

Sunset

By G. V. HURLEY

A dead man on Culion, watching the sunset. His name had been Bob ~~Bill~~. When he was alive, but now that he is dead he has no name. He sits alone, on the tiny veranda of the cottage they have allotted him, watching the smoke of the passing steamers that belong to another world than his. Few people come to Culion; those that do, transact their business quickly and depart with haste; Culion is the leper colony of the Philippines. A bit of verdant foliage and white sand, set down north of Palawan, in a blue tropical sea. To the casual eye it is a very beautiful place. It might be paradise; it isn't. It is a green mausoleum, the abode of the animated dead. A place of only two tenses, the present and the past—there is no future there. Walking ghosts inhabit Culion, men who have disappeared from all that makes life worth the living, as completely as if they had never existed.

The summer of 1922 recalls to me a time when Bob had been alive. There were rumors of a gold strike in the Cotobato country back of Kiamba, and Bob and I, free lance geologists in Manila, were among the first in the field. We had both come out of the same school back home and casual friendship over there had ripened into intimacy during our three-year association in the islands. There wasn't much foundation for the gold rumor. It seems that a Moro had brought some chickens into the public market at Cotobato and their claws had assayed about eight pesos in rough gold. When questioned as to where the chickens came from, the native had waved vaguely towards the hill country. *Sapataw*—in the mountains. It was enough to start us.

"We've as much chance of finding this place as the chickens had," said Bob, characteristically. "Let's go, Bill, we need the money. I would like to bring Mildred over here and this chicken feed would help."

We had both laughed at the wisecrack. So

after we had got an outfit together and Bob had written a long letter to Mildred, we shoved off, down into Cotobato after gold. Three months later we were pecking rocks and panning gravel, sixty miles from the coast, in the interior of Mindanao. Have you ever tried to find the failed needle in the haystack? That was the proposition that we went against. Mindanao is a vast place, a great, black, silent land of cogan grass, higher than a man's head; of wet jungle, swift running rivers, towering cliffs, and over all, a sun that scorches down every day in the year. As I look back now, I can see how small our percentage was, but we stayed on, always looking for the gold that we knew was there. Hacking and scratching at the surface of a land that presented every possible natural handicap—never breaking through to pay dirt.

Every night, around our little fire, Bob used to bring out Mildred's picture. "Taking my tonic," he always explained. And I guess it was a tonic to him, sitting there looking at her picture with the rain dripping from his soggy helmet. Never having felt so, I could only envy Bob and his Mildred. She was a great help, and it was too bad that things turned out as they did, for all the time Bob was getting closer and closer to the thing that was to make all thought of Mildred an impossibility. Some things need explaining very badly, for there were so many other ways, better ways, that Bob might have died on that trip, rather than the way he did. It would have been so easy for him to have laid his hand on one of the little deadly tree snakes, always hanging on the ends of the limbs overhead. A python might have dropped silently from above and satisfactorily ended the whole affair. One of the great cobras of interior Mindanao might have resented Bob's careless foot. But none of these things happened, and we pushed on and on, tracing the beds of unnamed rivers, examining our little bits of stone. All the while

biting a path through the feverish jungle with our harpoons. It was man's work, in 106 degrees of heat.

It was late in September when we took council in our camp, high in the hills overlooking the trail to Buluan lake. We decided, over our rice and dried fish, to give up the search and return to Manila via Cotobato. A week later found us well on our way, trying, in a driving rain, to cross a swollen river near the lake. Our heavily laden pack animal fell in the swift current, and before we could get the struggling *aspe* to it's feet, our blankets and provisions were all swept away. There was a Moro village by the river, a few straggling houses of nipa and bamboo, and we made our bedraggled way to the nearest hut, which happened to be deserted. We had hardly more than unstrapped our guns when a Moro woman came running across the cañon. *Wahlay malud!* *wahlay malud!*; she shrieked, gesturing wildly and following with a torrent of words that neither of us could understand. Bob paused in the act of removing his wet helmet.

"*Wahlay malud*—dangerous house. I don't see anything the matter with it, do you, Bill? I wouldn't care to ride a typhoon out in it, seems a bit wobbly on its pins, but it's dry and that's most important just now."

I turned to the frightened woman and explained in my insufficient Moro that it would do, and she left, shaking her head and rolling frightened eyes. I was too accustomed to the native legends and belief in witchcraft to comment much on the woman's actions. There is probably a devil in that baleta tree, Bob. I said, pointing to the huge, gnarled, parasitic growth swaying in the rain. We promptly forgot the Moro woman and her *wahlay malud*.

We had bananas and dried fish for supper, sold to us with reluctance by the woman across the clearing, who showed a marked desire to keep away from us now that we had decided to stay. After supper, Bob, rustling in a dark corner, emerged triumphant, with a battered saron leg by the previous occupant. "Allah is great!" he laughed. "Tonight we sleep in

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state, Bill, wrapped in the sarong of some pious Mohammedan.

"Not me," I replied, "too buggy—my rain coat will have to do."

No, Bob in the sarong and I in my rain coat, we stretched out for a long, cold night. We finally went to sleep to the monotonous beat of the agongs across the way, and the drumming of the rain on the nipa roof.

We had been here in Manila for two or three months, maybe longer, enjoying the shows, catching up on a bit of back eating and the like, when I was called to Camarines Norte to examine a property. The day before I left I had suggested a farewell game of golf to Bob, but he had begged off on the ground of a peculiar numbness in his right hand. "Must have acquired a touch of rheumatism in Cotabato," he said, "notice how it's drawn my little finger?" He had held up his hand for me to see, and it was all twisted and contracted out of shape. "We'll have the game when you come back, Bill."

But we never did.

The job took a little longer than I had expected. When I did get back to Manila, Bob was gone and his letter, three months' old, was waiting for me. He had written—

"Dear Bill:

"I went to see the Doc about my hand shortly after you left, and Bill—the Moro woman was right. It was a *swallow maulad* we stayed in that night. If we could have understood her, we would have pushed on, regardless of the rain. I've got it, Bill * * *

and I'm off to Cullion.

"It was that damned sarong that did it. Thank God you didn't take my suggestion and roll in with me! And now, Bill, I'm depending on you to carry out a little last favor for me. Mildred must never know about this.

"I've thought it all out carefully and decided that it is best that I should be dead. Much better for her to think me dead than to be a living horror to her. I am dead anyway, Bill, for all practical purposes, so she will only be a white lie that you tell her, quite justifiable. With me reincarnated over here alive, I would be a bar to her future happiness, and even if I got well there would always be that doubt that neither of us could dispel.

"You can handle it, Bill, I'm banking on you. And now all hail and farewell. *Are Casuar, moriturus le saltemus.*" The boatman is waiting to ferry me over the straits, and I mustn't keep him waiting. It's sunset, Bill, and I'll soon be alone in the dark. So long!

—Bob."

In due time, because it was best, I told Mildred how Bob had died in central Mindanao, in eight minutes, from the bite of a *doyley-poo*, a cobra—with her picture in his hand and her name on pale lips.

It was almost six years ago. Mildred is married now. I have been around the world and back again, every place except the islands. Never there. Sometimes Bob's little nurse must come to him, as he sits watching the sun go down. "The doctor says that you are better, much better, and maybe, some day * * *." But Bob only smiles—the gray smile of a man who has seen his world tumble about his ears, the smile of a man for whom there is no tomorrow, the smile of a man dead among the living dead—watching the sunset.

Tropical Landscape Architecture

(Continued from p. 13)

is universal.

It is true that many of the best effects are obtained by grouping together plants from many countries and climates, but it is also true that many plants which would be an ornament to any garden are passed by unnoticed because they are wild and common. Such ornamental native plants are particularly desirable because they are already adapted to the climate and are usually easy of culture, not to mention that they usually improve in attractiveness under cultivation.

Improving Buntal Fiber and Buntal Articles

By SALVADOR DEL MUNDO*

The Bureau of Science receives many requests for information in regard to a comparatively inexpensive process for improving the appearance of buntal fiber, not only from various local hat dealers and commercial houses exporting native hats and fiber, but also from private parties. Information that may be valuable to the various people who are interested in the subject is given in this paper.

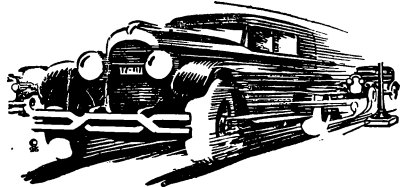
Buntal is the name given to the flexible material obtained from the fibrous bundles of the petiole of the matured leaf of bunt palm, *Corypha glabra*. When recently and properly pulled from the petiole, these fibers are white and glossy, but when exposed to air and light they become discolored and acquire an ugly brownish tint. The fiber is extensively woven into baskets, handbags, and similar household articles of

commercial value, but by far its most important industrial application is in the making of hats which are sold under the name of buntal. Baliang or Luchau, accordingly as the hats have been made in Baliang, Bulacan, or in Luchau, Tayabas. Buntal hats have met with favorable reception in foreign countries and the demand has created a profitable home industry. By request of local firms engaged in exporting native hats, experiments were performed in this laboratory with a view of evolving a comparatively cheap process of improving the appearance of buntal fiber or hats.

In evolving the process outlined below, it was not the primary object to produce a perfect bleach such as may be accomplished with the use of more powerful bleaching agents, sodium

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