

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-atang" 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

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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

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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. ‡