

## The Fairies of Mount Banahaw

By ALFRED WORM

Tucked away in the virgin jungle high up on a slope of extinct old Mount Banahaw is the cottage of Juan de la Cruz, the rattan-outer. For miles around there are no other habitations. Juan's son, Alejandro, aged three, and his daughter, Silva, aged five, have never visited even the nearest village. Also, they have seldom seen a strange face, as visitors come to their cottage on the mountain only rarely and by sheer accident.

Juan has been a widower since Alejandro came; the death of his good wife in childbirth took the joy out of his life, except that he now lives for his children and fine contentment in the happiness. Daily, in the morning and at evening, Juan takes the children to the four big pill-nut trees in the center of the little mountainside clearing, where is their mother's lonesome grave.

But is this grave really lonesome? Is it more lonesome than those of city folk, visited only on All Saints Day or Decoration Day, when etiquette demands of the living that they don appropriate garb and visit the cities of the dead? These occasions are sometimes gaudy, and some of the mourners wear their costliest jewels.

In contrast, never once has Juan failed to bring home daily, from his rattan-cutting excursions through the forest, some beautiful wild flower or rare orchid, and to plant them round his wife's grave; so that now the spot is a collection of rare flowers and plants, some of them still unknown to science, which would delight the botanist and cause him to prefer Juan a fortune for them. Oh, no! The grave of Maria de la Cruz is not a lonesome one, but a shrine of natural beauty.

It is but natural that such a place should attract the creatures of the jungle. So it has. They find shelter and protection there, the children treating them, according to Juan's teaching, as the Lord's creatures. Juan himself has never killed an animal in his life, save *baboy*, the wild boar; the children have learned his gentleness with living things and the animals that haunt the bower beneath the spreading pill-nuts have become quite fearless. They amuse the children, whose playmates they are.

When the sun nears the western horizon and the evening shadows grow long in the clearing, Juan tells the children stories of the birds and animals that come to nibble bits of food from their hands.

*Anloague*, the woodpecker, acrobat of the forest, who can go upside down over a tree's bark as well as any other way, is often among the birds.

"Why does he have a red spot on his black head?" Silva once asked.

"Because long ago," said her father, "Banahaw, the blacksmith who keeps his forge burning hot far down in the depths of our mountain, wished to send a very important letter to his cousin Sinukuan, the spirit of Mount Arayat, in the valley of the Pangasinan. When he had finished the letter, he wished to seal it securely and called upon *Anloague*, then a plain black

bird, to fetch him some resin with which to make a taper to melt the wax. *Anloague* brought the resin, but while he held the taper to melt the wax, some of the wax dropped on the back of his head and he was never able to get it off."

### IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS?

Once a little girl wrote this letter to the editor of the *New York Sun*:

"Dear Editor:

"I am 8 years old. Some of my friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in the Sun, it's so.' Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?"

"VIRGINIA C. HANLON."

And the editor of the *New York Sun* made this reply to Virginia and to all true believers everywhere:

"Virginia:

"Your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They will never believe except they see.

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.

He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as there were no Virginias. There would be no childish faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

"You might get your papa to hire men to watch all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men ever see. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders that are unseen and unseeable in the world. You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a well stronger that ever lived could ever tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love and romance can put aside that curtain and view the picture—the supernatural beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing so real as abiding.

"No Santa Claus! Thank God, he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia—nay, ten times 10,000 years from now—he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."

The sun had set. Darkness enveloped the clearing and Juan and the children went into the cottage and had their supper—boiled tubers, wild berries and honey, and delicious wild herbs and vegetables. All their meals are very frugal, they never have any meat—a baby falls victim to Juan's traps. Juan traps him because he is the outlaw of the jungle and destroys the nests of ground-breeding birds and cats or roosts up, with his snout and saber tusks, everything wild or planted.

Once each month Juan carries his rattan to the town far below, in the foothills of the mountain. The way being long and Juan's load always very heavy, the trip requires two nights and the children are compelled to spend a night in the cottage all alone. As they have never known anything else, they are used to doing this and are not in the least afraid. Juan always makes one special trip to town just before Christmas.

Once he went down the mountain trail just the day before Christmas, telling the children he should never bring Santa Claus back with him that very night, Christmas eve, with a pack of toys and dainty sweetmeats. He had toiled unusually hard during the month, and his burden of rattan was heavier than usual; he wanted enough money for all that he had promised. He muscled along the trail over what he should buy.

For one thing, he would buy the big vase he had seen in the store of the Chinese trader; this he would bring back and place at the head of Maria's grave, where he could fill it with fresh bouquets every day. There would, from such an extra quantity of rattan, be plenty of money left for the toys and candies. He bent under his load, but kept plodding happily on. The vegetation changed as he descended, and the footing on the trail changed from dry rocky formation over which he could make good time, to slippery mud through which he tramped only slowly and difficultly. It was hours later than usual when he reached the town, and before he had sold his rattan and made his purchases a storm came up and delayed his departure for home; he had to remain in town much longer than he had planned.

But the children were all right at home. Toward sunset they made the pilgrimage to the grave alone, but of course unaided.

"Father will be home soon," said Silva, "with Santa Claus." Her large lustrous eyes spoke the joy she had in the thought.

"Well, it has been raining very hard and I hope Santa Claus has an umbrella so he can keep the candy dry," said Alejandro, being just a little disturbed over the weather.

It grew dark in the bower, and a strange spell came over the children. Yet they thought nothing strange of it, since it was nearly bedtime and natural for them to feel drowsy. Cradled in a fork of one of the pill-nut trees, they fell asleep. Around them the gentle beasts of the forest were asleep too, and the birds among the foliage; but trrier life was awake and forging. It was Christmas eve at last! and two little children slept in the bosom of the forest, by the

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## The Fairies of Mount Banahaw

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grave of their mother, waiting their father's return with Santa Claus! The blankets of the night wrapped their round, plump God shielded their innocence and their beauty.

Near midnight, deep sounds emerged from the crater of the volcano, like the first notes of solemn sacred music, the sounds gradually changed into a soft melody, as of a Christmas hymn sounding low and sweet to the children's dream. From the blossoms at the grave, and the blooming orchids swinging from the tree branches, emerged a troupe of gayly tripping sprites not larger than a man's finger. They are the fairies of Mount Banahaw, and they formed a circle round the sleeping children and danced their fairy measures with gayety and grace. The tempo of the crater's music quickened, and the fairies changed their step with it; they danced rigorous and quadrilles, then they had a flower dance and threw handfuls of fragrant roses over the children—never once waking them.

So the night passed.

At the false dawn, just before *Almoruz*, goddess of the rising sun, heralded the morning, the mountain hushed its music and there stepped forth from the grave of the children's mother a figure all of loveliness and young beauty—glad in white, with flowers in her hair and a circle of orchids round her waist. She sat demurely at the edge of the grave, which closed behind her, she gazed tenderly upon the children, then stepped softly toward them. Bending down, she kissed them on the lips; and the fairies came and danced once more and sang a beautiful song; the shrouded lady went as she took the children in her arms and carried them into their father's cottage.

It was past sunrise when Juan, all anxiety and solicitous concern, at last reached home. But could it really be home, his home? He stopped in astonishment when he reached the clearing, for the rambling thatched cottage, no more than a rude mountaineer's hut, was gone, and in its place stood a neat little wooden house—as good as a rich man's in town. Juan rubbed his eyes vigorously, to make sure he had not fallen asleep and to dreaming, then hurried on across the garden and into the house. He expected it to be filled with the unseen things he had seen. It remained just as it was! And in a clean new white bed Silva and Alejandro were fast asleep. Toys, candies, and clothing for both boy and girl were spread upon a wooden table in the center of the room, under a Christmas tree brilliant with candles aglow and burdened with garlands of fruits and nuts.

A sob escaped Juan. Sinking to his knees and leaning his tired head low, he kissed the branches of the tree. For he had recognized it—the little pine sapling he had found on the very crest of Mount Banahaw and had brought down and planted at the grave. He realized that Maria had returned from Eternity that night, and made the sapling into this radiant Christmas tree. At the head of the grave, where the pine had stood, Juan set the vase from the Chinese trader's store, and no day passes that the children do not fill it with the choicest wild flowers the forest knows. As he gazes at the Christmas tree, Juan wonders at the mystery. He is sure it was Maria who visited their lonely children that night, and he thinks perhaps she will come again—perhaps at some other Christmas.

Perhaps she will.

## Britain at The Hague

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outlined its own point of view at some length. For a time it looked as though the breakdown of the Conference was inevitable. M. Briand made an impassioned plea to put the interests of Europe before any party financial considerations. I said that I agreed, and so long as conciliatory measures were likely to be fruitful, we had been willing to continue. We had, however, waited three weeks. There had been

no progress, no decision. The British delegation had been most anxious to give every opportunity for conversations that might lead to a final result. All through the British delegation had manifested great patience. For days we had had to sit idle, and now, as a final offer, we were asked to accept one-half of our legitimate demands at the Conference. The offer was at hand, but developments were imminent which showed once more that the darkest hour is that before the dawn.

The room was insufferably hot, and it was suggested that we might adjourn for ten minutes to get some fresh air. We split into little groups, and the majority of the Conference delegates and British delegates remained in one room, while the others went into another room. M. Jaspas acted as intermediary. M. Jaspas returned within five minutes to say that his friends would accept by sixty-six per cent of our demands, and rejected this, and at eight-forty-five I described on half a sheet of note paper the five heads of our minimum demands, and this I handed to M. Jaspas.

Half an hour later he returned with an offer which offered some advance but was still unacceptable. He begged him to begin his efforts, and pointed out that in half an hour he had advanced £100,000 a year, and at the same rate he would come up to the minimum demands before he returned. He returned to the offer of an hour with a further advance of £50,000. "You are doing first rate, M. Jaspas," I said. "Be not weary in well-doing." In the next two or three hours further small advances were made. He returned to the offer of an hour with £240,000 of the British claim. M. Jaspas was in despair. "I cannot do more," he said. "You have emptied all our pockets." "Go through your pockets again," I said very kindly, "and see if you find any more money." He said he remains between us. "You told me you had a very kind heart," he said, "but we have never met a man like you. I assured him that it was the kindness of my friends that I so earnestly wished him to continue his efforts, as I was sure that he would succeed. Then someone had a brain wave, and the hitherto undiscovered means of giving us the sum we needed was discovered. In order that our demands were accepted, and the Conference was saved. At 2 o'clock in the morning we left the conference hall. Outside were hundreds of journalists, who had been waiting all through those hours and had endeavored to make by making a bonfire of the Young Report in the square.

I had now better explain just what our persistence has gained. We claimed, in addition to our annuities of £2,400,000, a fairer share of the unconditional annuities and some substantial improvement in regard to deliveries in kind. The agreement we reached on the basis of these claims gives us an increase in our guaranteed annuities of £2,000,000 a year for 37 years. This is guaranteed to the extent of £290,000,000. French and Belgian Governments and £450,000,000 by Italy. We receive in addition at once a lump sum of £5,000,000, which is equal to an additional annuity of £360,000 a year. In addition, by the rearrangement of these claims, which dates from the time to be made, we gain an additional sum of £200,000 a year. This brings the total gains under this head to £2,600,000 a year. And there is the further advantage of considerable value sums, most of which are guaranteed and are therefore placed in the category of unconditional annuities, and we should continue to receive them in the event of any non-payment. This may be regarded as a compensation for the small sacrifice we made in the total of our original demands.

In regard to the second point, we obtained a larger percentage of unconditional annuities. Under the Young Plan there was available for us a share of the undistributed unconditional annuities which would not be allocated at the outset to more than £850,000 a year. We are now receiving, in addition to the guaranteed annuities, a further unconditional payment of £2,750,000 a year. On the third point our claims—most of which are guaranteed and are therefore placed in the category of unconditional annuities, and we should continue to receive them in the event of any non-payment. This may be regarded as a compensation for the small sacrifice we made in the total of our original demands.

1,000,000 tons of coal a year for the next three years. These three matters constitute our gains in the financial and commercial sphere, but the British Government has been equally successful on the political side. Agreement has been reached between France, Belgium, and Great Britain on the one hand, and Germany on the other, by the evacuation of the Rhineland is to be effected by the end of next June. The withdrawal of the British troops will begin at once, and it is expected that our evacuation will be complete before Christmas.

May I now briefly summarize the results of our four weeks' strenuous efforts? It has been commonly held that the Conference and the British delegation were fighting only for some sordid material gains. It is quite true that we were determined that our just rights in the matter of the distribution of reparations should be respected. The right to be met by means unimpaired, although a sum of £2,000,000 a year is an infinitesimal part of the enormous financial sacrifice which this country has made for the benefit of our Continental debtors. When we decided to resist the call for further sacrifice we desired the world to know that we had reached the limit of our generosity and that we could not allow England any longer to be regarded the rich man of Europe.

But beyond this, and of far greater importance, was our determination to defend our rights and our determination that international agreements should be respected. I am convinced that our stand will make a profound impression on our future relations with the other countries of Europe. The right to be met by means unimpaired in international diplomacy have been reasserted, and there will be no reversion to the spineless policy of recent years. We have won the respect of the nations with whom we have been in contact, but especially the United States, past four weeks. I made it a condition at the outset of the Conference that Great Britain would not accept any concession to her just claims in the matter of reparations to Germany. This condition has been maintained. After the final agreement had been reached I voluntarily sacrificed some share of the unconditional annuities to which we were entitled in order that we might be able to help the smaller nations, and this concession has won for us their ardent gratitude and respect. Throughout the Conference the personal relations between the British delegates and those of the other powers were of a friendly and cordial character—a striking contrast with the bitterness of the personal attacks which have been made on me in some of the Continental newspapers. I am convinced that I have done myself as the reincarnation of the man who burned Joan of Arc, beheaded Mary, Queen of Scots, and banished Napoleon.

I cannot conclude without paying a warm tribute of respect and admiration to the leaders of the other delegations. M. Briand's wise statesmanship and his personal sacrifice contributed much to the success of the Conference. Animated by an earnest desire to bring the Conference to a successful end, he made concessions which I am sure his own countrymen will on consideration not only approve, but commend. Herr Stresemann, the leader of the German delegation, who has his own internal political difficulties, showed a willingness to co-operate which was highly commendable. The Japanese, Prime Minister, and the Belgian and Italian delegates, although the Belgian and Italian were an unwelcome task of negotiator between the parties. His tact, his humor, and his patience were in a very large measure the means by which a satisfactory outcome of the Conference was achieved.

I would just like to make one further acknowledgment of our gratitude, and that is to the unanimous support of the British Press and of British public opinion. Without this it would have been quite impossible to achieve our object. At twelve o'clock on the evening of the 22nd I received amid universal congratulations and satisfaction. It was the birthday of the Queen of the Netherlands, to whose Government the Conference was held. The British and Belgian Prime Ministers and the Belgian and Italian delegates were seated in the conference hall the day before yesterday in the square played the stirring old hymn, "Now thank we all our God."