

CITIZENSHIP

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

By FORTUNATO ASUNCION

There was a hot discussion going on. Suggestion after suggestion was turned down by the teacher. Finally Clarita who was quietly seated near the wall timidly raised her hand.

"Clarita," called the teacher.

Slowly she stood up and thought for a moment. "I think *Zamboanga* is a good example of an unknown citizen that should be given credit."

The class was thunder-struck. *Zamboanga* to be included in the Hall of Fame for unknown citizens? That dirty, old, bald-headed beggar whom everybody mocks? That pest who annoys everyone he meets by asking for a centavo? Clarita must be fooling or she must be crazy.

After the shock was over, the class burst into laughter. Whisper of mockery filled the room. The class made fun of Clarita who was now blushing from head to foot. She looked around. There was not a friendly face at that instant. All were mocking her. With eyes beseeching for sympathy she turned to the teacher who just smiled at her. Did the teacher also think that what she had said was funny? She could bear it no longer. The hurt was more than she could endure. With a much clearer voice she silenced the class.

"There is nothing funny about what I said,—nor is there anything foolish about it. Yes, all of you know him as a dirty, bald-headed beggar who approaches everybody to ask for a centavo. That alone blinded you to realize the good he does for you and for me. Why, on his

way home he picks up all the dirty rubbish which lies on his path and carefully put it in the garbage can. Is there anyone of you who has ever thought of doing that? He runs errand for those who are in need and all he expects in return is but a centavo. He brings home firewood and things to eat for the poor people with whom he sleeps. Has anyone of you ever been as thoughtful? If you were

laughing at me and mocking me because of the worthy traits I admire in him, then I do not care whether you all burst laughing."

The hostile attitude of the class was changed. The room rang with whispers of approval. Finally the class pledged never to mock nor play joke on *Zamboanga*. In like manner they promised never to make fun of any old beggar

