



PHOTO C. AERTS

SERGIO

There stood Claro, perspiring and gasping for breath. With blood-shot eyes and sagging shoulders, a statue of misery and pain, he supported himself against the desk. His head hung low upon his breast.

It took some time before he uttered the words, "Father, my brother Sergio is very sick." The brown coarse fingers twitched nervously while playing with the tablecloth. "He wants so much to see you, Father said he. More he could not bring out. His lips began to tremble and his eyes filled with tears. The Father knew Sergio, a good boy, but who like so many of his caste had committed a big mistake. A mistake that filled his soul with fear and apprehension. Fausta had become his wife.

They had married according to pagan customs. Often he had wished to live like other Christian families, but their pagan customs, together with so many other reasons, had taxed his courage; and he had failed to make the step.

His sickness might well be a warning, a grace of God to send Sergio upon the right path. His will was good and this caused him to reach out with both hands toward this last means of salvation. He asked for a priest. . . .

The Father and his sacristan, with Claro leading, wended their way along the path that zigzagged toward the Chico-river. Claro's thoughts were with his brother. . . .

Suddenly it started to rain, but they did not even notice that their garments got sticky. It was cold, but a deathlike stillness filled the air just like the soul of Sergio to whom they were going to give new life.

It was 12:00 o'clock. They felt tired, but it was no time to rest; for a soul had to be saved from the clutches of the devil.

Down, far down is the little village. The huts are clustered like beehives along the sloping side of the little hill. It was very peaceful at this hour of the day. Claro felt the wild beatings of his heart. He didn't walk anymore, but he ran with Father and the sacristan following as fast as they could. Suddenly Claro stopped, listened intently, continued again for a while, and then. . . ., "Here," he said, "is my brother's ricefield with nobody to take care of". Indeed the field was utterly neglected, full of weeds with here and there a meager stalk of rice. And this was a time of famine. . . .

A crowd of little urchins met them at the entrance of the village. "Sergio is very sick," they said, "he can no longer talk". Soon the whole village knew that the Father had

come to visit Sergio. Who knows, He might have some santonine for their Apo lakay, who complained about his terrible headache; or sulfa tablets to prevent colds.

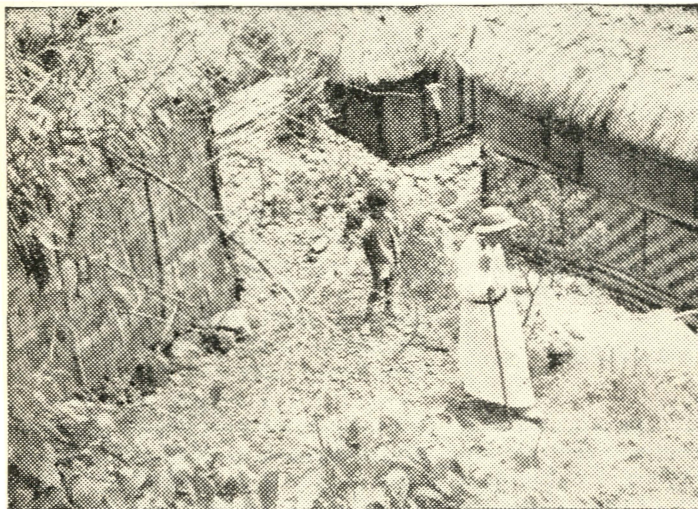


PHOTO C. AERTS



P
H
O
T
O

C.

A
E
R
T
S

Here now they stood in front of Sergio's little house. The faint moaning of the poor man reached their ears. Women mingled with them their lamentations. A pair of little heads appeared in the half-closed door, but soon disappeared again.

On the ground lay Sergio. His old mother kneeling near him. Her withered face bespoke of anguish and deep compassion, of distressing times and great trials. She tried to master her sorrow as only mothers can do. With trembling hands she caressed the fevered brow of her boy, her eldest son. His father had died when Sergio was but a little boy. For some years now he had been the only one to earn their living. His young wife sat somewhat farther helpless, gazing from husband to children and back again. Who should henceforth provide them with

food and clothing in this time of famine?

The many visitors drew back to the far ends of the house. It was awfully hot inside. Sergio turned his head slightly in the direction of the visitors, his eyes were planted deep into their sockets, lusterless, liveless. He was fighting a hard fight and a beastly foe. It was indeed a struggle for life or for death. His cheeks were hollow and sunken, his face overspread with the pallid hue of death. His emaciated hands went to his throat. jerked his head from one side to the other. Something seemed to stifle him, and he fought against it. He looked miserably at his mother then at his wife, at Claro and then at the Father. Was there then nobody who could help him? He wanted to scream, but he had no more voice. He tried to sit up, but fell back into his pillows, helpless and exhausted.

His eyes remained wide-open, staring without seeing; his ears tried to catch some sounds, but heard them no longer. His hands clutched frantically his heaving breast, while his mouth closed like a tomb. "The Father is here" whispered Claro, but Sergio remained motionless. For some minutes he lay like one in ecstasy, then again convulsions shook his frail and sick body. Father tried to rouse him to gain contact with his benumbed senses; but every means failed.



Finally Sergio seemed to have passed the crisis. He became calm once more, while his eyes took on a new brilliancy. A little sleep will do him good. One by one the relatives and visitors left the room. The Father went farther to another village where his catechist was living. He promised to come back the next day and left some medicine for Sergio.

That same night, about 9:00 o'clock the Father was called back to Sergio, who, for sure, lay dying, said the messenger. The Father wanted to accompany this man; but he was gone back to the village. Everything was quickly brought in readiness, torches were lighted, and away went the caravan. The moon shed her silver-pale light upon the rice-fields. Many a weird shadow glided over the terraces; a dog barked from afar.

Often did the missionary curse the tricky moonlight. When he thought to step on a stone, he found his feet planted in the cool mud of the field. When he tried to avoid some danger-

ous object, he lost the path to follow. Cold drops trickled from his forehead; yet onward he must, for Sergio was dying.

How happy they felt when they reached the first huts. A couple of boys came running towards them, leading them by the light of their torches to the house of mother Kanut.

Sergio was going through his most intense crisis. Since dawn he had not uttered a single syllable. Only his soft moaning rent the hearts of those who loved him. Fausta sat near him, and busied herself administering cold patches upon his fevered brow.

The Father, together with the other Christians, prayed. Calmness followed once more, yet not his speech. Long still did the priest and the catechist remain with the sick boy, until they knew that all danger was passed. Tomorrow Father should

offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for Sergio's recovery.....

The next day, after the mass, Father left for a nearby barrio. He stayed there overnight. The next morning his first visit was for Sergio whom he found in exactly the same condition as the day before. There remained only one thing to do. . pray.

And the next day morning a messenger hurried along the way to tell the Father that Sergio was much better, and that his speech had returned. This was the opportunity so longed for. Daylight gave wings to the Father. He found the poor man sitting up in his bed with a thick blanket around his emaciated body. Father helped him prepare for a good confession. It was a blessed moment for both when the man had made his peace with God. Peace and happiness emanated from his pallid face. Sergio was another man.

When the Father left the house, the village counted one more Christian family. Sergio was left, his soul bathed in inner joy and happiness, fortified to sustain his further sufferings and to offer them in complete conformity to the will of God.

Three weeks later, the Father received the sad and unexpected tiding that Sergio was no more. His soul had taken its flight to Heaven. The last week he had walked as far as his ricefield.

It was a deep consolation for the Father to hear that the boy had not omitted to pray daily together with his wife and mother.

For several weeks afterwards, his

old mother went to repeat her lamentations in the neglected ricefield. She walked in a daze weeping over her dead son. Amidst her tears one could hear her lament over again, "Why did you go, Balawag? Who is now to take care of your little children? Hear me, Sergio, come, take me along where you are so that I can care for you again. Balawag, where are you? Maybe you are suffering because nobody looks after you. Come, get me after two days, I want to see your face again, my child. I am old and lonely and can no more work. Come!"

V. O. K.

HAMMOND ORGANS

• ★ •

ESTEY ORGANS

• ★ •

KOLSKI ORGANS



Exclusive Distributors



Felipe Yupangco & Sons, Inc.

Bonifacio Drive
Port Area

316 Carriedo
Quiapo