

directed that no primary school teacher, should begin on a salary less than Rs. 40 per month, if he is an untrained and less than Rs. 50/ if he is a trained one. The insecurity of tenure of a teacher has also attracted sufficient attention and attempts are being made to give him the security which he so sorely needs.

The life of an Indian primary school teacher is a dedicated one. He wants only a little elbow room

to live and he is satisfied. Even as it is, he realizes that he is laying the foundations of the greatest democracy in the world of which he is rightly proud. Rightly is he called a Nation Builder. The base of the building is not seen and never appreciated but it is there holding the burden of the whole structure. The primary school teacher's work is this and everybody is conscious of the fact. Because he is dedicated India lives.

Fourteen Hills Away

By **Florencio Buen**

AT 8:30 in the morning of September 9 the sun was valiantly trying to milt the mist that enveloped Sagada where Mr. Epifanio T. Ramos, the District Supervisor, holds office and the starting point of the 2-week trip that we took to the interior of Bontoc. The day before, I received a letter from him informing me of the trip we shall take together "in order for both of us to see the actual conditions obtaining in the different barrio schools of your municipality especially with regards to enrollment and attendance."

I was new in the place being assigned only a month before as principal and doubtless, Mr. Ramos wanted to show me the conditions of the schools of Bontoc Municipality, the capital town of Mountain Province. Our itinerary covered fourteen barrios in two weeks. What took place in these two weeks is an experience I cannot forget and want to share with others.

At 9:00 o'clock that morning, the two-week hike up and down mountain trails started from the District Office. Sagada seemed to have been swallowed by a big monster in its cavernous and misty mouth. The mist was so thick that you could look up at the sun without hurting your eyes. The cold mountain air whistled among the pine needles and drove the mist among the trees.

There were three of us in the party — Mr. Ramos, Mr. Muting, the property clerk, and I. Mr. Muting came with us to act as our guide and interpreter as he is a native of the place. Mr. Ramos was the pacer of the team. I found out later that despite his diminutive size (five feet-two inches, and weighs around 115 pounds) he was an excellent hiker. I, the tallest and the heaviest, was the poorest hiker having climbed no mountains before. Each carried his own pack on his back.

Our lunch was scheduled at Tanulong, a barrio cozily nestled in a deep valley along the banks of swift mountain rapids. After three and a half hours of hiking, we reached the barrio school which was manned by a husband-wife team. For lunch, they served us dried meat of wild pig shot by the husband in one of his Saturday hunting trips to Dalican, the next barrio in our itinerary.

Three big boys carried our packs for us from Tanulong to Dalican, a barrio atop a high mountain. We started from Tanulong at 1:00 o'clock. Before we reached the foot of the mountain we had to cross the river through a hanging bridge with steel suspensions. The bridge should have been called a hammock bridge because it swang crazily as one walks across it. We had to cross individually because of the dangerous sway. Huge rocks and the swift rapids seemed to wait for the unfortunate. At 1:30 o'clock we started climbing. The sides of the mountains were so steep that one could kiss the heels of the fellow he was following.

The fellow who said that mountain climbing is an excellent sport should have joined us. Perhaps, he would have changed his mind about the matter. As we went up, the air became drier but colder. Water from rivulets rushing down the mountain sides quenched our thirst. The higher we went, the shorter our steps became. Fatigue began to creep on us. We kept on asking our guides how far we had still to go which was invariably answered with "a little bit more." After five or six "a little bit more's" I said to the amusement of my companions that the mountain was growing every minute.

At 4:30 o'clock, we reached the top at last. Here we were richly rewarded with red ripe berries that grew wild every where on the mountain top. We ate

the berries by the handfuls so that after a few minutes all of us complained of stomach ache. My stomach grumbled. Mr. Ramos said that the berries were fit for the gods. Maybe, our stomachs did not welcome the berries because we were not gods.

Dalican is situated on the other side of the mountain and so, from the top we went down to the barrio. We reached the school at 5:30. It is a construction which is almost all grass roof. The walls are low and the floor is only a foot from the ground. It had to be constructed this way because the cold mountain air whistles past at a tremendous rate. The majority of schools on mountain tops are constructed in this manner. We had to fortify our bodies with extra clothing. The cold air bites into the skin. The pupils, however, seemed not to mind the cold air at all for they wore camisetas and g-strings only. Some had no camisetas. All the pupils were males and we learned from the lone teacher that the people of the barrio do not think that there is a need for girls to go to school. Putting it simply, the home is the place for the women.

In the evening we were feted by the barrio "consejal" and the "teniente" with dog meat and "tapey", wine made from rice. The long hike whittened our appetites and we did justice to the uncooked skin of the dog and the boiled meat. Dog meat is as good as venison or beef. After supper the teacher went to hunt for wild pigs but luck did not smile on him. In the morning he came home with wild chicken for breakfast.

At 9:00 o'clock the following morning, we proceeded to Mainit, a barrio two hills away. Here distances are not measured by kilometers but by the number of hills between points. The teacher at Dalican said that there was not much climbing on the way to Mainit which we found out to be false later on. The climb up to Mainit was as much as that to Dalican. It seemed that the mountains mushroomed overnight.

Between the two barrios we crossed a deep gorge with huge boulders and churning water. A log about the size of an average waist was laid across the gorge. It was inclined at fifteen degrees and steps were chopped off its surface for footholds. Local experts walked across easily but we were neophytes. We crossed the gorge on all fours with shaking joints. A slight misstep would have meant sudden and ugly death in the cold mountain river.

Mainit is aptly named. Hot springs bubble forth their hot discharges in several places. The biggest one is about twelve feet in diameter and its vapor could be seen a mountain away. This place could be an excellent resort if only the springs would be kept clean. Stray pigs discourage bathing.

There were no classes in the school when we arrived for the people were celebrating a "chonno" — a fiesta with a lot of "gangsá" music and dancing.

The pupils could not be called to school by the teacher and so we left after lunch for another barrio.

We reached Guinaang, a nearby barrio with a lone lady teacher, at 3:00 o'clock. The people thought we were candidates and they asked us for some drinks. The teacher had to explain that we were teachers and did not bring with us anything to drink. We found during the visit that all the pupils were male just like that of Dalican, the first barrio we visited. Typhoon "Carmen" marooned us in Guinaang for four days. The four-day rest afforded us time to recuperate from the fatigue that began to exact its heavy toll. When we arrived I could hardly walk anymore so that the teacher applied some roasted ginger on my knees and after two days I could go around again. On the fourth day the sun came out. We looked for a place where we might take a bath and we were lucky to find a small pond with clear cold water. We swam and splashed in the pond like kids. This fun was cut short when a man informed us that the pond contained coffins—used and unused. The people kept the coffins in the pond to preserve them for future use.

The most gorgeous rice terraces I have ever seen are found at Maligcong, a barrio surrounded by gleaming mountain puddies. It is like a tiny emerald in a field of glazing diamonds. Some people say that the rice terraces here are more extensive than those at Banaue. We do not have our own school here. Classes are held in the Anglican Church which the priest so kindly leased for school purposes.

Tocucan is so many rolling hills away from Maligcong. Between the two barrios are excellent grasslands. Tall, weaving, silky grass can be seen for miles and miles on the sides of gentle rolling hills. As we sat down under a big pine tree, I could not help but gasp at the immense possibility of the territory. With capital, one can engage profitably in cattle raising here. We cut across the area in half a day. At Tocucan, we took the bus from Tabuk to our stations. The rest of the barrios we visited were along the provincial highway and we did not need to hike as we did for the past week.

During the trip I saw that the most common school problems were poor enrollment and attendance which were due to the following reasons:

- A. Indigence
- B. Ignorance
- C. Distance of the schools from the schools
- D. Older children take care of the younger ones while the parents work in the fields.
- E. Certain customs and traditions.

It may take some time before these problems can be solved. As only education can improve the life of the people of these mountains, it is hoped that the compulsory education scheme now being undertaken in this municipality will be successful. This is the mission of the men and women who teach and live among the people.