

## The Procession to the Virgin of Lourdes

By GERTRUDE BINDER

A thin, consumptive man, comically dressed in baggy red trousers, black shirt and wide-brimmed straw hat, is scraping the dirt off a crooked, dusty street. He works without hurry, enthusiasm or resentment, pausing feebly after each languid movement to lean on his fan-shaped bamboo rake or to patch dispassionately as a carabao sways past, watching a creaking, disc-wheeled cart, loaded with rice, toward a mill which hums drowsily a few yards behind one of the tall iron fences bordering the street.

The houses overhanging the road brood silently, with shell windows closed like the eyes of heat-stupefied men, over the uninspired toiler before them. Two blocks away, a row of high, two-wheeled carromatas stands before the public square fronting the church. The ponies' heads droop to their knees, the drivers sleep on nearby benches. A young American woman whose face shows signs of bad-humored fatigue, approaches them. The first driver waves her on to the second, who, likewise reluctant to interrupt his siesta, declines her patronage. With an exclamation of impatience she turns to a third, who rises indifferently, holds the pony's head while she climbs into the vehicle, mounts slowly to the driver's seat, and then with sudden animation cracks his whip and shouts to his beast, which trots away as though both horse and man had been restored to life by a single miraculous stroke.

Presently a girl, about ten years old, opens the wicket in the center of a wide carriage gate near the spot where the street cleaner works. She climbs out into the street and waves off in the direction of the public square, her bare brown feet sinking deep into the dust. Her hair is combed back from her face and pinned in a small knot on the back of her head. Her eyes are anxious and unchildlike. Fifteen minutes after disappearing around the corner of a building, she returns with a bottle of carabao milk in her hand. She has been to the market. Reprising the wicket, she enters the house through a side entrance. The ground floor is merely a gloomy, dirt-paved basement from which a stairway leads to a patio beyond which is a kitchen. Inside the kitchen three women are feverishly preparing food. Their industry gives an air of hypocrisy to the somnolent front which the house presents to the world—as if it were the harbor of intrigue.

The little servant girl puts down the milk, and goes into the sala. The room is dim and cool behind its closed windows. The walls and ceiling are of bamboo matting painted a delicate blue. A piano, a few high-backed Spanish chairs, a settee and a small marble-topped table are the only pieces of furniture. Two Japanese prints hang at either side of a door leading into a bed-room. In an effort to increase the already brilliant lustre of the narra floor, the girl begins sliding about over the broad planks with her feet firmly placed on two oily cloths which were lying in the center of the room when she entered, as though her work had been suddenly interrupted a short time before.

She works silently and earnestly. It seems her fate hangs on the quality of the gleam which she succeeds in drawing out of the wood.

Tonight a procession in honor of the Virgin of Lourdes will move toward the church through the street below the windows. A crowd of friends and relatives will come to watch as candle bearers and images pass. The three women in the kitchen are preparing delicacies with which to entertain the guests. There will be crisp cookies, tiny fried cakes, foamy candies made of egg white, dainty fruit preserves and coconut ice cream.

One of the women, like the girl who is polishing the sala floor, is obviously a servant. She wears a shapeless, one-piece dress; her feet are bare; her hair, black, lustrous and wavy, is twisted into a plain knot. The slant of her large brown eyes proclaims her a Chinese mestiza. Her white, even teeth are repeatedly displayed in a good-humored laugh. That it is a shield against anxiety no one would know. She will soon be a mother.

Her companions are plainly mother and daughter, the sehora and seniorita of the house. They wear the Filipina costume, with upstanding transparent sleeves and long train, pinned up on the daughter, trailing the floor behind the mother. The heels of their flat-bottomed chinelas strike the floor with a slapping sound as they walk. The younger woman is small and almost primly neat; the older one is tall, rather untidy, vigorous in her movements and commanding in her manner. The two converse as they work, using the Spanish language in order that the servants will not understand what is being said.

"Have you found anyone to do the cooking until after Maria's baby comes?" the girl inquires.

"Primo out here on the farm has paid not even the interest on the money we lent him two years ago. He has promised to send his daughter.

She doesn't know how to cook. We'll have the trouble of teaching her. Maria was a fool to think that man would marry her. Soldiers are all alike."

There is no reproof in her tone.

Maria, carefully tending the charcoal fire beneath a round iron box which serves as oven, betrays no consciousness of wrong-doing or disgrace.

The work proceeds. At the end of two hours, half of the long table in the dining room adjacent to the kitchen is piled high with food. The shine on the sala floor has been raised to an unheard-of brilliancy. Its author is sitting in an attitude of expectancy on a wooden bench at one side of the patio below which is the side entrance to the house. A peremptory call of "Loleng! Loleng!" brings her running into the kitchen, where she is set to work at dish-washing. The dishes are washed with an innocent indifference to bacteria. They are gathered together, carried to the patio and held under a cold-water faucet from which the water runs over them and through the bamboo slats of the

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floor to the ground beneath. They are dried on a rack outside the kitchen window, by the Maria begins preparations for dinner. Mother and daughter go into the sala to rest. They open the windows and look down on the street, calling greetings to passersby.

The red-trousered laborer has vanished, and the afternoon languor has gone with him. Long shadows have replaced the unrelieved glare of the sun on the white dust. Men and women in separate groups are walking up and down, raising handkerchiefs to their faces to protect themselves from the clouds of dust stirred up by the automobiles and carromatas honking and rattling past. The activity of the street increases with the coolness of the evening. When the darkness is almost complete, a young man in khaki outing suit drives up in an open car, stops before the large gate with the wicket in the center and sounds his horn. Loleng comes running out to open the gate. A moment later a pair of stiff leather shoes are squeaking over the gleaming nara floor of the sala, and the young man is beginning to discuss with his *mamma* the day's events on the farm.

There has been some trouble about finding sufficient laborers to harvest the sugar cane. Some of the rice, too, remains uncut. Loleng spent the whole morning talking with Loleng's mother. She was crying and carrying on. Her husband will be sent from the local jail to Bilhid today. She wants me to go to Manila and try to get another trial for him, but there is no use in it. It seems certain that he really took three carabaos. A shame, too. He knows more about carabaos than any man in the province. Who will I send now, when I have to have a herd sent down from the north? There's no one else I can trust to choose good animals. Right now, too, when it is so easy to sell them in Negros.

"Does Loleng know about her father yet?" asks the sister.

"No, but she'll soon find out. You must take her to the farm tomorrow. Her sister is still very sick."

"Ah, yes, that poor Guadalupe! Is she still talking?"

"Continuously. We could bring her to town to see the doctor, but they are afraid she will run away from us. She is always wanting to get out of the house—trying to elude them and get away."

"What do they want with Loleng?" demands the *sehora*. "She is so small to be a company." "The want her to take care of the babies while the mother does the nursing."

"Well, I guess we'll have to take her back to them, and get a boy to do her work here. There is always some trouble with these people."

At this point Loleng herself appears, to announce that dinner is ready. She serves her masters and later squats beside a low table on the kitchen floor to eat rice and fish company with Maria and the stable boy and a shaggy black puppy.

Soon after the meal is finished, guests begin to arrive. Mother, daughter and son, the two former dressed in black as a sign of mourning for the father of the family, two years deceased, affectionately greet all who come, and urge upon them the food presented by the ever-ubiquitous Loleng, who wears a clean dress for the occasion.

Everyone eats. Everyone chats. The procession tonight is to be no ordinary one. If it were, it would furnish no occasion for feasting and visiting; for few months past in provincial cities without at least one holy procession to enliven them. This time, in honor of their patron saint, nearly all the unmarried girls of the town, exclusive of servants, will take part.

At nine o'clock, strains of music from the direction of the public square announce that the pageant is leaving the church. An hour later, having made the circuit of the main streets, it moves into sight and hearing from the opposite direction. At every window faces lean out, unmindful of the dust raised by hundreds of slow-moving feet. Even servants are permitted to leave their work in order that their morais may be approved by the sight of the sacred images. At either side of the street is a column

of candle bearers two blocks long, one masculine, the other feminine. Children come first, monks and nuns second, lay men and women at the very end. Between the two files are standard bearers, priests chanting prayers, altar ministrants swinging incense burners, and saints of both sexes standing on brilliantly lighted and gayly decorated floats drawn by boys and girls in white. The Virgin of Lourdes herself comes last. She is a dainty, pink and blue saint with a mild, pretty face. Only little girls are near her chariot, and each one of them has a pair of white angel's wings attached to her shoulders. All knees are bent as she passes. Not far behind the honor saint comes the band, playing no hymn, but a lively march.

Two hours after the procession has reentered the church the town is in darkness. Maria and Loleng have drawn mosquito nets about the beds of their master and mistresses. They themselves have lain down, without changing their clothes, on bamboo mats spread out on the kitchen floor. They sleep unprotected by nets, as though lowly estate bore with it immunity to fevers. Loleng does not know about her father. Only tomorrow will she learn that. Unusually wearied, she sleeps heavily. But Maria, tired as she is, tosses in her sleep, moans and cries out.

"Thou Virgin of Lourdes!" she wails. " \* \* \* mercy!"



ESSENCE OF AN ADDRESS

In Governor General Stimson's address at Mr. Quezon's state dinner Thursday evening, September 27, the following is worth colling.

"The distribution of your public lands is fatally clogged in administration. The director of lands last week made public the statement that at the rate at which applications for homesteads were being received, all of the public land would be distributed in forty-two years. But when I asked him how long that distribution would take at the rate with which his bureau was actually complying with those applications and issuing the patents, he told me that it would take nearly three hundred and fifty years. In other words, the desire of your people for the land is nine times as keen and urgent as the ability of your government to comply with that desire. This is not the fault of the Bureau of Lands but partly the result of insufficient personnel and partly of a faulty system. In your desire to prevent applicants for your lands from obtaining any undue advantage, you have, in my opinion, given to your administrators too great a burden of personal discretion in the execution of those laws. Personal discretion consumes time and delays execution; more than that it tends to beget favoritism and corruption. It institutes a government of men and not of laws. The existence of such a system with its evil possibilities is a fatal discouragement to free investment and cheap money. No responsible investor or banker will furnish capital to an enterprise which is at the mercy of official delay, official favoritism, and official discrimination. Where such a system exists, the only capital that can be obtained is the kind of irresponsible disreputable capital which makes the borrower pay for its risk in extortionate rates of interest."

ANYTHING LIKE THIS HERE?

Japan's equivalent of "an apple a day" was celebrated Aug. 2 throughout the country. Instead of apples, Japan does it with eels, in the belief that eels eaten on the first day of the "doyo", or heated period, will keep all ailments away for the remainder of the summer. This period is one of the series, named after certain animals in the Japanese calendar. Virtually every Japanese who could buy eels on that day ate them. Incidentally, the price of eels, ordinarily within the reach of the common workman, jumps 20 per cent on eel day. Advance orders may be placed, but despite these all shops dealing in eels are sold out by nightfall. The custom dates back several centuries, its exact origin being lost. The superstitious believe that the eel is a messenger of the gods. Coupled with the belief that eels are an ordained food for that day is the conviction that eels eaten with *umeboshi*, a pickled plum, are disastrous, resulting in certain death. Though a prominent Japanese scientist has disputed the theory, eating eels and pickled plums on that day himself, the superstition prevails, and not one Japanese in a hundred would defy it. The favored method of preparing the eels is to broil or bake them in a special sauce, when they are eaten with boiled rice.

—B. W. Fleisher, in the *Chicago Daily News*.

If there are similar customs in the Philippines, the Journal will pay for brief and accurate reports of them.

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