



The Home-Coming of Epifania Pitpittung

EPIFANIA was sitting idly under the house, leaning against its corner-post, and staring dreamily across the beautiful valley of Burnay, where a lazy drizzle seemed to be soaking everything: the ricefields themselves, lying fallow, and abandoned as it were since the harvest of last month; the few patches of camote-fields in between; and the small, lonely barrios, scattered throughout the valley. Close-by, the trees also and the straw covered houses; the rare passers-by on the slippery horse-trail below; everything seemed to shrink from this unceasing drizzle. The tall acacia next to the house, had folded up its leaves as if to avoid being drenched altogether; and even the proud coco palms seemed to be bending down their long pinnated leaves in discouragement before the ceaseless downpour, few of them still standing erect, striving as it were to keep up a lost pride; their long leaves gathering the moisture from above and dripping it warily on the large banana-leaves below. This

monotonous dripping seemed to be the only sign of life about the dreaming, listless young lady.

Such seemed to be the very condition of her own soul: for the last two months she had not known one carefree, bright sunny day, such as she used to enjoy when she was so steadfast in practising her holy religion, that she was an example and a leader to many of her lukewarm companions. She sat staring across the valley, where from time to time she could see the Burnay chapel on the opposite side, when the low clouds appeared to clear up a little. For how many years had she been going there to attend the evening lessons in the dormitory. It was nearing Christmas now, and she remembered how beautiful it had been in previous years as if everything were happening before her very eyes as it once happened in Bethlehem: Jesus being laid in the crib, the singing of the angels, so brilliant in their white dresses and golden wings, the visit of the poor shepherds, the first who were call-



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The Mountain
Abrupts
of
Burnay,
Ifugao,
Mountain
Province.

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ed upon to adore Jesus and bring Him their little presents. Why could she not bring Him again her love as she had always been doing for so many years? This year it would even be more beautiful for she had heard that the Mothers would be coming from Kiangan.

But she did not want to remem-

ber, she did not want to think: did she not resolve to put it all out of her mind for always? What was the use of it all? Suddenly she caught the sound of a well known voice calling: "Ow," and then the trample of a horse coming down the trail; it was the Father coming from Kiangan on his big brown

horse. Would he stop on his way and visit their barrio? She hoped not, anyway she drew a little backward so as to be out of view from the trail below. But the Father was only checking his horse not to go too fast down the slippery trail and he went through. Yesterday also, when the catechist came to visit her barrio, she had been hiding, and told the other people not to betray her presence. Why must she always hide herself? Why did she not even dare to go and attend Holy Mass on Sundays?

It was already two months now, since she was married in the pagan way: according to the Ifugao customs, never daring to take her stand as a Christian against her parents who were pagans; and against Antonio who was baptized, but who only laughed at what he called her nonsense. "Why bother about going to Mass every Sunday?" "Why bother about getting married in the church?" "Could you not be a Christian without that?" "Later, yes, later they could always arrange that." He had been in the lowlands, he had been in Baguio; the people were Christians there also, weren't they? And they did not worry about such trifles. She knew he was wrong all the time, but she lacked the courage to take her own stand; she had been urging others to do so before, and to be strong in their faith, to show Jesus that they really loved Him and could do something hard for His sake. It was all so different now: was it the fact that she was married and had more

things to care for, or was it because she was not able to receive the Sacraments? Somehow she felt it hard to say even her daily prayers, and it was only out of sheer habit that she still said them once in a while. Had the Father not told them so often: "Whatever happens in your life, never give up your prayers."

She tried again to put it all out of her mind: she had been dreaming again sitting on the rice-mortar and chewing her betelnut after true Ifugao-fashion, spitting the while it's reddish juice over the ground. She rose, went to get rice inside the house, took the pestle from its support and started pounding rice. It was not time yet for doing so, but she needed action to divert her mind.

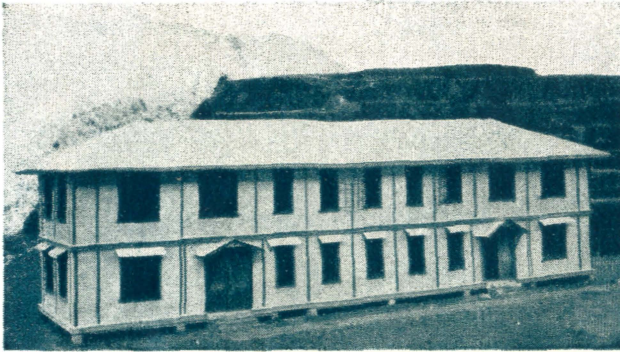
Two days later, the day before Christmas she saw the people passing coming from the barrios: from Lagawe, from Buliwong; she could even see those from Anao and Hingyon coming down the high mountain on the other side of the valley, for the weather was clearer now and a watery sun was trying to pierce the thin clouds. She was alone, for Antonio had gone to work on the road although it was Christmas. Until late in the evening she sat talking with one of the neighbor-women, a pagan, but all the while distracted and thinking of what was going on at the mission: she could imagine everything so well: there would be a Christmas-Program and the children would be playing and singing and dancing until the Midnight Mass.

She could see the bright lamps of the Mission shining through the surrounding trees and from time to time she could hear faintly the beating of gongs, when there was an interruption in the Program and the children would take to their native dances. She did not go that night, she did not go also the following morning. She was too much ashamed to meet all of her former companions.

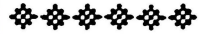
On New Year's night many had gone to Lagawe to celebrate, especially those who had been to the mines and still had a little money, they used the rest of it for buying gin. In the middle of the night: the moon was still faintly shining, four of them came home to Burnay, singing the while and shouting as drunk men are wont to do. Epifania heard them coming down the small hill separating Lagawe from Burnay. Little by little the voices grew louder and the shouting became wilder. She grew more and more frightened for only Josefa, the little sister of Antonio, was with her, hurriedly they came out of the house and went to find refuge in the house of their neighbors. Scarcely had they closed the door when the men came stumbling up the small trail which led to their own barrio. They squatted down under her own house singing hoarsely each of them to his own self. With her neighbors, two elderly women, they waited anxiously, not daring to move and betray their presence. It seemed to be lasting for ever. At last the singing was over and

they started conversing, gently in the beginning but more and more lively by and by. At last one of them said: "Let us go home." But another who had just been talking, said: "No, let us rest here a little more." They started quarreling louder, after a time forgetting even what the quarrel was about. It was only then that Epifania recognized the voice of her cousin, and knowing the quarrel was getting to be serious, she came out to cail for him and bring him in safety, as is the duty of a true Ifugao-woman.

They did not see her at first until she got hold of her cousin saying: "Come, let us go inside." He said: "Yes, I will go." But another upon hearing this said: "No, you will not go, I will kill you." Already he was drawing his bolo and came staggering forward, while Epifania pulled her cousin towards the other house. Seeing that he would not reach them on time he threw his bolo from about one meter distance. It was a most unlucky strike for he did hit his opponent on the shoulder, skimming the head of Epifania. Her companions had already closed the door before anybody else could get inside. Her cousin who was too drunk to realize all what had happened, wanted to get out again now and fight, though the blood was leaking all over the body. He was holding the wound with his other hand. The man outside still pounded on the door, but receiving no answer he grew weary and joined his companions and began to explain to



Sisters' Convent
in
Banaue
from
nearby.



them all about it. The others were wise enough not to contradict him anymore and after some time they went home. No other houses were near and nobody else seemed to have heard anything.

In the meantime Epifania still trembling all over had convinced her cousin to lay down and had washed his wound as she had seen the Father doing so often before. She had no medicine, but she could at least wrapsome bandages around the wound to stop the bleeding.

She did not sleep anymore that night too much shocked by what had happened. The little wound on her own head did not pain her very much, but it made her realize in what danger she had been. She started thinking and by and by found herself in prayer, thanking God for saving her this time.

At dawn she heard the bell ringing in the church, she knew this was New Year's Day. Her cousin was sleeping soundly now and quietly she left the house and putting aside her shame she went to church again for the first time in two months. The sermon was a

very short one, the Father extending his New Year Wishes to all: to the little ones: that God may bless their little souls and help them to love him more truly during the year, to everybody that they should make a strong resolution to fulfill faithfully their duties during the coming year: their duties towards God and fellowmen, and more especially to the married people, that God may bless them during the coming year, that he may grant them to have children: good children who would grow up to be real Christians, so that the peace of God may rest on their family. that they may always be happy because they know they have a Father who is always taking care of them.

After H. Mass Epifania went to see the Father and told him her New Year's resolution: to arrange everything with God and to marry on the coming feast of Three Kings, her own feastday, so she could again adore Jesus with a pure heart as she had done for the first time the day she was baptized, ten years ago.

She did take a firm stand with



An "Aperitive" before New Year Dinner.

her family; she warned Antonio that he should be there on Saturday. He did come and the feast of Epifany became the most happy day in her life, excepting maybe the day of her baptism. Antonio himself began to be more in earnest with his religious duties and even talked of giving up his job if they would not allow him to comply

with his religious duties on Sunday.

Epifania was now again a happy Christian enjoying the peace of all men of good will. She thought so herself while she was sitting once more under the house looking down on the beautiful, now sun-lit valley of Burnay, with its little tower pointing to heaven and salvation. Father Verbeke

"We stand firm to protect and defend our own, and will safeguard what Holy Providence has intrusted to us. If during 1941 we are not hurt by an invader's sword, we will hurt ourselves by generous cooperation, by generous giving — yes, we will give till it hurts and send back to the poor Igorrotes their much needed Catechists..... We will!"