

The Little Home Shop: Shrine of Native Art

By MRS. GEORGE READ

To how many people in Manila is *The Little Home Shop* just a vague name? Yet what a shrine of native art it is!

On our first visit to *The Little Home Shop* we felt at once that a definite personality was responsible for the atmosphere of the place. It could not be, otherwise. We have been in Manila long enough to have heard glowing accounts of the Misses Metcalf—of their hardihood, their resourcefulness, their spirit of adventure complementing their high love of humanity. We had heard half-tales of their pioneering in Mindanao in the early years of the century.

The vicarious adventures and philosophy of Alfred Aloysius Horn have no more savor than the exotic saga of the sisters Metcalf; how and why they came to the Philippines and what they have done during their long stay. They have done their adventuring in the proper spirit. They have been sent on no missions, though presidents have encouraged them and governors have rescued them. There is something inspiring about the thought of these two women struggling with a deadly usual existence in New England, suddenly leaving it behind them and, like Emerson, the philosopher of their soil, "writing on the lintels of the door-post, *Whim!*" and going off to the farthest corner of the globe to seek personal contact with barbarians. Furthermore, subsequently to make a friendly and pleasant contact possible by virtue of their rich sympathies and the power of the imagination. One can fancy them saying with Emerson, "My life is not an apology, but a life. It is for itself, and not for a spectacle."

"We came to study the gongs of the Bogobo!" is the first startling revelation. "Here is one of them. My sister was the musician, and she could tell you all about it. She was the leading spirit and the pilot for the two of us," says Miss Metcalf with a decided movement of the head. "I was just the machinery. We have heard one man play on as many as seven gongs in the interpretation of one song."

"How did you become interested in the gongs of the Bogobo?" one wants to know.

"Was your sister thinking of writing some compositions for the Bogobo gongs? Did she come out as a representative of some musical research society? Was it her idea to secure

became deeply interested in the Philippine Bogobos, who had faced a series of misfortunes since they sailed away from their jungles in Davao. Smallpox had broken out among them; the first victim of it was the American interpreter who had been their guide and friend. They were left almost helpless. They were put in quarantine, of course, and kept there for months before they were allowed to put in an appearance at the Exposition. This delay



A Corner In The Little Home Shop

examples of these gongs for a collection? Did she wish to lecture on these tribes?"

"Oh, no! She came out as a free lance. We first went to the Beer War—in St. Louis."

Apparently, the first day of their visit to the Exposition grounds, the Misses Metcalf

resulted in a second, and one might almost say greater misfortune. The Moros, brought also to St. Louis, had secured all the best gongs, and when the Bogobos were at last permitted to perform they were given only third-rate and broken instruments.

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"Of all the tribes we came in contact with at St. Louis, the Bogobo appealed to us the most—possibly because we felt such great sympathy for them. They had had such a hard time and were so dispirited."

"We have always worked," adds Miss Metcalf. "We have had hard to work," she emphasized openly. "And it was difficult for us to do the things we wanted to do in the Philippines. But somehow we managed it."

The first thing they did when they came out to the islands was to visit the families of the Bogobos they had become acquainted with at the Exposition. All Miss Metcalf's casual references to insurrections, to being hidden out in the hills, in danger of their lives, to being the only Americans within miles and dwelling among a people whom it had taken them six months to assure of their amicable intentions, to being secreted in nipa huts by rivers rife with crocodiles, were given in the most humorous and philosophic manner. It was quite as if she had maintained that leaving Beacon Street suddenly and going off to the farthest uncivilized point therefrom, was all in the day's occupation.

"We had a very hard time getting started here," she remarked, in answer to a question regarding the little shop. "Neither one of us was blessed, or cursed, with the commercial spirit. We started out by making handkerchiefs. A friend suggested it. We had to do something. But we did not start *The Little Home Shop* until the last time we came out from a visit home. In the meantime, in the southern islands, we had made a collection of Bogobo household utensils, clothing, pottery, handcraft products of all descriptions—afterwards all purchased by the University of Pennsylvania. At that time ours happened to be the only Bogobo collection in the United States.

"We did have a time with the Bogobo hats! They were wonderful things. A dozen varieties, ornamented with brilliant feathers and cunning little bells. You've no idea what a sight it was to see a Bogobo horseman, a chief, riding down the trail on his sturdy little pony with his feathers flying and all his little bells jingling. The hats were beautiful. But tremendous. Each was packed in a separate box. It took us weeks to get the collection off.

"But to get back to the handkerchiefs.

"Once we had completed a lot of them—hand embroidered, hemstitched, scalloped—we didn't know what to do with them. It was through the goodness of friends who were interested in us and who liked the work, that we were ever able to

sell them. These friends would tell other people about the handkerchiefs and give our address, which, by the way, we changed five times in three months. We would go to one place and find it too expensive, and have to seek another roof.

"This is the first house we ever stayed in, in Manila. It was a private house where there were two or three rooms to rent. We said the first time we came here that we would like to rent it for our own home some day. Much to our surprise, one day it was offered to us for rent.

"The garden—we planted it ourselves. Everything prospered. Friends would say to us, 'Look at that poor little vine, there. It will die with so much sun on it. It never gets any shade.' 'Look at that poor little vine now,' I said, when these same friends came through Manila a year later. It was higher than the house. Another said, 'You can't make a pergola out of that bush. It isn't piliated enough.' In a year we could have served tea under it and been as well screened as in this room.

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It seemed too good to be true. But that was more than ten years ago and it holds many memories both happy and sad. It looked very much then as you see it now. Certainly no paint has been added since that time. The owner is very slow to make repairs. However, I don't mind so much about the paint. I rather like the aged look of it."

We asked if the garden was in existence when they first came.

"After the handkerchief venture, we started selling baskets. Every kind of basket of native weave. We had them sent up to us from the provinces. Friends we had known would make them or get them for us."

These friends were the natives among whom they had lived for years.

In her house you will always find two or three young Igorot boys who do everything. They work the garden, plant, prune, cook, serve the tea, write business letters, shop, and market. Miss Metcalf's interest in them is much more than merely domestic, just as her interest in the girls who embroider and weave there, is much more than a commercial one. She does not consider them only as machinery necessary to the running of the shop. She laughs with them, she reproaches them, she praises, she corrects, in a spirit of understanding.

There is something distinctly beneficent about the air of the little shop late in the afternoons when the embroiderers are going home. Miss Metcalf has had her tea and is engaging in a last few minutes talk with friends who invariably drop in at this hour.

Conversation is suspended while she speaks to each girl individually, calling her by name. "Goodnight, Restituta. Goodnight, Resurrección."

"Goodnight, Miss Sally," each girl responds.

"And now I must say goodnight to my dumb girl, Josefa. They always laugh when I do it."

She touches her fingers to her lips, then gestures a demiar with her arm.

"The sun goes over the rim of the world, it means," she says.

The group of dark, smiling faces at the head of the stairs vanishes quickly below. It grows almost still in the house. A soft light fills the high opening near which the chairs are drawn. We observe the firm set of a certain head with its neat coil of snow-white hair. It indicates to us that the owner stands gently but firmly foursquare to the universe.

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