

THE BRAVE BOY OF LEMERY

AN INCIDENT IN THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION

by

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DEAR boys and girls, when I was about as old as you are, I heard from my mother's lips a story, which I am eager to repeat to you now. It is a true story, told by an old mother whose memory was full of thrilling events that happened near the close of the Philippine Revolution.

Before I begin, I should like to ask you to have a look at the map of our country. Find the Province of Batangas. In this province there is a little old town situated on the bank of a little river, the Pansipit River. That little old town is Lemery. You ought to remember it as one of the only two towns in the entire Philippines where there are no Chinese merchants. The other one is Taal, also in the Province of Batangas. It was in Lemery that our story happened.

During the whole week before the story took place, the people of Lemery had been fleeing to the mountains to hide because they heard that the American soldiers had defeated Aguinaldo and his men and were now marching down, burning the towns on the way, and torturing all that resisted them. Very few persons remained in the town. Taal was deserted. Its inhabitants had already fled. I cannot remember now why my mother insisted on remaining with her children. Perhaps, she believed that wherever she might be, in the mountains or in the town, near or far from the firing line, if it was the will of God that she should die, she would die anyway.

An incident in her past life must have taught her the folly of seeking hiding places, for once following the example of her neighbors and their advice, she left her home with a tiny baby in her arm to hide from Spanish soldiers. But some of them passed by her while she was

resting in the shade of a tree standing on the road. She looked at them without fear as she nursed her baby half-sleeping in her arms; and the soldiers, after looking at her, walked on in silence with their bayonets glittering in the burning sun. Why those soldiers did not stop to molest her, when cruelty was then a common practice, she attributed to her prayer and faith in God. Now again she remained, perhaps believing that her faith and her prayer would be a sufficient protection against the bullets of the American soldiers.

At dawn of that day she was awakened by a stunning sound. It seemed to come from the east. Rising with a prayer on her lips, she opened a window and beheld Taal in flames. She could see big tongues of fire licking big houses and slowly eating them up. The roofs of homes she had once been in crashed down with a terrific noise. She heard the continuous sound of guns. She prayed with more fervor.

"Jose!" she called out.

Jose was her boy, her eldest, still sound sleep.

"Jose!" she repeated.

Sleeping children are rather hard to wake up. She approached him and shook his head. Jose began to wake up.

"Wake up, Jose! The Americans! They are coming!"

(Please turn to page 103)

"What, Mother?" Jose cried, leaving his bed.

"Don't you hear that sound?"

"Yes, mother," Jose answered.

"The *Americanos* are here now. See Taal burning! Listen!"

The sound of fire continued. The flames towering into the sky advanced. The Americans had crossed the Pansipit River by the small iron bridge connecting the two towns of Lemery and Taal. They began setting fire to the houses in the little old town. The terrific noise was now very close to them. My mother woke up her little daughters, and together they prayed. Her eldest son went downstairs and walked around the dear little home like a true soldier on guard. You could imagine his straight rebellious hair standing like a lion's mane on his large head. But what could a boy about thirteen years old do against the Americans? These people, you must know, are as big as the giants that you often read about in your story-book.

Little Jose watched the house faithfully. The terrible sound did not scare him. In a moment he would be fighting like a soldier, and he would not live to see the home of his mother in ashes. The red glow of the advancing flames enabled him to observe

what was happening in the distance.

At last the Americans were close by. They had fire-brands in their hands. What the flying sparks of the burning houses could not reach, they burned with the torches in their hands. Jose could hear his small sisters crying. They wanted to go out and run away from those Americans; but he begged them to wait. Their pitiful cries mingled with their prayers. At a distance of more than a hundred meters stood a house belonging to an old relative, who also had the courage to remain on the bare chance of saving his old home. Two gigantic Americans approached the house with a flaming brand to set fire to it. The old man, approaching the age of sixty, begged and prayed on his trembling knees to have his home spared, but in vain. In a moment his nipa and cogon house was gone.

The Americans then turned towards Jose. The little boy broke off a big leafy branch of a *tuba* tree and stood in readiness near the house. Each one approached

with a flaming brand in his hand. One of them began to burn the nipa wall of the house, and the fire was no sooner started than Jose put it out with all his might with the *tuba* branch in his hands. The flame of the fire-brand were also put out. The Americans tried again; but again little Jose put out the fire with his *tuba* branch.

Now, my dear young friends, I guess you have been thinking that these Americans were very bad. What do you think they did to the brave little boy? Did they kick and box Jose? They did not. If they had harmed little Jose, you yourselves would consider them bad and cruel. They were angry indeed. But when they saw Jose's courage, they helped him put out the fire which they had started.

So, while all the houses in the neighborhood were cracking in flames, the house of Jose's mother was left untouched. Inside the family assembled, praying to God and thanking Him for giving Jose the courage that meant peace and safety to them all.