

Born King of the Jews

Christian holidays in the Philippines persist past Christmas and New Year to Epiphany or the Day of the Three Kings commemorating the hallowed arrival at Jerusalem of the trio of eastern sages guided there by the Star of Bethlehem. They inquired for him who had been born king of the Jews, they said they had beheld his star in the East and had come to worship him. It makes of course, this homage of great knowledge and venerability, one of the most appealing stories in the Bible. Many villages of the Philippines repeat its circumstances every year in homely outdoor dramas. These over, the people terminate their Christmas and resume the year's routine.

Old friends who may have journeyed from distant provinces or from Manila to go visiting, return to their homes. There may have been weddings and christenings, these visiting friends may have taken on the responsibilities of godfathers and godmothers and so united in religious bonds several families. Children kneel at the feet of all their elders, recite blessings and kiss extended hands, and get off to school again. It is very oriental, none the less Christian. Primogeniture prevails in it, not law either civil or religious, but Malayan custom. He who has labored for his wife may now have her; probably the harvest is in, probably the young sweethearts will no longer be put off without impatience.

Has the young pretender not been faithful and industrious, working since the very planting of the rice, even helping with the seedbed, and he and the girl both modest and resigned? It is a contract. Word has been pledged.

If at this juncture the girl's parents fail to abide by their word, it will nearly always be the mother's fault. Elopement may follow, the girl always pretending to the last that she is seized against her will. Her marriageable age makes no difference, she is of the family and still under her elders' will—her parents' more particularly. If the elopement is interrupted before marriage is legally consummated, the weeping girl may turn upon her suitor, for sake of obedience, and in court turn the adventure into an abduction.

Then the law is hard upon the young man, many years of prison are his lot. Let us therefore dwell on the marriages that are not frustrated or postponed, and the elopements that succeed and end in happy forgiveness and reunion all round. In some way, in all classes, the groom bestows a gift for the bride, among the peasants a gift of labor. And the couple join the bride's family, the groom's having only secondary claims. In the Malayan conquest of the Philippines of which so little is known, how could it have been otherwise. Families, that were clans, strove against one another and united only against a common foe. There had to be a gift, preferably service, in proof of fidelity in the young suitor-warrior. Nor could families let daughters traipse away to strange families and found new households there.

The clans could not be weakened, so it was better that cousins marry. Afterward, when Christianity resettled the primitive communities under the bells of the mission

churches, every farmstead in hearing of early curfew, the parishes themselves could not be weakened by romantic migrations. Thus Filipinos became a most gregarious people and the tenure of land became, as it remains, an acute problem with them while vast areas of the wilderness remain fallow to this day. Only Ilokanos and Cebuanos have become great migrating folk, but it is a sheer crowding out because families holdings have become too small to be longer divided.

When the missionaries found animism here, they could not altogether eradicate it. Their own belief did not altogether exclude its mysteries, shrines of particular efficacy for this or that rose everywhere in the Islands. Not old affections, but new ones similar to the old. That would serve, and that was the introduction of Christianity into the Philippines. It was a simple faith. However, it was effective. Sta. Lucia, who protects Manila, in clouds over Manila bay inspired a successful defense of the city and the Islands from an overwhelming attack by the Dutch. There can be no doubt of it, the books record it; and it turned the tide of battle.

Dominicans dominated in the Christianization of the Chinese, confined to pales. San Nicolas and Our Lady of the Rosary, Sta. Rosario, became patrons of the Chinese; and even at Gualupe, the Augustinian shrine and monastery at San Pedro Macati near Fort Wm. McKinley, Chinese from Manila flocked to celebrate San Nicolas day with three days of feasting and revelry. Some of the pious chroniclers complain of the gambling that prevailed throughout the fiesta, but every man is holy according to his light.

Christianity is changing in the Philippines, as are all popular institutions. The older faith was largely sustained by legends, one of which we believe. Do you too?

It happened in this legend of our personal credence that a man led a notoriously immoral life, only remembering each day to touch the image of Our Lady of the Rosary that hung round his neck, better destined for the rope, an image his mother had given him. (Note with what simplicity the adoration of the Mother and Child is here suggested to a sinful city). Daily the man, grossly healthy, indulged the cardinal sins without limit; nothing whatever was beyond him, after one *Hail Mary* on rising of a morning, and his carousels lasted beyond midnight, contemptuous of curfew and the closing of the gates.

At last the man was caught in storm at sea, toward the mouth of the bay, but swimming with the strength of a bull he escaped the wreck of his ship and managed to get ashore at Mariveles. But he was more dead than alive; the people who crowded about knew nothing of how to slosh the sea out of him, he soon expired. As he died, his hand was on the image and his prayer on his lips. Like the thief, his prototype indeed, that night he would be with his Lord in paradise.

It was soon noticed at the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary in the Dominican monastery church in Manila that the robes of the image were grimed and soiled ap-

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parently from travel, as if she had been on a journey. And due investigation proved this to be true (we say). The image had left her niche, abandoned her chapel, and hastened to that dying wretch on the shore of Mariveles—there to give him final consolation, since we ourselves refrain from saying absolution.

But to impart the lesson of the Mother, even in the brutal mind—indeed most particularly there—what better? Something has elevated the Philippine woman to a social station deservedly enviable even in the West, and partly it could be this tale, exceeding in the marvelous the rescue of Jonah. It is at Christmastide that Philippine mothers bask in utter happiness, all their families dutifully at home and all obediently at church or helping with the hospitality. Every marriage in the Islands is based upon the expectation of children, every new one a new benediction on the

union. If they can not all be good, and of course many are rogues, are the evil ones worse for never putting their mothers quite out of mind?

A man should remember his mother and be decent, that is more enlightened and infinitely best. But suppose he does not? Then at least he should remember his mother. If it helps him to believe the redemption on the shore of Mariveles, let him believe. We are so deeply corrupt and ignorantly depraved ourselves, we would believe. At a final hour, even that degradation could be our star in the East.

Something has happened in the parishes of the Philippines since President Quezon was a boy in the one at Baler, up the coast of Tayabas. It is their secularization, and it presents the president a study. When he was a boy at Baler, a poor boy, the streets were all tidy and clean—everyone helped in the sweeping of them twice a day and the burning of the trash. They were surfaced too, the parishioners turn-

ing to in crews when not otherwise employed and doing this for themselves. The church was always in fine repair, and the school too. This was more communal work. And there were commons where rice was grown for the teacher and the priest. The town wanted nothing, and it was clean; all their lives the people lived there, well content.

When he had become high in politics and visited Baler again, Quezon found everything changed—and changed for the worse. Why were the streets not repaired? There was no money. But in the president's boyhood they were repaired without money. Yes, then, but now there is freedom—when men work they demand money. But why then are the streets dirty, this was woman's work. Well, perhaps the women do not sweep because that streets are not repaired—there is no money for the wages. So it was with everything, the church was in disgraceful disrepair for want of money, the commons fields were no longer tilled for the priest and the teachers, because there was no money; in short, all civic pride had vanished with the advent of the franchise—Baler folk reveled in freedom without feeling the lightest of its real responsibilities.

Since Christmas among Christians is a time for taking stock, this is a good place to stop. Where is He born king of the Jews? His star has been seen in the East, men have come to worship him. That is splendid. The eternal question remains, worship him how.

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