

Cover Story

THERE WERE two sisters, so the Scriptures tell us, and friends of The Master they were. There was that blessed day when The Master came to town and dropped in for a visit. He spoke to the sisters of the beauty and truth of His kingdom. His kingdom was not of this world, He was wont to say, but one could gain admission to it by living in this world in charitable service to one's fellowman. There was beauty in His words, there was inner music in His gentle accents that Mary, the younger, could not but leave all to listen to Him. Martha, left to the kitchen work, complained to the Divine Guest. Did He not see that Mary had left her with the serving? And He replied: "Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best part which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10, 41-42).

Every legitimate occupation is good. Every vocation, every profession is God-given. Even the humble task of street cleaning is a mandate from God. This is so for each task is a form of service, and the only true joy in life can be found in service to others. And the greatness of a task depends not so much on its material returns, but rather on how well it is performed, and to a lesser extent, on how much good it has given to how many. This is a fundamental Christian concept to which the more worldly-inclined may tend to take the opposite view.

But of all worldly tasks, Christ said: one thing is necessary. Knowledgeable Christians need not ask what this one thing might be. To the salvation of our human souls, all other considerations are secondary. It is, according to the Divine Master again, *the best part*.

With this idea presumably in mind, ten women of diverse origins, backgrounds and inclinations left country, family, and the conveniences of modern living to give their time and effort to the poor and un-

Like Mary in the Bible, ten young ladies leave to heed Christ's call — all for love of God

THE BEST

By PRAXEDES P. BULABOG

lettered in the mountain villages of Latin America. Four of them are from Cebú. Regina Terrenal had been with the faculty staff of the University of San Carlos for several years. Nieves Barredo and Estrellita Peggy are graduates of St. Theresa's College, while Chita del Villar is from the Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepción. From Iloilo's Assumption College is Glicería Mosquera. Another lass which we only know from recent letters as Ludmilla, is a trained nurse from Negros Occidental. Then there are the Maryknoll (Manila) alumnae, Irene Zobieta, Linda Valeriano and Nimfa Bello. An admirably unique case is that of Eleanor Napolitano, who left behind a first class secretarial position in New York to join this society of volunteer lay missionaries.

The Society of God for Humanity

It all started when Father Giuliano Ferrari came here a year ago. Father Ferrari, a handsome, soft-spoken young Swiss-Italian cleric, was sent by his superior, His Eminence Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, who is the head of the world aposto-

lic movement, to recruit lay volunteers for missionary work in South America. After going around the Catholic schools of the city, Father Ferrari came up with the four ladies who were more than willing to heed the call. Father Ferrari's missionary zeal has merited the approval of Cardinal Tisserant and of His Eminence Lawrence Cardinal Jaeger, archbishop of Paderborn, Germany, and a prominent figure in the ecumenical movement.

Although the main job of the volunteer is to teach religion, it is not all that they do. In the Peruvian center for instance, Chita del Villar serves as the Bishop's secretary. Ludmilla, the only trained nurse, couples her nursing duties with catechetical work. The others function as social workers, language teachers, census takers and just about any humanitarian task you can name. But all are by priority catechists, for catechism teaching is the heart and center of their stay in those foreign jungles.

Generous, Warmhearted Spirits

Members of the Society of God for Humanity (the official name

behind the womanly chores of Martha through service to man. Like Mary, they have chosen

PART

of the group) make no vows. The work they do is every kind of apostolic work that is not exclusive of the priesthood, and are under the disposition of the bishops under whom they work. There is an urgent need for doctors, nurses, teachers, social secretaries, and for other such tasks. The pay is roughly the equivalent of thirty Philippine centavos a day, which is a mere pittance. Here it would hardly be enough to pay for a tin of talcum powder. There is nothing by way of material compensation to entice the worldly ambitious. Unselfish sacrifice and a genuine love for people are the factors that drove the volunteers to this materially unrewarding endeavor.

Rough Terrain, Beautiful View

The lay apostles' description of the Latin American terrain and flora makes for an interesting and colorful armchair travelogue. From Quito to Guayaquil, which is the largest town in Ecuador and the biggest port between Los Angeles and Callao (Perú), the girls took an "autoferro" which is nothing but an ancient bus on rails. The picturesque sight of pastoral plains



MISS REGINA TERENAL
USC's Lay Missionary

complete with sheep and shepherd reminded them of scenes from the Bible. Llama and alpaca abound in great numbers. For over an hour the awesome view of Chimborazo towering majestically over 20,000 feet in perpetual snow was a faithful landmark. A boat ride northwards brought them nearer the Peruvian border. Then followed a journey through a desert so vast that it seemed endless, stretching along the coast from Ecuador to Peru and on to Northern Chile. To the left was an intricate maze of oil pipes, while to the right the blue Pacific gleamed invitingly.

The Places, The Volunteers

In Latin America, the laity is only beginning to recognize its true position in the Church. It has only now become aware of its duties and responsibilities. Many excellently trained lay apostles abound but they waste precious time in discussions and conferences. What is needed is positive action. And this

is where the foreign lay volunteers come in.

Colombia. At the request of the laity, an English language kindergarten and a language academy have been started. Nieves Barredo takes care of kindergarten, while Gliceria Mosquera takes over the language academy. Linda Misa is secretary-treasurer and theologian-consultant. A census of the parish ushered in their activities. They listed 20,000 people. For this number the present group of volunteers is sadly insufficient. It therefore becomes part of their job to train native volunteers to be sent to other areas.

Perú. Since March three lay apostles have been residing in what used to be the parochial house and center of religious congregations. It has ample space for large gatherings and, for miles around, is the only house with running water. In spite of the torrid heat, the volunteers find their work enjoyably edifying.

Bolivia. From this country comes a letter written by Eleanor Napolitano, the New York secretary turned lay apostle. She flew to her Bolivian assignment with Irene Zobieta and Lindita Valeriano of Manila. Their breath-taking flight started when they took off from La Paz, the highest international airport, which rises 4,000 meters above sea level. This is 1,000 meters higher than the loftiest peak in the Philippines. From cold mountain glaciers which set them shivering even inside thick coats, they skimed over the tropical zone.

Everyday Irene wades knee-deep in a river to get to a *balsa* raft that would take her across. From there she walks a mile and a half to Charompampa, where she teaches religion, English, and everything else that she can impart. Her students express their appreciation via various kinds of fruit. At the opposite bank Eleanor has her own class.

The Carolinian Apostolate

Father Ferrari writes that the Filipino lay volunteers have proved themselves capable of their difficult mission. He makes special mention of Regina Terrenal of USC, who he says continues to win ad-

miration from all concerned for her saintly devotion to the apostolic work.

And who is Regina Terrenal?

No neophyte in the missionary field, Miss Terrenal served in the SVD missions of Flores, Indonesia from 1955 to 1958. She hails from Tayum, Abra and shows it by her gentle mien and earnest manner. Hardships there were in Indonesia, but she hardly mentions them. She does talk of the poor there and how badly they needed spiritual and material comforts. Many indeed are called but only a chosen few stick it out. Miss Terrenal easily shows herself to be one of the elect. Her forte, no doubt about it, is religion. Shortly before she left for South America, Miss Terrenal had successfully defended her thesis which earned for her the high academic degree, M.A. in education, *cum laude*. Instead of staying and expecting added privileges to which her new degree entitled her, she gladly left behind her scholastic laurels when Christ called for volunteers to tend to His poor. Many a doubting Thomas in her theology classes were enlightened by her. And little is known of the fact that she has been responsible for not a few conversions.

Miss Terrenal has written twice from her Latin American post where she warmly relates her experiences. *To my joy, I was among the group sent to . . . Our boss, the American prelate, has a big heart . . . the people are sympathetic. . .* are some of her phrases. Not a word of complaint, not one single gripe. Her accounts indicate a warm and generous nature, full of joy and goodwill and kind praises for her fellowman. Amid the freezing cold, the torrid heat, the fatigue and the discomfort, Miss Terrenal can still smile even in her letters.

But if she is sympathetic to individuals, she is rightly critical of a faculty system. Of the people and situations in her mission she writes: "Due to lack of priests, the population here has a very poor standing — morally and spiritually.

The census shows more than 50 per cent illegitimacy. Many men support several women and children on 15 *soles* (about P1.50) a day. Children run around with dirty faces and even dirtier clothing, while the rich wallow in money from vast pump-irrigated fruit and vegetable farms. A man here told me that if the status quo of too much Capitalism and too little charity prevails, Communism will surely invade Peru."

In some places over 80 per cent of baptized men and women live together without benefit of clergy. A large majority have no one to administer to them the Last Rites. The main problem is communications. Many parishes are larger than Cebu province, and most of them are separated by almost impassable rivers and mountains. It is not uncommon for a priest to ride 15 hours to say a second mass on Sundays. This puts him at a disadvantage, costing him much time in travel which he could have spent in actual missionary work.

In her latest letter, Miss Terrenal writes about her new assignment (her third) in La Paz, Bolivia. Her first was in Medellin, Columbia, and her second in Piura, Perú. Excerpts from her letter run: "Our loyalty to and admiration for San Carlos and for all the good principles and advice we got from our professors inspire us to do the best we can in our manifold duties amid the numerous difficulties here in Latin America. We pray that all Carolinians will also realize the precious value of the influence of a good faculty and an active student body, things which are possessed by our dear University of San Carlos."

Another paragraph tells about her new post:

"We were in La Paz from Thursday to Saturday last week. The place is beautiful and a more progressive and bigger version of our Baguio, and of course much colder, it being reputedly the highest capital city in the world (over 4,000 meters high). Were we to stay

here, we would not be able to survive the cold, but we are now in Coroico, a very lovely place where the climate is mild."

Those who wish to communicate with Miss Terrenal may write to her at this address:

c/o Padres Franciscanos
Casilla 2329
La Paz, Bolivia, S.A.

More Volunteers Needed

Father Ferrari is still in dire need of volunteers. He always will be. For as long as spiritual and material poverty remains in those areas the need for lay volunteers will continue to be felt. Monsignor Sheen's message during the Centennial celebration comes back to our mind: If all the unbaptized people in the world were to walk in single file past a given point continuously every second, it would take them 25 years. And if all the hungry people in the world were to walk in single file continuously around the globe, they would circle it six times. Ponder on this.

Should a kindly reader feel it in him to volunteer or to send volunteers, he is requested to write to this address:

Father Giuliano Ferrari
Calle 37 No. 66-A-55
Conquistadores
Medellin — Columbia

Monetary donations are to be sent to the account of Father Giuliano Ferrari, Bankers Trust Company, 750 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

AND SO, nine lady lay apostles from the Philippines have done the one thing that is necessary. They have chosen the best part which shall not be taken away from them. No less than Christ's guarantee is in this promise. It shall be with them here and now. It shall remain with them and sustain them one day when the call for a general accounting will be sounded.