepted, he went to mass and prayed fervently. He had something to pray about and to study for! Tragedy had set *purpose* ablaze in his young soul --, *purpose* that would never die. He did not know how to help his home and country but he would *find* a way! Since Mercado, the first surname of the family, had come under suspicion of the authorities because it was the name used by Paciano when he was studying and working with Father Burgos, in whose house he lived, Jose adopted the second surname, Rizal.

THE ATENEAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Offered a six (6) year program that entitled a student to the academic title, *Bachiller en Artes*

The program is composed of 5 learning areas, namely:

Christian doctrine; Languages Spanish, Latin, Greek and French; History and Geography World History and Geography and History of Spain and the Philippines ;Mathematics and Sciences arithmetic, geography, trigonometry, mineralogy, chemistry, physics, botany, and zoology; and the Classic Disciplines poetry, rhetoric and philosophy It also offers the following vocational courses: agriculture; commerce; mechanics and surveying.

RIZAL'S FIRST YEAR IN ATENEO (1872-1873)

In June 1872 first day class in Ateneo Rizal first heard Mass at the college chapel and prayed fervently to God for guidance and success. When the Mass was finished, he went to his class, where he saw a great number of boys, Spaniards, mestizos and Filipinos. Fr. Jose Bech-Rizal's first professor in Ateneo-whom Rizal described as a 'tall thin man, with a body slightly bent forward, a hurried walk, an ascetic face, severe and inspired, small deep-sunken eyes, a sharp nose that was almost Greek, and thin lips forming an arc whose ends fell toward the chin. Being a new comer and knowing a little Spanish, Rizal was placed at the bottom of the class. He

was an externo, hence he was assigned to the Carthaginians, occupying the end of the line. After the first week, Rizal progressed rapidly. At the end of the month, he became emperor. He was the brightest pupil in the whole class, and as he was awarded a prize. 'How please I was, when I won the prize, a religious picture! He was proud of it because it was the first prize he ever won at the Ateneo. He took private lessons in Santa Isabel College. In the second half of his first year in Ateneo, Rizal did not try hard enough to retain his academic supremacy which he had during the first half of the term.

SUMMER VACATION

Rizal returned to Calamba. He did not particularly enjoyed his vacation because his mother is still in prison. His sister tried to cheer him up by bringing him to Tanawan but Rizal did not become happy still. Without his father's consent, Rizal went to Santa Cruz and visited his mother in prison. When Rizal came back to Manila, Rizal already boarded inside Intramuros at No. 6 Magallanes Street. His landlady was an old widow named Donya Pepay, who had a widowed daughter and four sons.

SECOND YEAR IN ATENEO (1873-1874)

Nothing unusual happened during his second year in Ateneo except that he studied harder and once more he became emperor. Some of his classmates were new. Among them were three boys from Binyan, who had been his classmates in the school of Maestro Justiniano Cruz. During March 1874 summer vacation, Rizal again went to Santa Cruz to visit his mother. In the course of their conversation, DonyaTeodora told Rizal about her dream the previous night. Rizal, interpreting her dream, told her that she would be released from prison in three months' time. It was during the summer vacation in 1874 in Calamba when Rizal began to take interest in reading romantic novels such as:

- Count of Monte Cristo by Alexander Dumas
- Universal History by Cesar Cantu
- Travels in the Philippines by Dr. Feodor Jagor, who visited the Philippines in 1859-1860.

RIZAL'S FOURTH YEAR IN ATENEO

The family, who saw in Jose great aptitude for study, decided to place him as intern or boarding student in the college the following year. In the fourth year of his course he had Fr. Francisco Sanchez as professor. Jose describes him as a model of rectitude, a solicitude, and love for the students. He must have progressed much, for at the end of the year he obtained five medals, which pleased him immensely because with them he said that 'I could repay my father somewhat for his sacrifices. His first poem penned while in Ateneo was entitled 'Mi Primera Inspiracion (My First Inspiration) was undoubtedly dedicated for his mother on her birthday in 1874.

RIZAL'S LAST YEAR IN ATENEO

Rizal graduated at the head of his class on March 23, 1877 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. During his final days in Ateneo he wrote in his diary:

"The day previous to awarding of prizes, I was tormented by an idea, the saddest and most melancholy which I felt. Whenever I thought I had to leave that peaceful retreat in which the eyes of my intelligence had opened somewhat and my heart had begun to learn nobler feelings, and I fell into a profound despondency."

"On the last night, going to my dormitory and remembering that night would be my last night in my quiet room because, the world was waiting, I could not sleep until 1 o'clock that night".

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT ATENEO

Rizal was an active member and later on secretary of a religious society, the Marian Congregation. He was also a member of the Apostleship of Prayer. Rizal was also a member of the Academy of Spanish Literature and the Academy of Natural Sciences. In his leisure hours, Rizal cultivated his literary talent under the guidance of Father Sanchez. Aside from poetry he also devoted his spare time to Fine Arts. He studied painting under the famous Spanish painter, Agustin Saez and sculpture under Romualdo de Jesus, noted Filipino sculptor. Among his carvings

at the Ateneo was the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus which though originally intended to be brought home to Spain by Fr. Lleonart, was left behind in Ateneo. Finding the image, the Atenean boarders hanged into the door of the dormitory where it remained for almost 20 years. It reminded the Ateneans of Jose Rizal, their greatest alumnus. He also engaged in gymnastics and fencing and was physically trained by his Tio Manuel.