

MY BOYHOOD CHRISTMAS

By RAMON D. BUCU *



Our teacher said, "My heart shall be full of love for' you."

ABOUT fifteen years ago, I was a pupil in the fifth grade. The little barrio school where I finished my primary schooling was tidied up and decorated with palm leaves, red and green paper festoons, and lanterns of various shapes and with many kinds of decorations. All around there was the delightful noise of the Christmas season. It was the last day of school before the Christmas vacation. The children, arrayed in their new spick-and-span clothes, were in holiday mood.

That afternoon we were going to have a program. Our parents and neighbors were invited to see the most interesting event of the barrio—the annual Christmas program at the barrio school. There were to be Christmas carols, poems, a

drama of the Nativity, and inspiring messages by our teachers. When the time came for the program, everyone in the whole barrio was there.

One by one the numbers of the program were rendered with the noisy approval of the people who knew little of what we were talking about. I recited a poem. I was very nervous, but I saw my father pointing at me with pride to his open-mouthed friends.

Finally came the Christmas message of our teacher. I understood clearly everything he said. The gentleness, the goodwill, the warmth of his words found a place in my heart. "Children," he began, "you have good cause to rejoice on Christmas Day. Christ, our Lord, is born, and with His birth each one in this world receives a Gift whether he expects one or not."

Our teacher said, as he closed his message, these words which I cannot forget: "Boys and girls, I have not much to give you at this Christmas season. I am poor like many of you. But I freely give you the dearest of my treasures—my heart which shall always be full of love for you."

We all clapped our hands. The old folks shook hands with our teacher, for he was their idol. Afterwards we sang a Christmas hymn. Then followed the exchange of gifts. I was not interested in this, for I did not expect to receive any present and had none to give. I slipped away unnoticed while my classmates received their gifts.

I soon reached our *nipa* house. Everybody was gone. I sat down to think. I thought of several things. I thought of

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the great Gift, Jesus the Son of God, the Gift our teacher said everyone would receive. I thought, too, of my dear sick mother, who, three months before, had been taken by my sisters to a place where she could receive medical treatment. I missed her a great deal. The house had been lonely since she had left.

I got some cooking utensils and cooked our simple meal. Father had caught some mudfish. I cleaned them and cooked them over the red hot embers. When they were cooked, I put them on a plate and set them aside. The sun was going down and I could see the shadows of the bamboos lengthening. At dusk father came home on our one and only carabao.

I fixed our kerosene lamp. Then I arranged the table, and soon we were eating our supper. That night I said my usual prayer before I went to bed. Before long I was in the sweet sleep of childhood.

There were seven days left before Christmas Day. I watched them come and go. At last it was Christmas Eve. I recalled how mother had cooked *suman* the year before. I wanted mother. I wanted her very much.

The next morning—Christmas morning—our neighbors went to the church to hear the mass. After breakfast I got

myself ready to go to my godparents and relatives.

I had just gone down the bamboo stairs when I heard the voice of my sister calling on the other side of the nearby river. She shouted, "Father, father, bring us a *banca* so that we can cross." I ran as fast as I could to father.

Father borrowed a *banca* and paddled across the river. After a few minutes I saw my dear mother. She was no longer sick. She could walk very well now. I ran to her and kissed her hand. How

glad she was to see me!

We reached the house. Several of our neighbors were there to welcome mother. Everyone was glad to see her come back home. How happy I was! I was happier than anybody else, for I had received a very precious Christmas gift—the

return of my dear mother.



I had received a very precious gift—my mother.

SOME QUESTIONS

1. Why were the children in the barrio school excited perhaps?
2. Have you ever attended a barrio school?
3. Have you taken part in school programs like this one?
4. What did this teacher say to his pupils?

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CHRISTMAS GOLD

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Into every room she went, blessing the house with the Christmas blessing as she went on her way.

At last she came to the great room where the little spider slept in the corner and where the big Christmas tree stood covered with common cobwebs, a sorry sight to see.

She blessed the picture of Jesus and His mother Mary, and the little shrine where prayers were said, and all the spotless room. Last of all she blessed the Christmas tree, standing as a disgrace to all the household in its gray cobwebs.

In the morning it was Christmas. The sunbeams sparkled and the Christmas bells rang out clear and sweet.

In the great room in the good woman's house stood the Christmas tree, covered from top to bottom in shining gold. You see, the little spider had spun a web all over the Christmas tree, and the Christmas fairy had turned the web into sparkling gold.

It was Christmas magic, the magic of the Christmas blessing which turns everything into shining gold.—
Adapted from "The Instructor."

PUPPET THEATER

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In some scenes the entire depth of the stage is used; in others only half, or even one-fourth. A forest scene consists, for example, of six pieces of scenery: a background, four wing pieces (two for each side), and an open foreground. (Figure 2) Two extra wings add to the possibilities.

For the Christmas story the background may show the interior of the stable, while a manger and animals may be among the figures. The outdoor scene may represent a starry night with shepherds and their sheep in the background. The scene of the wise men may represent a starry background with one large guiding star. The wise men mounted on camels are among the puppet figures.

On the back upright frame, on each side, a piece of zinc near the top is fastened and bent downward to hold the scene in place. (Figure 1) Most of our backgrounds are on stiff cardboard, but some are of paper, with only strips of cardboard pasted back of the two ends. By setting a lamp directly behind it, we can create moonlight or sunsets or early dawn.

The wings of the puppet theater are extremely important. To hold them in

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5. Why was the narrator of this story lonely?

6. What was his "precious Christmas gift"?

7. Did you like this story? Why?

8. Could the events of this story occur in many different parts of the Philippines? (The author states that this is a true story.)

9. Does this story have "human interest"?

10. What have you learned from this story?

place, we use wooden slats in which there are round pegs at one end. These pegs are set in holes bored in the wooden floor of the stage. The advantage of this arrangement is that wings can be turned diagonally, giving better perspective, preventing the audience from peering in behind the scenes, and also making it possible to open stage doors and the like.

At the bottom and top of each slat are pieces of zinc, similar to those on the back upright frame, one bent upward, the other downward. These serve as clamps to hold the wings in place. (Figure 3) The wings make many things possible, like setting a house in the middle of the woods, or creating optical illusions.

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