

... A Tribute to Monsignor Anthony H. Thijssen ...

IN THE UNITED STATES, when a bishop goes out of his residence to administer the sacrament of confirmation in a certain district, he has only to ring for his driver in order to bring a sleek limousine up the driveway, give short notice to his ecclesiastical assistants and off he starts on a safe, smooth-travelling excursion — as correctly and as impeccably dressed as any meticulous couturier could wish. Not so in Flores, Indonesia. Here, when the bishop prepares to go out to perform the same function to his widely scattered flock, one always gets the

ing after Moss. The air was humid — the barometer indicating low pressure somewhere. Dark clouds frowned at our party with ominous threat. But we were not to be daunted. Our spirits were high and hopeful — so was that of our Ford, aptly named *Old Faithful* who, that morning, sported the newly-scrubbed look of a Sunday schoolboy. Our driver, a hardy, gentle native looked every inch a veteran of the road. As I clambered up *Old Faithful* along with my co-passengers, he stood at attention for the Monsignor who was giving last minute instruc-

tion. It lies over a hundred miles from Ndona. If mileage alone were to be considered, Poma seems just a whistling distance away. But the important thing is the road... ah, the road. Out here, the word does not exist in a legitimate dictionary. I was to discover afterwards that it is an abused thin thread of a yarn that goes snaking up between towering mountains... plunging down labyrinthine crawls in the valleys... running at a kissing distance from the shore and groping, staggering along miles and miles of horseshoe bends... climb-

Three Heroes and A Story

by AN S.V.D. MISSIONARY

inevitable impression that His Excellency is bound for an extended expedition or exploration — the kind that one often reads about between the pages of a *National Geographic Magazine*, where the paraphernalia ranges from pit helmet to sunglasses, thermos bottles, flashlights, toolbox, etc.

Shortly before Christmas, I received orders to accompany the Most Reverend Monsignor Anthony H. Thijssen on a trip to the northern part of his Vicariate, where he was expected to administer confirmation to hundreds of his Christians. Having, myself, just arrived in this picturesque island, the news was received by me with the feverish anticipation and burning curiosity of a tourist. Don't get me wrong, I am an SVD missionary priest myself — though somewhat fresh from the seminary grind and still quite wet behind the ears. Whence all this overflowing enthusiasm? Don't ask me. If you were a newcomer yourself and you were asked to keep your bishop company — well, probably, you'd know all the answers. Let's start from there.

We started from Ndona, the Bishop's residence, on a misty morn-

ing after Moss. The air was humid — the barometer indicating low pressure somewhere. Dark clouds frowned at our party with ominous threat. But we were not to be daunted. Our spirits were high and hopeful — so was that of our Ford, aptly named *Old Faithful* who, that morning, sported the newly-scrubbed look of a Sunday schoolboy. Our driver, a hardy, gentle native looked every inch a veteran of the road. As I clambered up *Old Faithful* along with my co-passengers, he stood at attention for the Monsignor who was giving last minute instructions to the remaining members of his household. We presented a colorful, interesting spectacle up in the second story, scrambling for coveted space atop a rich conglomeration of bundles and baskets and boxes. I succeeded in getting me a wicker basket full of vegetables for a lone seat, and I perched on it, waxing the huge smile of a bum who has triumphantly emerged from a free-for-all. Monsignor surveyed the truck and its cargo. Above the din, he said something inaudible. Beg your pardon, Monsignor, I asked, and he replied... Is everything all right?... it was solicitous. I nodded... Good, he remarked and climbed to his seat beside the driver. Then the engine burred... carbon monoxide lumigated the air... smoke enveloped men and cargo for a brief moment... from a distance a man was shouting in shrill notes... "kampong" people on their way to market ogled at truck and cargo with a wonderment that can only be described mentally. One desperate, goodbye kick from *Old Faithful*, a shrug and bang, and off she went zigzagging down the muddy dirt road that was to be the death of us all.

Poma, I was told was our des-

ing at almost perpendicular inclines that would scare any engineer newly emancipated from college.

The first miles of the journey were relatively pleasant... no one appeared to be seriously minding the road. From my wicker basket tower, the scenery that lent its charm to me was one from a picture book. It was one unadulterated by skyscrapers skyline: there was Ende Island across the bay, stone-gray, majestic... floating on a deep-blue, angry sea... a man-of-war steeped with a rich history. The coconut palms hanging and salaaming above us swayed to and fro in perfect unison, dancing to the fierce melodies of a Western monsoon... their evergreen headdresses rustling, tunefully, like dainty swishing frocks on a gay, summer evening. The sweet symphony of sounds tortured the poet of a lost childhood... the washing of surf on the shore... the whispering palms... the crunching of gravel under the wheels... the plaintive choocoo-choocooii of a warbler somewhere among the trees... a nostalgic quietness, a nameless longing seeped in and gripped you... the beauty one was capable of seeing

(Turn to next page)

saddened you as one came lace to face with Nature in the raw... pure prayer ascending to Him as one remembered Kilmer's... "poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree."

Cccrrruunhchch. **Old Faithful** grated, then stopped short without ceremony. The man on my left jackknifed at the impact. The sudden jolt took the wind out of me and alas, shook my reverie to pieces. I jumped down along with the others — to investigate. Two meters farther away was a stream that was swelled by mountain brooks. Not deep, two or three feet. But the bottom was stony. The ground, loose. We removed the fan-belt to prevent water from spraying the distributor. Then we cut into the river. Water entered the truck. The carban struck a big stone and remained there. The sullen driver tried to bring **Old Faithful** up the bank but the wheels only churned the water. No grip. Broken ejaculations filled the air... a battle of saliva ensued. A chronic clown quipped: Who is Who in midstream — that is the \$64 dollar question. Someone laughed his sides out, another grunted. Monsignor took the driver's seat and ordered all hands to push the Ford while he, himself, steadied her to high ground. No more breath was wasted. Everybody lent a hand. Satu, dua, tiga!! (one, two, three) **Old Faithful** burred like a freezing denizen. Again. Satu, dua, tiga!!! Keep smiling, I whispered in a conspiratorial tone to the man at my right. I have here an affidavit assuring us that guardian angels are standing by. He snickered, his eyebrows went up. Satu, dua, tiga!!! His Excellency pressed on the starter... coaxed the steering wheel to position and up, up, up went **Old Faithful**. People from a nearby "kampong" saw the Bishop inside the truck. They broke into smiles. Some whooped like Apaches and swarmed around **Old Faithful** where we were drying her. It took the better half of an hour to rescue her from a prolonged bath.

Once abroad again, spirits seemed more buoyant. Ten miles up the road, we were swallowed by the woods. Coming out finally, we found ourselves looking at rolling hills. Farther away in the east, giant mountains stretched, their unimaginable grandeur rising out of the plains. On our left, the Keo volcano emerged high, sharp and rugged against a lonely sky, smoke

trailing towards the heavens as often seen in watercolor landscapes. His Excellency pointed the volcano to me as we rounded a bend. Father, do you see that volcano? That at least, is one item the communists cannot claim to duplicate. I looked at Monsignor, then at the volcano. They dare not, Monsignor, I bantered. His Excellency smiled back and nodded — his eyes doing an ellin dance. Desultory talk... punctuated now and then with staccato laughers... the man on my right, wearing denim pants was whistling "St. Louis Blues". Good heavens, where in tarntard did he pick up that tune — not in this neck of the woods!

As we rolled along, people by the roadside, more often than not, recognized Monsignor and always, they gave him a sweeping bow. Most of them knelt, making the sign of the cross. Young and old, women and children... walking or astride a horse... his christians knew him and they knelt down in awesome reverence and respect and love. His Excellency inclined his head to them in fatherly greeting and raised his hand in blessing. We passed lots of children — many of them looking sickly, undernourished. They were dressed in a manner that makes one conclude they are miniature facsimiles of old father Adam and old mother Eve. They would stop their games whenever they saw the truck coming. And when they spotted His Excellency, they flew into dizzy delights, shouting their greetings: **Bapak Ukup! Bapak Ukup!** (Father Bishop! Father Bishop!) You'd think His Excellency was some Royalty visiting poor relatives... or a playmate of theirs gone truant, purposely absenting himself from play. They looked so, so infinitely precious in their articulate display of pure devotion. Ah life, how sweet is thy morning!

Whenever we came to children groups I always prayed that the Bishop would not have the mind and the mood to stop. You see, I had been told by people that His Excellency has the bad habit of extending a three-hour trip to a five-hour one, that is when he, himself, goes a-driving in his jeep. He would stop at every inhabited place along the line to converse with village folks, christians and pagans alike — on subjects even more trite than the weather... or he would assume the role of examining board by taking to task the school children on their subjects,

TWO

1. Beats

*Stars are bottom-views of stalactites
clinging to your sky
(like needle-points in my brain)
taciturn above the nocturnal concert
of frogs*

*Unlike rainclouds showering applause
to stoic roofs of a city goined
by sleep,
Was it yesterday? Last June?*

*(My fingers were once breeze through
your perfumed hair... once trembling
twanged to color contours of your
cheeks)*

Yet who cares for tenses... or tears?

*Our hearts were metronomes beating
time
to animate a lump of flesh.*

by ALFREDO AMORES

cajoling them, rewarding them with religious pictures... or would give a housewife bound for the market a lift in his jeep. On this trip, I was awfully glad because Monsignor "behaved" and caused us no unnecessary delays. I always breathed a sigh of relief when the truck slowed down and he only waved his hand vigorously to them, his children. Loud resounding cheers went up... these kids, they reminded me of the bobby-soxers, the bleacher-teenagers back home who shout themselves hoarse rather than for their basketball or football idols. Children will be the same everywhere. With the hand of their Father Bishop poised in the air, their cheers were loud and solid, reverberating on the mountainsides, until **Old Faithful**, Father Bishop and cargo moved to a definite past tense.

Two hours of pilgrim's progress... the sun staring down on us with merciless complacency. **Old Faithful** pulled... snorted as it kept up a perpetual jig, up now, down now, up now, down now till traffic came to an abrupt stop once more. A huge warinig tree, uprooted by

POEMS

2. Signposts

*Rose stems rotting in a flower vase
are signposts for heart dew-fresh
as unsummer'd blades of grass
for it can neither decipher hieroglyphics
of a smile nor interpolate obscure
muntissas of the eye (not till it can
define sharp points of tangency where
eyes meet sun and heart meets loneliness).*

*Feeling sheer sharpness of rose thorns
retires
to some pink cathedral of a dream where
vapor-trails of a smile twist about
its spires. But wake up brother!
Dreams in the harsh impoliteness of
reality are
tinsels and cotton-snows on a month-old
Christmas tree.*

by ALFREDO AMORES

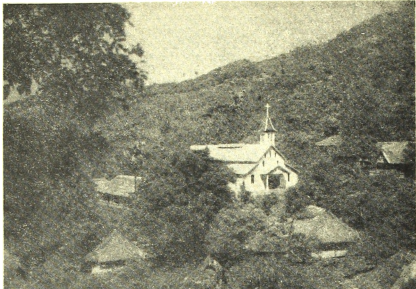
strong winds and torrential rains, draped itself shamelessly ahead on the road. It meant just one word: Detour. We took one look at it then decided to defy conventional driving rules. We cut through the woods, all heads 'lo, in adoration falling'. Branches broke, brittle twigs snapped. We felt like the American pioneers of old, blazing a new trail — only, ours was a much more abbreviated one. In less than five minutes, we were on the right road again. The only casualty was a torn shirtsleeve. A little farther up the mountainside, we spotted herds and herds of fat cattle. The man who had entertained me hours before with his "St. Louis Blues" solo started off with "Home on the Range" in a lilting tempo. At this time, Monsignor called my distracted attention to the grazing herds. Those are ours, Father, he said. There must be 150 of them. We are now approaching Toda-Belu. Why, of course, I had already heard voluminous stories about the place from other Fathers. Toda-Belu. My blood stirred lazily from its sleep. I flexed my limbs. This now is the place I have especially longed to see for myself. I had been in-

formed that it is the sand-table exhibit of His Excellency. All drowsiness vanished. Everyone came to life. We were on a mountain ledge more than three thousand feet above sea level. The air was soothingly cool and invigorating — there was an exquisite stillness in this God's country. Down below us, nestling in the heart of a fertile valley, was Toda-Belu; Seminary buildings, red-roofed... lush plantations... peaceful pastures smiling under the serene skies. Farming this land of little water would have been impossible without the careful planning and community cooperation and technical skill of the Brothers and Fathers. Fearing no task, they had created a fertile paradise in a region other men thought God had forsaken. Here was a dream community in a dream garden.

About three miles before we reached the Seminary compounds, at the outskirts of the wide, corn and coffee plantations, another obstacle presented a trying ordeal. A farmhand had volunteered to us the information that there was a ford our Ford would not be able to cross. The mud, he commented, was deep. We would surely get stuck if we attempted a crossing. Period. Monsignor caught sight of a John Deere tractor ploughing its way at a nearby field some eighty yards away. He signalled the driver who limbered down immediately from the machine and came to where we were. I recognized him for one of the Brothers... his khaki shirt soaked in perspiration, his blonde hair gleamed in the sun. Except for the reverent kneeling down to kiss the Bishop's ring, the farmer hailed the latter in the style of one who remembered well a fox-hole "buddy". It was the most intimate stunt only a Brother and his Bishop can put up with impromptu on an outdoor stage, nature providing a true locale. The three of us joined in consultation concerning Old Faithful... get some ropes, suggested the Brother... those stout vines will do, he pointed to some coiled around the trunks of trees. Well, he remarked, you're going to Henry Ford's funeral today if John Deere does not cooperate and run true to form. His eyes glinted in mischief. His Excellency chuckled. I grinned, congratulating John Deere mentally. We hurriedly repaired back to the place where we left the Ford. The Bishop climbed the driver's seat for the third time that day. Brother backed the tractor to

the lord and vines were tied to the Ford's bumper. Deere was at the fore and the Ford at the rear. Tension was great as Deere strained at the taut vines. Monsignor steadied the Ford — his delt hands on the steer. Old Faithful felt abused. She coughed strenuously, provoked at Deere's audacity and persistent bullying and pulling. After long, tortuous minutes however, she began to kick dirt and mud until she finally chugged to the embankment on the other side, close to the trail of Deere. Once there, we hastened into the frantic business of repairing her make-up, reassembling her hurt dignity and pride... restoring her bearings and our wind. Within a quarter of an hour, we entered the Seminary compounds — trim lawns, immaculate white houses... vegetable and flower gardens... the place was simply bustling with activity. So, this was Toda-Belu! Here we took time out for rest, to refresh ourselves, stretch the limbs. It was no stop-over for His Excellency in the real sense of the word. As soon as people got wind of his presence they fell over each other in their eagerness to have a few words with him. Fathers, Brothers — a medley of them. Two, tall, important-looking Fathers approached him on problems concerning administration. By their serious mien and tenor, their problems must have been urgent with a capital U... a long-bearded one holding what appeared like parchment dropped by... would His Excellency please take a look at the blueprint of the building that would soon go up and kindly, give specifications as to materials and procurement? An old pleasant nun ambled towards Monsignor. Hers was the feminine approach... Has Monsignor had coffee... why, Monsignor was looking fine!... how about those badly-needed medicines His Excellency promised. Between gulps of hot, black coffee, I watched the Monsignor with the intensity of one who had had the aspirations for an exalted position such as his. (You upstart, I ridiculed!) I marvelled at his poise, his coolness... I left so rundown, it irked me somewhat. Made mental note to suggest to him later that, maybe, it would be best if he would bring along next time a tape recorder to register all the wails and woes of his flock. While he went on dispensing with advice and suggestions and solutions and smiles, an old-timer on whose white head perched gingerly a cute, straw

(Turn to next page)



A Village Church in Flores, Indonesia, nesting among lush forests and underbrush.

hat, jaywalked through the crowd to me. Hi, there! he sang by way of greeting, then commenced into a bubbling one-sided conversation... rattled through the statistics of Toda-Belu and went on to dissect the place and its organs the way an m.d. would a minor surgery... an m.d. who has given the best thirty years of his life to Surgery and mankind. Learned that thirty years ago, Toda-Belu was a wilderness... that before the Faith had reached those parts, tribal wars was the order for generations and generations. Now, the valley was completely transformed into a life-giving, productive land. The Seminary has 250 students... 500 more in the other middle schools. The Vicariate owns 630 acres: 270 make up the Seminary compounds and 360 acres are farmed by the Brothers and Indonesian helpers trained by them. They use four tractors. The Seminary is self-sufficient due to this big-scale farming. Most of the farm equipment are of American brands. Ten thousand hoes and spades had been distributed by the Vicariate to native small-time farmers to substitute sharpened poles as farm equipment. Diversification of crops is no new practice in this place... corn is the chief product, big, big ears. There is no irrigation system in Toda-Belu. However, lorty to sixty inches of rainfall annually make up for the lack of it. Well, I said to the oldtimer, farming here may not be carried in as nearly big a scale as in the Great Plains, but if one considers the fact that here in Flores anyone can become

a mountain or volcano magnate overnight, what has been accomplished is an agricultural miracle. Coffee... more black coffee... no, thanks, really have to go... we're still a long way to Poma. We took leave of the place and climbed Old Faithful, settled back on my wicker basket log seat. I glanced back on time to see three people shaking their heads dolefully... maybe, they felt they had been robbed of the opportunity of an "audience"... tsk... tsk... tsk.

The sun shot forth its last glorious rays as forewarning of the twilight that was almost descending upon us. Poma was still far off. True, we were all refreshed, yet we nursed some misgivings. It peeved me to purgatory, therefore, when having covered only some miles. Old Faithful chortled in indecision then stopped with a terrible finality. Monsignor stepped down from behind the wheel immediately to get a look at the engine. Light was waning fast. His Excellency rolled his sleeves as we crowded near him. He peered at the engine. Seconds, minutes ticked away, and at every tick I grew obsessed with the fear that the damage might be so that it would come to a point where Monsignor might disrobe himself and go under the truck to survey on his back the Ford's complex "victuals". Oh, he is so known for his unorthodox way of doing things at times; his simplicity is written all over his face. Moments passed, then he straightened. Fuel pump is empty, he said. The membrane is torn. That sounded so much Greek

to me. My companions and I exchanged worried looks. The bladder of a pig will do, he continued in a matter-of-fact tone. Somebody took the cue and started for the bush. Before I could even repeat Jack Robinson twenty times, the man was back carrying a small wild pig which had met death from a well-directed stone. His Excellency and two officious-looking assistants undertook the repair job. Feeling utterly useless and eclipsed, I hunched by the roadside... smitten... mortified... lingering the pages of my Breviary. I let my conscience ride me... give me a sound beating. Look, wise guy, if you had guts enough you should be able to tell a clutch from a spark plug. Watch your Bishop doing the dirty work for you... you feel like a saturated tourist, don't you? I stole a glance at the Bishop who was bent in deep concentration on his job under the hood, a dark oily smudge gracing his right cheek. My littleness smarted me... stilled me. I got up, inched my way to his side. His head came up from his work and he smiled. Don't you worry, come his quick reassurance. We'll get to Poma yet. I wanted to say I wanted to help. I opened my trap, thought twice, then closed them slowly. I kicked a piece of stone and it went hurtling down the precipice. Ignoramus. Incomplete fool, I addressed myself... wiped my beady perspiration then lumbered for my rosary. I needed company.

Thundering hoofbeats broke the stillness of the late afternoon. As we looked in the direction of the riders, horsemen in tired, sinking horses hailed us. They relayed the information to Monsignor that the whole village had been waiting for their **Bapak Uskup** since that morning. Fortunately, a man passing their "kampong" had informed them that he had seen the truck of Monsignor break down in the middle of the road. Whereupon, they were ordered by the village elders to bring horses to **Bapak Uskup**. He was in great need of them. They did not waste time to communicate to their Father Bishop they were awaiting him. They must love him very much, I mused, hugging the thought like a new precious possession. We grabbed our few personal belongings, mounted the steeds, Monsignor taking everything in his stride like a veteran polo-player whose pro-playing years were showing off to advantage... then we cantered in the direction of Poma. We left the clearly re-

(Continued on page 11)

bumped against the wall. She fell senseless to the sofa with the boy still in her embrace. Willie got the boy out of it and put him in the center of the sala while he withdrew to his seat.

He sat there staring at the boy. Junior laced him squarely. He stifled any sob or tear that attempted to escape. Junior wanted to be a man and he decided that this was as good a time as any. He stared at Willie not pleadingly but with bravery and defiance and courage. He showed no fear. He put his hands on his hips and said, "Go ahead."

This amazed Willie. Then he began to wonder if he really wanted the boy dead. His son would be just about Junior's age if he had lived and he would have wanted him to be like Junior now.

Nevertheless, he pulled the hammer of the gun from the half-cocked position to full. Slowly, he raised the gun and took aim. The sights were now leveled and he knew that what mattered now was that little squeeze on the trigger. He knew that the little squeeze would send a bullet plummeting into the boy's belly. He summoned all his strength for that little squeeze, but his finger wouldn't move. He then realized that he couldn't kill this little Mr. Defiance. He lowered the gun, placed the hammer to half cocked, and placed it back under his belt.

"I guess you get me beat, kid," he sighed. He took the half-filled bottle of beer and downed it all. Then he looked at the boy again, still glued to the spot.

"Well, what are you staring at? G'wan, get lost!" Willie said, and the kid ran to help his parents.

"Willie," someone called out as he was just about to leave. He stopped in his tracks, hesitated and turned. Then their eyes met.

"You! What are you doing here? Where have you been hiding?" he asked.

"Oh, I followed you and hid in the bedroom when you went to the kitchen. Willie, I'm glad you're not a murderer. I'm so glad. Besides, you couldn't kill anybody with that gun. I emptied it before you left the house!"

"Women, women, when will I ever learn to understand your species," Willie sighed, "and since when did you start following me around?"

"I'm your wife, am I not? And I got a right to know where my husband is going and what he's doing. Aw, let's go home." §

Three Heroes and A Story

(Continued from page 8)

sentful **Old Faithful** with the guilty feeling of "deserters".

Our grand entry into Poma had all the drama and fanfare that simple folks can alone concoct for the beloved. The only missing touch was a brass band. But that even was fairly done up for by the wonderful singing and rhythmic thumping each one seemed to be so expert in. The evening was still young when we broke into camp. The whole village was reception committee headed by the Missionary who stood in a cleanly swept clearing... expectant. **Bapak Uskup! Bapak Uskup sudah datang!!** (Father Bishop has come!) the litany was endless. The Missionary, elbowed and surrounded by a "mobby" crowd of people who were so eloquent, they were all talking animatedly at the same time in their native tongue, fell on his knees in reverential greeting to his Superior. Above the hustle and the bustle... the jostling... the foul, unwholesome smell of sweating bodies... the sore scurrying... the mad fighting for grandstand seats near His Excellency, all three: Monsignor, the Missionary, and my dust-laden self experienced a warm and deep kinship that only brothers in a religious community can feel.

Close to midnight, after hearth fires had burned low, the three of us retired... grimy, exhausted. On the morrow another drama was forthcoming. I was up at 5:00 o'clock the following morning, washed myself hurriedly and hid me to a dilapidated structure which is a strange, incongruous definition of a church. I wanted to hear confessions, only to find that my Bishop had beat me to it again. Half an hour ago, I was told, he had entered the improvised confessional — a tin box set by the wall. Now the b-line was five meters long.

Solemn ceremonies started promptly at seven. Even here in Flores. Time can be a dictator. When His Excellency walked down the aisle to the thundering rendition of the impressive **Ecce Sacerdos**, ten altar boys in full regalia as regal as their Father they were ushering, all eyes flew to **Bapak Uskup. Ecce Sacerdos** shook the rattlers as school children sang spiritedly from memory, each note precise and pure and sweet. Their lilting hearts, their surprisingly wonderful talent for music showed beneath the seams

— a gift that compensates for a lot of things they miss and which civilized society takes excessive pride in. During sermon time, the motley congregation was attention personified. One could hear a pin drop... their quietness was breathless, punctuated only sometimes by mischievous giggles from sprightly, dark-skinned cherubs who could not detach their wondering, caressing eyes from Monsignor's golden Crozier. Among the Catholic audience were elderly pagans... why, they would not for the life of them miss the **pengadjaran** (sermon) of Father Bishop... they sat not stolidly, listening with the intensity and seriousness and rapt attention of the child learner. Mass finished, confirmation was administered to children and adults alike. That, indeed, was a most beautiful spectacle inside the house of the Lord. Some 500 souls were made stronger knights of Christ. Many of them were children of pagans who gave the impression that they got more kick out of the solemn rite than most christian parents get.

Festivities followed the rites — that was the "adat" in all the villages: pigs and "kerbau" (water buffaloes) were slaughtered for the gala occasion. His Excellency was lavished upon with gifts that ran from horses to gaily colored, hand-woven fabrics. The blessed cherubs made a show to their Father Bishop of their graceful, supple bodies in several dance rhythms. Our loud applause after their dance never failed to evoke big, wide smiles. A nod of approval, a complimentary word from Monsignor was a rare gem to them. The angels!

On the other hand, Father Bishop interpreted to them, not in vague terms, the essence of the word LOVE. I came to realize during that trip with him that it is this powerful force that makes the Monsignor more than a name — more than an ecclesiastical figure to be revered by those whose lives he has touched. He possesses the capacity of looking deeply into the human heart and, of understanding fully, with infinite sympathy, what he sees therein. His everyday way of living, his inexhaustible patience and kindness — his habit of dumping Charity into everybody's lap, regardless of color and creed: this is

(Continued on page 16)

UNCLE AMBO'S TRIP FIZZLES OUT

YESTERDAY, Uncle Ambo tried to depart for Egypt where he wanted to spend his Yuletide season and meet President Nasser. He had planned to confer with General Burns of the United Nations Peace Force and to visit the Anglo-French soldiers somewhere in the Suez Canal zone after which he wanted to proceed to Israel and visit President Ben-Gurion. But the globe-trotting did not pan out.

Not that he had any financial difficulty. Uncle Ambo has money to spend. That made us believe he would reach his destination. He is old, though. Sweet 60, never been touched by a house-wife's *bakya*, but slightly wrinkled. In short, he is a bachelor. It took him only three weeks to complete his preparation

vileges of the writ of *habeas corpus* or to effect his perpetual release without bail.

Since the announcement of his projected trip, he had increased his fees for all these things. He had to because, according to him, his journey would entail heavy expenses. My uncle had been very tight with his money since the idea of travel seized him. He decided not to repair the roof of his house (which, he says, "leaks only when it rains...") and salt away his cash.

Equally discernible was the fact that Uncle Ambo had practically abandoned the wearing of shoes. His six pairs of GI shoes which he bought during the liberation are still as new as his three old socks.

● by ADELINO B. SITOY ●

for his ambitious journey. It was just a fortnight and a week ago when he triumphantly announced to all the people of our barrio his plan to spend Christmas in Egypt. At first, we laughed off his proposed trip. Nobody believed him; everybody thought he was crazy. But we later realized that my uncle was serious; he was truly preparing for a journey that, judging from his preparations, would last for seven years.

Uncle Ambo is the *tambalan* of our barrio. He is known to possess such extraordinary power as to see the spirits and the *engkantos*, to be able to talk with them, too, and to cure a person from whatever sickness he suffers. Hence, all the barrio folk paid homage to his healing power and to his diplomatic connections with the invisible beings. And every time a person was bedridden, it was my uncle who was called to give treatment; whenever a fellow in the barrio was lost, that is, kidnapped by the *engkantos*, it was Uncle Ambo again who would be requested to make the necessary representations with the high invisible authorities to extend to the person kidnapped the pri-

He only wears one sock at a time because he says a pair should be worn only by those who have crooked feet. As a matter of fact, my uncle often wears a shoe on one leg and a sandal on the other. He is quite a card.

In the past weeks, my uncle was the earliest man in church and the last to leave it. Never before was he seen to be so fervently religious as when he was preparing for his travels.

When he was finally set to sail for the town where he was to board a bus for Manila, the barrio folk turned out *en masse* to see him off. They brought all kinds of gifts, especially foodstuffs. There were native cakes, *bibingkas*, *putong-tingkahoy*, *bobod*, cooked camotes, roasted bananas, *binignit*, *tilaob*, *inang*, *bukhayo*, *biko*, *maruya*, *siyakoy*, and others. The presents made Uncle Ambo happy. His sailboat was weighted down by the token of affection given by the ruralites.

When Uncle Ambo weighed anchor, there was a flurry of waving and jostling. From his sailboat, Uncle waved so strongly, so strongly — his boat capsized! ‡

(Continued from page 11)
the unwritten sermon that he preaches outside the confines of a church. One feels good in his presence because he radiates his own goodness.

As I watched him listening intently, patiently to the one hundred and one requests and appeals of his shabby, poor christians, he did not fend... he did not attempt to put across a bargain... he did not shoot them away through their petitions or demands required a Foundation to do the blueprints. The elders wanted a concrete church for 3000 members of his flock. They were willing to contribute free labor... collect the necessary wood and accumulate sand and gravel... they must have a permanent House of Worship... please, would **Bapak**

Three Heroes!

Uskup help them? The "intellectuals" of the village needed more schools for their children... most of the kids were forced to trek miles and miles of rough, primitive country to avail themselves of an education, would **Bapak Uskup** please, help them? There is sickness and death — people, especially the older ones were coughing... malaria and dysentery are taking tolls; they were too poor to afford the medicines sold at the *rumah sakit* (hospital) far away... would **Bapak Uskup** please pity them and give them some? Politics to them is still a remote subject. Their only desire is to live contentedly, following their great tribal customs and traditions, conforming to the teachings of Christ. Monsignor remained miraculously unfruffled throughout the seemingly endless interviews and earnest overtures... That baffled me. Children of all sizes and age squatted, noisily at his feet — looking at him with unspeakable idolatry that would have felled anybody but the Monsignor. No museum piece in an art gallery — not even at the Louvre — was ever that nakedly, minutely sized up and scrutinized as His Excellency and his gold cross. I was nonplussed but amused. The picture was interesting study. His Excellency, I'm sure, had made mental notes of all their need — he knows

only too well that they depend on him as though their lives hinge on his ability to meet their wants — simple wants. Monsignor has the longest memory on this side of the rainbow when it concerns the needs of his people.

When we finally took leave in order to proceed to other "kampongs", the same spectacular, over-dressed drama was given a repeat performance: the village on *masse* mobbed His Excellency for the kissing of his ring; I dared not do M.P. duty... several complained in straight terms why he could not stay a day or two longer... babies cried in mothers' arms, dogs howled in a gallant gesture of farewell... scantily-clad angels with "dirty faces" danced around in circles, interpreting their "piece de resistance" for the final show...

And A Story

heavily wrinkled elders with bared, white heads, wistful, stood beside His Excellency steeped with the dignity and reverence of an age that has long passed. A sturdy steed named "Wungu Pau", a gift to Monsignor, was saddled. Others were also readied for the rest of us, members of the retinue. His Excellency motioned everyone he was about to give his blessing. We all dropped to our knees on the hard, bare ground... his voice had the quality of a father's love at its profoundest degree as it fell upon us in benediction: "In nomine Patris, et Filii..."

A goodbye cheer rocked the little village as Monsignor mounted "Wungu Pau"... one last handshake with our brother Missionary whose life was burning away in the fire of his apostolic zeal... a wave of the hand... then ten stalwart, worthy horsemen holding multi-colored streamers, Indonesian and papal banners preceded His Excellency as we followed slowly the narrow mountain trails leading to the next "kampong".

Everywhere we went, Poma-type reception was evidently commonplace. Hospitality was stereotype. Afterwards, when we got back to our waiting Ford, dear **Old Faithful**,

(Continued on page 30)

Be Glad You Are An INTROVERT

DO YOU often stay alone? Do you prefer to be with, say, your books or with things of nature and shun the company of people around you? Have you ever locked yourself up alone in a room while a party or jam session was going on? Do you find difficulty in dealing with people because the business requires much talking and do you prefer to keep your mouth shut while a hot discussion is going on? If you do, you are an introvert. If you have spent a good deal of time fretting about your unhappy lot and wishing you were a member of a social set, stop pitying your-

self and have manifested sheer excellence in the different fields of specialization were deep-rooted introverts. The great bulk of novelists, poets, composers, philosophers, scientists and even stage actors are positive introverts. The immortal Angelic Doctor was so silent while still a student that he was called the "Dumb Ox". The world's greatest scientist, Albert Einstein, was often so lost in contemplation that he used to mistake his cat for his wife, kissed it and called it "my darling". Greta Garbo, America's most beautiful and talented actress, is dubbed as "the Myth" for she

by ILDEFONSO VELEZ LAGCAO

self. Otherwise you might find yourself playing lull guy for two evils — loneliness and pride. Loneliness because self-pity breeds contempt for association with others; pride because you refuse to admit your limitations. If you are an introvert, you are a lucky guy.

I know of a certain fellow who typifies the run-of-the-mill "play-boys". He is handsome and was born into a rich family. He goes to school in a flashy car, wears smart clothing, speaks different languages, always frequents the drug store and the nearby soda fountains, catches up easily with the latest steps and is very popular among the younger sets. But he flunked in three college courses and is starting his fourth in an unlimited series. This is not an isolated case. This runs through the entire species of so-called "regular guys" who flunk as often as they enrol and who become mediocre when they take up the greater responsibilities of life.

It is to be noted with great significance that many of those who

lives alone and shuns publicity, James Dean and Marlon Brando are no exceptions. Thoreau, Swift, Byron, Carlyle, De Quincy, Poe, our own Nick Joaquin and Jose Garcia Villa, compose a magnificent coterie of introverts.

Because most shy people have little needs, their lives are happier, if simpler. They have less needs and, therefore, less worries. The introvert "gets a big kick" out of being alone — sitting beside a brook and indulging in what appears to him as pleasurable contemplation. For the extroverts, it is a pity to be a "drip" or a "wet blanket". They get their share of joy in boisterous laughter and noisy company. They cannot resist the urge to do the town or show off their social liens. Every time they go out, everything they wear must be new and "class". Since they have more needs, they also have more worries. And very often, despair contaminates their souls while the shy, lingers-in-bitting introvert is at peace with the world and with God. §

The USC BUCKLE STARTS A TALE

MUCH has been told about how owners of amulets and other good luck charms are invulnerable to the effects of bullets, blades, explosives, and even to malignant curses and wishes of hard luck. The explanation of Kamlon's numerous successful escapes from the clutches of our armed forces was believed by some to be due to an "omling-ating" which protected the wily chieftain from bullets and in instances gave him the cloak of invisibility.

Favorite bed-time stories include such tales, also, of how a rabbit's foot, the egg of a heron or a stone from the mouth of a snake could bestow good luck and happiness on its possessor. There is not much to be said about the truth of these incidents, though.

But one experience which stands out from the rest of similar yarns because of its truth and authenticity is about how a buckle — a USC buckle, to be precise — carved for

Three Heroes and a Story

(Continued from page 17)

bound for home, a Brother sauntered to where I sat in a reminiscent mood. He cross-examined me, intimately, regarding how I felt about the trip... the people... the places... oh, he inquired, especially the trip — the arduous trip. Did it do me some good, he queried, with particular interest. At that, I looked at him squarely, almost indulgently, and with deliberate candor answered: Yes, indeed. I enjoyed it more than you can ever know, Brother. You see, I came to brush elbows with three great, outstanding heroes — GOD, the Bishop, and Old Faithful. ‡

me a certain degree of recognition. May in our island, aside from being the month when flowers bloom, is also the Month of Fiestas.

It was during one of these fiestas that I came up with a very amusing albeit embarrassing, incident. I was attending a fiesta celebra-

tion in a certain barrio. Together with my two friends, we went to a celebrant's house. At the outset, I was reluctant to go. I did not know the celebrant and I did not want to be rebuffed. Moved, however, by their brotherly persuasion, I acceded on condition that they be responsible for everything. We were ushered into the reception room — a spacious one where almost all corners were adorned with fresh and lovely sampaguitas. The room was painted white with costly wall

bases banging on the sides. There were pictures of Filipino heroes framed so well that they looked stimulating to the eyes. At one corner there was a wash-drawing of Maria Clara, Rizal's typical Filipina, and on another, an oil painting of Amorsolo's Sunset over Manila Bay. As my eyes continued to feast on the beautiful and historical murals hanging on the walls, my friend suddenly poked me on my floating ribs and whispered: "It's chow time. Be ready." The visitors were then beginning to go to their places at the table. I was hardly seated at the table when suddenly a tender hand patted me. Then I saw her in pigtails and I felt a sudden commotion within my breast. My heart began to palpitate hard. In a soft and modulated voice, she invited me to sit at the head of the table. I wanted to refuse the invitation knowing that there were others older than I, but

her insistence made me accept. Deep inside me, as I began to eat, was a strange uneasiness which I concealed from the others. The importance given me by the host was tormenting not because I was new to it but because, on an occasion like that, a man of higher rank ought to have been given more preference than I. I began to suspect that there was something responsible for the extra-kind treatment. The host was known as an advocate of the "select-the-select" system during fiestas. The term is applied to a custom of accommodating only those people who stand on even keel with the host. Select-the-select, therefore, meant the rich-with-the-rich and the poor-with-the-poor.

After the meal, we were ushered again into the sala where we sat with beautiful teen-agers from the mainland (Mindanao). What followed was convivial and warm fellowship among us. They talked of many things about their schools, of their friends in the city where they were studying. The conversation included boring tales; nevertheless, I tried to be attentive. I thought my attentiveness would spare me from the task of gabbing but I was wrong for somebody asked me: "How about telling us about The University of San Carlos? You

by SIXTO LLACUNA ABAO, Jr.

know, we are very much interested about this well-known institution and we would be glad to hear about your campus activities." I became aware then that I was wearing a USC buckle which I had borrowed from my brother. I had no idea the buckle would place me in a fix. I was torn between telling them I was not studying in USC and going on with a fictitious tale of the school. The first alternative would have embarrassed me and the second would have made me open to suspicion since I knew next to nothing about San Carlos. I decided to take the latter alternative. I told them of the imposing facade of the University of San Carlos, of its learned professors, of its active students and the fine campus spirit. I told them a lot from out of the blue. I thought I was fibbing then but now that I have come to San Carlos, I realize how truthful I was all the time. ‡