

# A Little Flower Among the Igorotes

Ines was a lovely little Igorot girl from Itogon. Her black eyes which peeped out under the blacker hair, that covered her open face, showed life, spirit and purity.

Ines had been baptized; she was a christian and as a christian she behaved. She did not go to school for a long time, oh! no, when father and mother are poor, when their rice and camote fields are few and high in the steep mountains, an Igorote girl has to work hard and early in life.

But Ines had studied enough to know her duties as a catholic girl. Every morning, before she took her basket to the hills, she went to mass. How could she miss the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross, once offered for her by Jesus Himself whom she loved? And after mass, happy, she went to the far away fields and towards evening, sing-

ing or praying her rosary under a heavy load, she slipped down the narrow mountain path homewards.

And will she go to rest now in her poor shack? Not yet. The rice must first be pounded and the evening prayer said. Now and then she talks with her few neighbour girls about God and heaven, and the happiness on earth of those who serve God, and the glory in heaven of those who lead a pure life. Ines was happy, very happy the result of a pure God loving conscience.

Ines had reached the age at which Igorote girls are given away in marriage by their parents to a boy. Ines had dreaded that moment. That moment came. She must marry. But her future husband was a pagan. One evening, her father called her and said: "Ines, next week you will have a

husband. You will go and live with N.''

Ines did not answer but that night she did not sleep and, instead of stretching out her tired body on the wooden

mass very early, she received Holy Communion, but, instead of singing while at work, her lips formed in silence the prayer she had offered that



floor, she passed the dark hours in prayer. Did not our Lord also pray while in agony? And while in prayer, did He not accept death? Was it not preferable for Ines to die than to have to live with a pagan, in sin? What a terrible agony she endured!

The next two days, Ines went to

long lonely night, after the terrible news of her coming marriage had been broken to her. Four days more and she would be forced to live with her husband. She shivered at the thought. She passed another night in prayer, her prayer was always one and the same

The next morning Ines was tired



Her head was hot and weary. Her limbs refused to carry her to church. Ines lay down on the carabaoskin, her bed, on the floor. She smiled. No, she was not sorry she could not go to church. Had the priest not often said how good God is, how He always hears a fervent, confident prayer?

The father and mother of Ines were not anxious about their girl. Fever often prostrates the overworked Igorote. No, tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, Ines would be better.

The priest did not see Ines at the Communion rails that morning. Another morning dawned, Ines felt hotter and hotter. She shivered thru her whole body. But Ines smiled while her father and mother gave her the food she needed while they would be in the mountains for the whole day.

Nevertheless they came home a little earlier that evening. Ines might need water. How her eyes shone under the black hair that covered her face. She smiled a heavenly smile. Her parents would call the Father. The Father has wonderful medicines, oh! he cured so many who otherwise would have gone to the pitiless grave.

The Father came. Ines was perspiring. Smiling, she said she was

well, very well, but she would like to confess. After her confession she told the priest the news of the last four days, she told even how and what she prayed for. What? Ines would rather die than marry a pagan. She preferred a cold grave to what her parents deemed a happy marriage. God would have pity on her, she said she had prayed fervently, God could not refuse her demand.

The next morning, after mass, the Father brought the heavenly Master of life and death to Ines' poor shack. The girl smiled from under the shadow of approaching death. He could not repress a tear. He knew Ines' prayer was heard though yesterday he could not believe it.

That same morning, at the time Ines usually climbed the mountains after mass, Ines climbed again, higher and higher, smiling, glorious: the angels of the heavenly Sion sang a welcome to a voluntary martyr of purity: an Igorot girl from Itogon, Mountain Province. Ines' prayer was crowned.

Say, are there not saints still? and do not the Igorotes deserve the help of their christian brethren of the Philippines?

