

Shunned by relatives and friends, a prisoner needs sympathy and understanding when he leaves the prison walls

## THOUGHTS OF AN EX-CONVICT

*(The following article was actually written by a former inmate of the National Prison of Manila.—Editor)*

I CANNOT even put my name to this informal article; Society in a thousand and one ways has decreed so. Tied to my legs still is that heavy "leg iron" of Inferiority Complex. While Society feigns this should not be so "in words", yet, "in action", it preaches the same in its everyday attitude to people of my "tribe" ("type" may be so mild a word to describe people of my group, EX-CONVICTS). Indeed, Society has a very strange way of asserting its pride and personality over "obviously prideless and obviously personality-less" ex-convicts. Exceptions there are, but they are very rare, per-

haps "as rare as flowers in the Sahara Desert."

An ex-convict has to be a "dumb idiot" if he has to court the sympathy and earn the patience of Society even just "to talk or converse" with him. And, because an ex-con is basically and essentially a human being, he feels the urge to mix, live, or occasionally, ambitiously aspires to "even just converse" intimately with Society. But he must conform to the exacting criterion of Society, namely, that he must be dumb or at least feign to be so at the very moment that he is talking to these "personality-FULL" and "pride-FULL" members of Society... this "Society" which haughtily identifies itself from those poisonous unfortunates who "graduated" from the "cemetery of the living dead". This process which works everyday, could breed only one positive effect, and it is "Inferiority Complex" on the part of the ex-convict. This TOPS the Psychological Problems that confront an alumnus of the Insular Penitentiary.

An ex-convict, viewed from any slant, is "no less" a human being than any member of "decent" Society. And, a Human Being, so the priests and ministers at least preach eloquently on their pulpits, is a CREATURE of God, and what is much more revealing is, "as beautiful as his Creator". Although, from most recent illustrations, as aforementioned, the Ex-Convict is prevailed upon (for convenience's sake perhaps) not to be "this ambitious". The strange "logic" seems to be that "because he is an ex-con, he is not expected to rise an inch higher from his current state in life, and that he must be resigned to swallow the slights Society might choose to inflict on him every now and then"... and any deliberate gesture on his part to the contrary would be mis-

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## SPIRIT OF . . .

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Even today, barrios spring up through the force of *Bayanihan*. Houses are transferred from one place to another, houses are constructed, crops are harvested, and many other activities that make up barrio life are undertaken through *Bayanihan*.

This incident happened way back in my days in uniform in the active service of the armed forces, in Central Luzon. My men and I were tired as a result of continuous patrol operations, and we were looking forward longingly to a good afternoon and night rest at the end of a patrol mission. But at the end of the trail was no physical rest, but a spectacle which I cannot forget, and whose picture I cannot remove from my memory. We found a group of men and women—all rural inhabitants—doing a serious work of harvesting in a ricefield. Curiosity got the better of me when I recognized in the group some of the more prominent and landholding citizens of the community. When I inquired, I was informed that the effort was a *Bayanihan*, and that the beneficiary of that heartwarming display of cooperative spirit was a lowly farmer who was too sick to harvest his ripened crop.

Oblivious of the demands of our tired bodies, we waded through the field and my men, rifles strung across their shoulders, contributed their bit to the over-all community effort. The spectacle was as beautiful as it was reflective of the true Filipino spirit found in *Bayanihan*.

Spectacles like this have prompted a Filipino writer to ask this question: "When barrio people help a neighbor build a house or harvest a crop, what compulsive power makes them donate their labor for free?" Then, answering his own question, he said: "The answer to this spontaneous and massive symbol of help towards a fellow countryman lies in the innate character of the Filipino to help for the common welfare. If this could be achieved to build a house, harvest a crop, or move a house in its entirety to another place, why can't this be done to build a nation's economy, the benefits of which are not oblivious even to the barrio man. Indeed, like the meandering river that flows over the hills and dales, filled with potential hydraulic power but nevertheless pursues its course harmlessly—even wastefully—*Bayanihan*, as a potential powerhouse for economic production, must be retrieved

## SOLUTION

White-faced, a patient rushed into his doctor's office.

"Oh, doctor," he cried, "the ghosts of my departed relatives come and perch on the tops of fence-posts all around my garden at dead of night. They just sit there... staring, staring... What can I do?"

Said the doctor calmly: "Sharpen the posts." (Liguorlan)

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interpreted by Society as some form of indecency or discourtesy.

On top of the preceding, the Ex-Convict also finds himself as a total stranger even in the very midst of his blood kin, and his former intimate associates now know him more (and IDENTIFY him MORE) with his "poisonous" diploma which he now carries, and which seems to be the only potent force that would mold his immediate future. (Incidentally, the writer-ex-convict has in his possession, put down in black and white, a long litany of actual illustrations to support this seemingly strange observation.) "Prevention is better than cure", so that popular adage runs, hence the Ex-Convict leaves the folds of these intimates, so as to cut short his bitterness (else this bitterness may flame again into another blunder) . . . and, he starts knocking at the doors of civic-spirited organizations which he occasionally reads about in the newspapers.

During all this time of course, the more pressing and more realistic problems of meals and shelter concomitantly assert themselves . . . and he has to stretch his palm for a measure of charity every now and then (because Society concludes it cannot take the risk of trusting the Ex-Con with another break or job in their midst), so much so

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from its obscure course and made the principal rallying point of the nation's economic development."

(Excerpts from a speech before Manila Council 1000, Knights of Columbus, on March 15, 1959)

# Columbian Squires

## INTER-CIRCLE BASKETBALL GAMES

Columbian Squires of Mary Immaculate Circle No. 1063 accompanied by local Knights and Daughters of Isabela motored to nearby Barasoain, Malolos, Bulacan recently to play basketball against St. Michael Circle 1032.

After a hectic competition, the St. Michael Circle 1032 emerged victorious at the count of 51 as against Pasig's 42.

Barasoain Knights, Daughters of Isabela, Squires, and Squirettes served refreshments and entertainment after the meet.

At the invitation of the defeated contingent, a return match is scheduled to be played at Pasig this month.

## NATIONAL COMMITTEE HANDS IN ANNUAL REPORT

The National Committee for Columbian Squires, KC-PI, through its National Chairman, Bro. Francisco Tantoco Jr., handed in its annual report to the Worthy Territorial Deputy, Rev. Fr. George J. Willmann, S.J.

According to the report, the number of active Columbian Squires Circles increased from 11 to 15.

The goal of the National Committee this term is to extend its expansion program to Mindanao with the help of local Councils.

## CAPITOL SQUIRES SCHEDULE HOLY WEEK ACTIVITIES

The Columbian Squires of Capitol Circle 784 together with the local Squirettes of Mary have scheduled group activities for the Holy Week. On Holy Thursday, the Squires

## ATTENTION— Mindanao KC Councils!

HERE'S AN INVITATION to anyone of you to sponsor the first Circle of Columbian Squires, our Junior Order, in your locality. Add another FIRST to your Council's credit, write NOW to the National Committee for Columbian Squires, P. O. Box 510, Manila, for details.

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that when these members of Society are thus bothered, in "good faith" perhaps, they make the unfairly rash conclusion that the cheap, hungry ex-convict "is getting out of his mind".

This definitely is a "most trying" problem for the ex-convict, for in his constant brushes with Society, modestly arguing in his behalf, he is beset by his utterly helpless situation in life, hungry and shelterless . . . yes, an entirely opposite replica of the front-cover page of a most recent issue of the FREE PRESS (where the image of the late Pres. Magsaysay posed with his creed that "... the little man deserves a little more food in his stomach, and a little more roof over his head").

Positively, the Ex-Convict, try as he might, to acquit himself in a better, more decent role in life, all the time confident of even just a partial success in this objective (because it is guided by good faith that he is at least not cheating himself nor Society), wakes up to find that he is lost because Society arrogantly insists on putting so many barriers against him. While civic-minded organizations like the Phil. Mental Health Organization, and the Community Chest (thru Dr. T. Evangelista, its president) shout to the four winds that "it is the job of civilized Society to restore an ex-convict back to Society", there has not been any concrete step to implement this "cry of civilization".

Thus, the Ex-Convict, while he ambitiously moves to secure even just an inch of space to place his feet on, in Society, finds himself very much "like a blind man inside a dark cave looking for a black cat that is not there" . . . so much so, that at times, the Ex-Convict still essentially a human being, created by a beautiful God, as an uncouth attempt to get away from this "Man-polluted" Society, just turns his gaze up to those blue-black skies during the tranquility of night, and directly brings his complaint to GOD!

## AN ANONYMOUS "EX-CONVICT"

and Squirettes will have "Visita Iglesia", after a Corporate Mass-Communion. The group will hear a sermon on the Seven Last Words on Good Friday. To cap the Lenten activities, the Circle will attend an Easter Sunday Mass.