

The Mambunung Blesses the Harvest

Little known, and that with small respect, since they are a pagan folk, the best agriculturists in the Philippines are the Igorots of Mountain province; and experts in the art and science of farming often have not been content to pronounce these hardy mountaineers the best farmers in the Philippines, but have declared them to be the best in the world. For they have converted sterile mountains into the most fertile fields, first terracing the slopes with walls and then building up the fields with loam from the valleys. They have perfected the art of making compost out of every superfluous straw, so that all but the very grain itself goes back into the soil. Finally, aside from seed selection, which they know well, they have devised for their terraced fields a most ingenious and fully adequate system of artificial irrigation and drainage.

All their farming is done by hand, women working with the men and a natural division of labor being practiced. The men build and repair the walls and tend the ditches, the women plant and tend the fields, and all, men, women and children, busy themselves with the harvesting.

These stocky Igorots have a religion strikingly like that of the North American Indian. Evil spirits are propitiated, good ones supplicated. There is special reliance upon Kamundian, the Great Spirit. Before the yellow grain is cut, an old medicine man blesses the fields.

"You, O Kabigat and Bugan!
You, O Kabigat!" so prayed he,
"Living in the sky, your dwelling—
You who feed us all, and give us
Rice and *abba* in abundance,
All we need for our existence.

"You, O Kabigat and Bugan!
Bless the cutting, bless the harvest!

"You are He who in your goodness
Long ago has made these paddies;
You have plowed them, you have worked them!
Bless them then. O bless the rice fields,
Planted here in endless paddies,
Sai gwara kai-igad-igadanyo—
So that we your name may honor!

"You, O Thunder, mighty Speaker!
From your heights above, don't harm us;
Don't lay waste our burthened rice fields!
—Iango! Here is good tapoi!
—Iango! Here's rice wine to please you!
Come, and let us drink together!
Come, protect us! Come and give us
Long and happy lives, and riches!"

So it is that Father Clerhoudt, a Belgian missionary priest, says the *mambunung* of the village of Bokod on the headwaters of the Agno river, blesses the fields before the ripened grain is cut. He describes the *mambunung*, whose office precisely corresponds to that of an Indian medicine man, as a man of great age, "a tall fellow, surpassing all the other tribesmen by at least a head," who was born in Bokod and learned in all its traditions. Also, the *mambunung* "knew about sickness and other evils; he knew not only the causes of such ills, but also their remedies. He possessed a valuable storehouse of exorcisms, mysterious and all-powerful; he conversed with Kabunian, the Divinity; with the ghosts on Mount Polak, and with the spirits that dwelt in the sky, the water, and the fire."

It is to the ancestral manes, the ghosts on Mount Polak, that the *mambunung* addresses his supplication—asking them not to speak angrily in the thunder and deluge the ripened fields with untimely rains, but to drink the tapoi; rice wine, and mingle with the people friendly. "All the women, about to help (in the cutting of the rice), were sitting in a circle round the flag, and one step farther on toward the field sat the thin *mambunung*, his tall body doubled over a jar of rice wine." Ending his prayer, he dipped up the wine in a coconut shell and held it high aloft, proffering it to the demigods, the people's ancestors, the ghosts of Mount Polak.

"The field first to be harvested must be blessed," the *mambunung* had told his flock. "The field first to be harvested must be exorcised!"

So, on the highest point on the wall round the field, the *mambunung* planted a warrior's spear from the head of which floated a taboo cloth; and none then could enter the field without incurring the wrath of the gods, save those who were of right to help with the cutting. These waited for the blessing of the field, the exorcism of evil spirits, and then got out their sickles. But the *mambunung*'s sorcery is not quite ended; do not enter yet!

"The *mambunung* kept silence for a moment, threw a few pebbles into the field, and proceeded:

"Sikajo ay makadaga—
You who founded all these fields here,
Bless our harvest, bless the cutting!
—Iango! Here is tapoi!
—Iango! Here is rice wine!"

"After which Pokchas (the owner of the field) took a swallow of the rice wine. Then the cup passed round from hip to lip, and the people began to cut the rice.

"At sunset Pokchas and the *mambunung* descended from the field and went to the village, followed by a long row of women bending under the enormous loads of their *kaibangs*, their heavy baskets full of golden rice."

The harvest festival resembles the primitive Grecian festival to Dionysius. In Pokchas's but the village maidens had boiled big pots of last year's rice "which they had pounded, sifted and cleaned." Dried pork was served for meat. With the harvesters gathered round, the *mambunung* squatted near the steaming rice and boiling meat and said a prayer:

"Kaladjo! Come ye all much nearer,
All who at bakak have feasted
Long ago and long before us!

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Teach us, pray, your supplication
For the bakak of the harvest:
Sikajo Bimaka mkaak—
The bakak of former ages!
You who prayed and celebrated,
Mandasakjoji inaan—
Please increase and make abundant
All the feast to you we offer!

"Tep iafigo y aduto—
Here is food, and food delightful,
You with us will eat this evening!
Give us fortune, vouchsafe riches,
That the mortals may more often
To the harvest home invite you!"

A somewhat astounding detail of the ceremony
Father Claerhoudt so poetically and vividly
describes is the blessing of the very utensils
in which the food was prepared:

"The *mambunung* smeared cooked rice over
the three stones on which the rice kettle had
stood a-boiling, and proceeded:

"Chakadan, because you carry
On your head the heavy kettle
Where our rice is put to boiling,
Eat you first, for you deserve it—
For you keep the embers glowing
And the boiling rice from burning!"

"Then the *mambunung* took another hand-
ful of rice and smeared it on the shelf that hangs
above the fire, on which the villagers lay their
rice bundles to dry," and once more he cried
out:

"Sikam sáo oodán pañ-ánka—
You too, shelf, where dry the bundles,
Eat this food first! And your watching
Over fire and food neglect not."

In the same way he blessed the mortar in
which the rice is pounded free from the hulls,
and then the feast began; and wine, rice wine,
as straight from Mother Earth as wine may
come, passed freely round the circle. Next day
the village was deserted: "Each and all were
in the fields, excepting the emaciated old *mam-
bunung*. All day long he lay with his bony
body stretched out in the refreshing shade of a
mango tree near his hut. He alone was watch-
ing over the village, and his dim eyes longingly
followed the brown figures stooping in the pad-
dies, that from the summit of the mountain
descended to the river."

The moral laws of the Igorots are, of course,
very rigorous. To despoil a village while the
inhabitants were in the fields harrowing would
be a capital crime. It would mean a job for the
headhunters.

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strike, and crop failure. And there are com-
panies which issue policies on the voice of a
prima-donna. A company in Russia has been
insuring individuals against economic conse-
quences of political persecution. And who can
tell what sundry risks will be insured in the
near future to keep pace with the continuous
and surprising progress the world is making in
industrial capitalism?

Already there has been a talk in England and
America of insurance against divorce and against
twins.

The tremendous influence life insurance alone
is exercising nowadays over the economic fabric
of the world!

An old adage says that "there is nothing sure
in life but death," and for an insurance company
to exist there must be the element of uncertainty.
This element is found, however, in the time of
the occurrence of death or in the magnitude of
deaths. What is, therefore, insured against is
the time or magnitude of deaths by offering
to remove the economic consequences of such
uncertainty or, in other words, by replacing the
monetary loss caused by the death of an individual.

Life insurance has developed from the stage of
fatalism when it was no more than an attempt to
reimburse individuals for losses incurred, to the
present modern one based on statistical data,
tables of mortality and scientific calculation
of premiums. In life insurance the net premium
is the joint product of the theory of probabilities,
the experience of vital statistics and a calculation
of rates of interest. (Seligman).

Modern life insurance with such scientific
basis was bound to grow, it has grown and will
continue growing. Its growth will naturally
increase the rôle it plays in economics.

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