



A Propos of a Pastoral Visitation in the Mountain Province

From Friday, February 2, until Thursday, May 16, has been a very busy time for Msgr. José Billiet, the Prefect Apostolic of the Mountain Province. He made his Pastoral Visitation to many of our missions, administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to many neophytes and children. He made use of all available means of transportation, from the taxi, bus and P. U. car down to the riding on horseback and the simplest journeying on foot.

He started with a taxi which carried him and his baggages to the Dangwa station, where, like an ordinary traveler, he mounted the bus bound for Bontoc amidst Igorrotes who returned home for a well deserved rest after hard work in the mines. "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me"—"He sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor," is Msgr. Billiet's cherished adage, and, while the truck rolled on the rough road shaking and

tossing its passengers, his attractive smile and kind conversation sowed the good seed of God's word in the souls of Christians and pagans alike who, for being of the Mountain Province, are committed to his fatherly care. He loves them, and to be with them is a delight for him. He never feels better than on the open road, traveling as a poor missionary, making new acquaintances, new friends, and those of the mountaineers who meet him once are not to forget him anymore. God has given him a rich memory, and the writer of these "causeries" has many times been wondering how he knew so many people whom he called by their name as if he had known them for years, although he saw them but once somewhere in a far off place at a gate on the road or in a barrio. Faces beaming with joy and gratitude stare then at him, and at every such occasion these words of the Good

Shepherd come to my mind: "I know My sheep, and call them by their name."

It was already late in the evening when Msgr. arrived in Bontoc, where his brother Francisco Billiet was waiting for him. Alighting from the truck, stiff and well covered with dust, he smiled his best, but Apo Francisco could not prevent an outcry of surprise seeing Msgr. his brother emerging alone from the bus. But no further outbursts of surprise were possible because Msgr. was already shaking hands and chuckled all remarks to a stop with a hearty: "Oh, well, I enjoyed it immensely!"

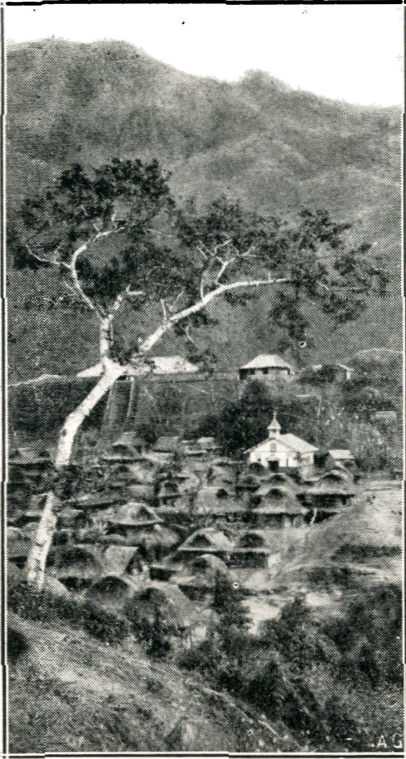
It was late at night when Apo Francisco returned to the convento of Bontoc; he had been in town to find and contract a P. U. He had been lucky in his expedition, and the result was that on the next morning he and Msgr. his brother covered the 68 kilometers to Lubuagan comfortably seated in a public utility car.

Lubuagan may well be called the home of the Billiets. They are three in number, two brothers and a sister, and all three are in the Philippines. Rev. Mother Lutgarde, of the Belgian Sisters residing in Tondo, is the oldest of the three. They were still young when they lost their parents, and Sister Lutgarde had to take the place of their mother while the two boys, Francisco and José, continued their studies at the college. On completing his six years of college, Francisco entered the Mis-

sion Congregation of Scheut, Belgium, where two years later his younger brother José joined him. Free from all family cares and worries, Sister Lutgarde herself entered the Congregation of Missionary Canonesses of St. Augustine, Heverle, Belgium, and now the three are in the Philippines rendering most valuable service to the Church in this country.

The convento of Lubuagan has many doors which stand invitingly in four directions, to express welcome to all those who may arrive from anywhere and for any reason. During the many times I have been in Lubuagan I never saw the convento without visitors. Young and old, Christian and pagan, they are all received with kindness and a smile that makes them feel at home.

I have always admired the way the missionaries of Kalinga treat the most common Igorrote. They certainly follow the advice given by St. Peter, the Patron Saint of Lubuagan, who wrote to his Christians these words: "Honor ye, therefore, all men." Besides, it is a fact that the Kalinga people have a special liking for being honored; although in primitive appearances, they show forth in their way of speaking and acting a certain nobility of which one who comes in contact with them is soon aware. This is a natural gift they received from their Creator, and which in most places makes them quite attractive. Of course, such a gift can be misused and turn into pride, making the possessors of it



^ barrio Chapel in the
Mountain Province

a little too much thinskin­ned; but, if rightly cultivated by religion, it is a very opportune means to make of them an "elite" of Christians.

A good number of neophytes received the Sacrament of Confirmation, which Msgr. Billiet administered in Lubuagan church and in the chapel of Bangad. I feel always glad when Kalinga Christians are confirmed, because, dwelling in their souls, the Holy Ghost finds in them a good disposition to accept His operation to make of them true soldiers of

Christ, and their supernaturalized sense of honor paves the way for the practice of Christian virtues.

No wonder then that the first priest in the Apostolic Prefecture of the Mountain Province comes from the Kalinga tribe. This happy happening has still paved a wider way to Christian ideals, a way to the native Priesthood, and no one would be surprised that in a relatively near future the example of Rev. A. Duggom be followed by many Kalinga boys. Rev. A. Duggom has been appointed to the mission of Lubuagan, and his daily missionary work is going to be a constant appeal to the nobler feelings of the Kalinga sons to join him in his endeavors to make of Kalingaland a selected spot of Christ's Kingdom on earth.

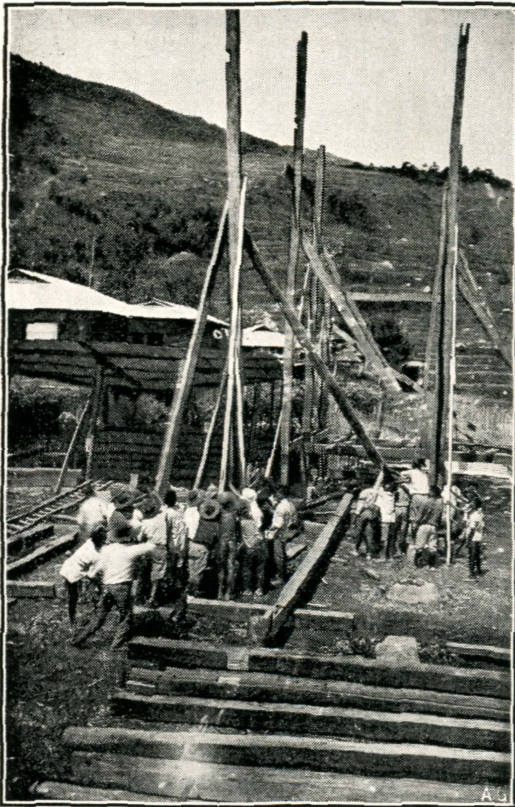
From Lubuagan Msgr. Billiet went to the Salegseg mission. Twenty-four kilometers high up above Lubuagan lies the barrio of Balbalan, where a well prepared group of neophytes were ready to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. From there he had to ride on horseback to Salegseg, amidst the woodland flowers and the wild orchids.

Besides Balbalan, Msgr. administered Confirmation in the center of Salegseg mission and in the following barrios: Daw-angan, Limos, Allaguaia and Taga.

Father V. Pil is building a new church in Salegseg, which ought to be completed by this time. One who has seen the narrow trails and paths leading up and down from one barrio to another, easily ad-

mits that Father Pil is living a very hard missionary life. But the good Father never complains, makes his every day steep climbing and abrupt descending in search of new souls for Christ, and prays the Lord for more strength in order to reach all the sheep committed to his care but scattered in the far off and surrounding mountains. His mission is too widely extended for one priest! But, alas! there is not much hope that help will come to him, now that the homeland is again occupied by the German armies. If only we could give him more catechists; but, we appeal al-

most in vain to the Catholics of this country. It is always the same few that are interested in mission work. Our Catechists' Fund is almost exhausted, day after day is passing by without receiving a single centavo to help the great work of Christianization of the Mountain Province—but daily, new and expensive automobiles increase running on all roads in the Philippines, splendid parties are given, cines are crowded, and to their unfortunate brethren not the least thought of compassion is given. While these lukewarm Catholics give themselves up to politics and "good-times", mis-



Erecting the
heavy posts of a
new Mission Church
in the Mountain
Province.



sionaries and a few catechists are exhausting themselves, are dying on the spot, to bring the consolation of our Holy Faith to the poor of the Mountain Province, who wait in vain for the fraternal love of their wealthy, well-to-do compatriots. Yes, the favored in this country know how to make beautiful speeches on patriotism, social justice and the like; but, I ask you, do they know what they are talking about?.....

Rev. A. Duggom is from this mission. I saw the place where he was born, where he lived as a child, a boy, and I feel obliged to recall how our dear Lord found in this far off mountain recess a faithful servant to follow Him on the way to Calvary for the salvation of many in the tribe of Kalinga.

In him the Apostolic Prefecture of the Mountain Province has its first secular priest. He was ordained to the Priesthood in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, on march 9, 1940, by His Excellency S.C. Sancho, bishop of Nueva Segovia.

A native from Pantikian, belonging to the Salegseg mission, he was baptized in 1926 by Rev. Francisco Billiet.

In the early days of his boyhood he walked the six kilometers narrow trail from Pantikian to Alingayen (Salegseg) in order to pick up the first rudiments of reading and writing in the public school of the latter place; at evening he ran down the same narrow trail, trying to get home before sunset. Such

was the daily routine of his boyhood.

In the beginning of 1926 a missionary passed through Alingayen and Pantikian, and a boy by the name of Duggom, a native from Pantikian and pupil of the Alingayen public school, was the first to approach the missionary, to listen to his kind words, and to be so much attracted by the priest's personality as to become his best friend and follower.

That same year he was baptized and became therewith Alberto Duggom.

Alberto Duggom was of such uprightness of character and of behavior that for him to believe in our Lord's doctrine and to accept baptism was a matter of fact as soon as he came in contact with a Catholic priest who brought to him the Good Tidings.

For as much as I know him, it seems to me that even his vocation to the Holy Priesthood was for him but a matter of fact. His pure soul, his generous heart naturally strove to a higher life, and when he saw a Father Francisco Billiet or a Father José Poot sacrificing themselves in search for souls for Christ his decision was made then and there to be once himself a missionary priest in the service of the Good Shepherd.

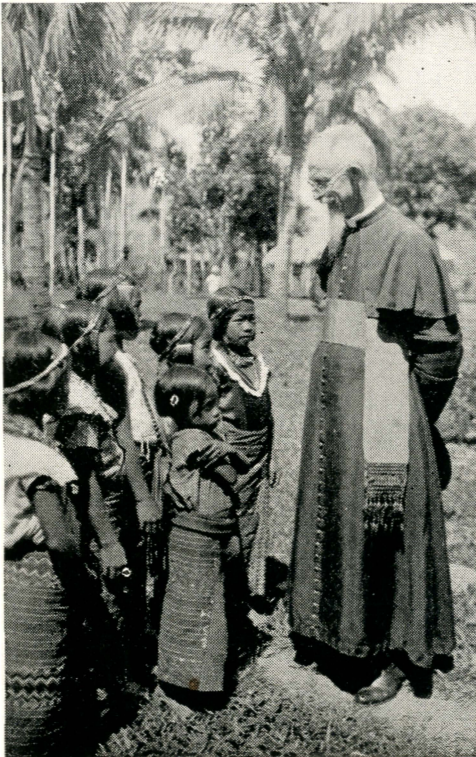
While I write this I think of another pure soul whose words fully explain what I mean. "Sometimes I heard people saying," writes St. Theresa of the Child Jesus in her Autobiography, "that Pauline would be a nun and, with-

out quite knowing what I meant, I thought: 'I will be a nun too.' This is one of my first recollections, and I have never changed my mind." You see, to the Little Flower of Jesus her religious vocation came instantly at the first mention of it, and later on it was so natural that it also may be called a simple matter of fact.

That Alberto Duggom wanted to become a priest was certainly one of the first confidences he made to Father Francisco, his true spiritual father. Knowing the two souls, one must simply say: "It couldn't have been otherwise." But, what the Little Flower of

Jesus said of herself, "I have never changed my mind," could have been likewise said of Alberto Duggom. The fact, indeed, that it has not been otherwise with him, that he too never changed his mind, makes us look at him with admiration and reverence, because with the great St. Paul he can now say in all truth: "By the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace in me hath not been void, but I have labored more abundantly than all they: yet not I, but the grace of God in me."

In these words of St. Paul lies the long story of labor and struggle in order to remain faithful to



Msgr José Billiet

with Kalinga Children.



On a next Visit Msgr.

Will say who is Feliza,

Teresita, Antonia etc.....



a higher vocation, to a special call coming from the Divine Master.

The years passed in Lubuagan under the loving care of Father Francisco were a providential preparation for the little boy Alberto who was to meet, like all children of Eve, the trials and temptations of life. It was especially at the Farm School of Trinidad, where he studied for a few years, that Alberto may say that he "labored more abundantly than all they."

The grace of God preserved the purity of his soul, kept alive in his heart the call to a higher vocation, because the grace of God worked in him, with him. In Trinidad Alberto Duggom was a living good example for the other boys. It was he who never missed Mass on Sundays, who knew how to convince others not to forget the way to the church and to the confessional, and whose presence was enough to stop undecent con-



How Missionaries are traveling in China.

There he was abandoned to himself, "could do wrong, but did not do it," resisted to all worldly attractions, went victoriously through all temptations. He "labored more abundantly than all they," not only in showing a wonderful application in his studies, but above all in being faithful to his Christian duties and to the salutary practice of daily prayer.

versations. "Temptations and trials do not make the man," says The Following of Christ, "but they show what he is." The time passed in Trinidad Farm School has certainly shown in clear light what a man Alberto Duggom was.

He finished his High School in Tagudin, from where he entered the Seminary of Vigan, Ilocos Sur.

From Salegseg Msgr. Billiet made the long trip on horseback to Tuao, Cagayan, from where he went to Tuguegarao, the residence of His Excellency C. Jurgens. After a day or two of needed rest, he set out again, via Tuao, to visit the large subprovince of Apayao. It is a long way from Tuao to Ripang, the first mission station in Apayao. The first hour is a ride up and down the hills, and the horse trots at regular speed from one winding trail to another. Then begins the wooded region of Apayao, a thirty-five kilometers through dense forests. For hours not a single house is to be seen, and the traveler asks himself if any human being dwells in this wide subprovince.

Arriving in Ripang towards evening, Msgr. was glad to be welcomed and to find some comfort in the convento of the missionary, Rev. H. David. The first impression one has is to wonder why a church and convento are built in such a wilderness, and how it is possible that a missionary can live here year after year without even thinking so much as to give it up and return to civilization. Here one realizes what a missionary can endure for the salvation of a human soul. Believe me, it is very hard, physically and morally, to live in Ripang, to remain in Ripang, and to work there with zeal to bring a few wandering souls to our Lord. Only a few and poor houses form this mission center. And where are the rest of Apayao's 16,000 inhabitants? Not

even an Isneg can rightly answer this question, for today they live here and tomorrow there, in places almost inaccessible where they have built little shacks with sticks and grass and where for the time being they have planted their mountain rice. And the priest has to travel on and along swift and dangerous rivers, has many times to risk his life by crossing them; he has to climb slippery rocks and wade through mud-pools, with the hope of reaching a few people to whom he can speak of God's love and of the all important matter of the salvation of their souls....

The next day quite a number of neophytes and children received the Sacrament of Confirmation. One wonders again from where they come, how they have been gathered, and how they have been prepared to receive the Holy Ghost. One priest and two catechists have done the work. Every Christian present has been a true conquest; the conversion to the Faith of every adult is a long story of hardships and sacrifices endured by the priest and his catechists to win him or her for Christ. In Ripang, in 1939, only four adults were baptized together with another total of seventeen children from Christian and fourteen from pagan parents.

There are only two missions in Apayao. The second one being Kabugao, the capital of the subprovince. A muddy path of fifty-one kilometers through the woods separate Ripang from Kabugao.



Pastoral Visitation in Kiangan.

In company with Fathers H. David and G. De Caestecker, the missionary of Kabugao, Msgr. Billiet covered this long and tiresome distance on horseback in one day.

The Kabugao mission center has this advantage on Ripang that the church and convento have a neighborhood of Christians from the lowlands; the government officials and public school teachers are there to give the missionary and his two catechists the consolation of seeing a respectable attendance at Mass on Sundays. But for the rest, Ripang has nothing to envy from Kabugao; the work is equally hard, and the result equally modest. During 1939 the Father and his two catechists suc-

ceeded in converting seven Isneg adults, baptized thirty children from Christian and 116 children from pagan parents. To these and others Msgr. administered the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Kabugao and Ripang have their chapel at the missionary's residence; there are no other chapels in the whole subprovince, for the simple reason that no one can say where to build them, since people are not permanently living in the same place, and, if some do live in the same place, then one does not find them at home for the greater part of the year; they are most of the time abroad in their inaccessible fields.

On his return trip from Apayao,

Msgr. Billiet boarded a row-boat, which slipped swiftly down stream to Abulug, Cagayan, where he was lucky to meet Captain Sandiko who gave him a lift in his car bound for Tuguegarao.

From Tuguegarao, Cagayan, to Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, Msgr. Billiet passed the long journey on a bus of the Rural Transit. The next day another truck of the same company brought him to Kiangán, capital of the Ifugao subprovince.

Kiangán is a beautiful mission where the number of confirmations ran into the hundreds. The same may be said of Burnay Banawe.

Ifugao is the most densely populated subprovince of the Mountain Province. There are actually in the whole subprovince six missionary priests, thirteen Sisters, eight teachers and seven catechists to take care of a High School, Intermediate and Primary Schools in Kiangán, Primary Schools in Banawe, dormitories for boys and girls in these two places, and a population of more than eighty thousand souls.

The rice terraces graduate from the foot up to the top of the mountains and give splendid vistas to the traveler who rides in a car on the main road; but, to the missionaries who have to visit the little groups of houses scattered amidst these terraces, they make dangerous climbing and a tiresome duty to be complied with. If, instead of seven catechists for the whole Ifugao subprovince, the missionaries had ten times as many such pre-

vious helpers, much of their hard and exhausting work could be spared and many more Ifugaos could be reached and instructed in our Holy Faith.

From Banawe Msgr. went by truck to Bontoc for confirmation in Bontoc itself and in Tetipan.

Bontoc is a very difficult mission on account of the natives' strange customs in their way of living. One has to see with his own eyes the repelling condition of their huts, their public sleeping holes for boys and girls respectively, the performance of their wild *caniaos* and other pagan customs, to realize that it is difficult indeed to make good Christians out of a people living in such a depth of pagan miseries. Not long ago a Jesuit Father visited the Igorrote "puebic" of Bontoc, and he came back shaking his head and exclaiming: "Hopeless case!..... Hopeless case!....."

Much has been done by the missionaries to improve the miserable lot of this pagan tribe, but the results have not responded to the amount of their generous efforts.

The method of christianizing the Bontoc Igorrotes used by Father C. Jurgens, now His Excellency C. Jurgens, was that of secluded education of boys and girls in schools and dormitories. He even bought a large piece of land in order to provide for the future development of Christian life. On this plot decent houses would be built once Christian boys would marry Christian girls and make

Christian families.

Although restricted, this method has given very good results. It has produced men like Felix Diaz, Louis Claver, Jerome Facat, James Dakyon, Henry Amos, Julio Angawa, William Ola, Pedro Chumakog and others who today keep high the standard of Christian education received at the Catholic mission and who occupy outstanding positions in society.

But this method was very expensive, too expensive above all in times of general depression which affected the whole world and not less the missions. Besides, this method did not directly reach the elder Bontoc people, although they were not abandoned.

Keeping the schools and dormitories in a still more restricted sphere, the missionary of Bontoc tried the method of bringing the Gospel directly to these Igorrotes, by daily contact with them in their own poor huts. It has been a hard and difficult enterprise which has offered not much consolation, although this method has always been in use with other tribes and has everywhere else had the most gratifying results. The zealous Father of Bontoc even planned to put a chapel and a priest's residence in the middle of their "pueblo," so that the relations between the people and the missionary would be more effective. The ground whereon to erect these



Msgr. J. Billiet and Rev. J. Poot with Ifugao children at Kiangan.



Burnay
Mission:
Rev. Verbeke,
his Catechist
and a few of
his
parishioners.

buildings was already purchased, materials gathered, and Brother Henry was already on the spot to start the work. But then troubles came, which were of such nature that the good Father had to give up his cherished plans. Bontoc Igorrotes remain stubborn in their prehistoric way of living, and, if ever a change is to come, it will be when the government becomes aware of the necessity of making the people feel the power of its authority and improve this altogether too miserable condition for human beings.

In the meantime the missionary will have to use heroic patience in dealing with the pagan population of Bontoc. He will have to stand by the handicapped method of secluded education in schools and dormitories — of course, in a very restricted way on account of the lack of means. In other words he will have to temper his zeal and be

satisfied with slow and modest results.

It was March 16th when Msgr. Billiet returned from Bontoc to Baguio. He remained only a few days in the city. On the feast of St. Joseph he gave the tonsure and minor orders to scholastics of the Society of Jesus, that same evening he made the invocation at the commencement exercises of the graduated nurses of Baguio Hospital, and the next morning he was again on his way to Bontoc. He had to be in Lubuagan on Easter Sunday to assist at the first solemn High Mass of Rev. Alberto Dugom.

On Easter Monday he left Lubuagan for Bontoc, from where he traveled thirty-five kilometers on horseback to Barlig. From Barlig he had another long ride of thirty kilometers to Natonin, followed by other long journeys to Kadaklan

and Lias, always in the saddle from morning until late in the afternoon. In all these places new Christians were made soldiers of Christ through Confirmation.

From Barlig Msgr. traveled again via Bontoc to Lubuagan, and from there to Naneng. In Naneng itself and in Bulanao and Laya there were many confirmations. Laya is the place where during the Spanish Regime the Dominican Missionaries had a mission. There was still a church in that place when our missionaries came to Kalinga; material in the church which could still be used was transported to Naneng for the construction of another church in the center of the actual mission district.

For the sixth time the Prefect Apostolic passed through Bontoc, went to Sabangan and Bauko for confirmation, and paid a flying visit to Kayan.

Back in Baguio on the 22nd of April he was, two days later, on

his way to Batan, Kabayan, for confirmation. From kilometer 52 on the Bontoc road he walked down into the depth, climbed a steep mountain, followed the mountain ridge, went down slippery rocks to reach Batan. This trip was the most tiresome he ever did, and few will be able to endure what he suffered during that journey up and down the steep mountains.

On May 1st he went for confirmation to Balagbag, the following Sunday to Kapangan, and finally a few days later to Diokmo, of the jurisdiction of Itogon.

On May 14th he was again en route to Kayan where he blessed the new church, an important event of which our readers will hear later on in a special edition.

Finally, on May 16th, he could sit down in peace and take a rest after almost four months of continual traveling.

The Little Apostle

