

# WOMEN AND PEACE

By FELICIA LABAYEN GAMBOA

ALMOST a year has passed since the United States Armed Forces in the Philippines surrendered to the Imperial Japanese Army, nevertheless, in remote localities bands of armed men still roam the countryside in the guise of patriotic guerrillas. They rob civilians, burn lonely farms and warehouses and kill their own countrymen. People call them disbanded soldiers, their predatory excursions suggest another name. However, I shall not dispute the point. It remains that while Manilans enjoy a normal life people in isolated places still suffer from these marauders. Nevertheless, the latter have been promised complete amnesty by the military administration if they give themselves up. The Kalibapi has undertaken to spread Japan's word but it's the Filipino woman who can best influence her man to return to ways of peace and order.

On December 8, 1941 Japan declared war on the United States and that same day Nipponese bombers dropped their loads on military objectives in the Philippines. Office workers, laborers and students, men from every walk of life, enlisted for service at the front. They were fired with the love of country, they fought for the safety of their families and the speedy resumption of their old mode of life. They thought that the Japanese Army would ravage their homes, take their all and leave them destitute and hungry. So they put up a stiff fight. For three long months they bore gnawing hunger, ceaseless shelling and bombing. Besides America had promised us independence in four years. We thought that if America were defeated we would forfeit our freedom. We were ignorant of Japan's similar intentions.

Our forces were defeated by an army of superior number and equipment. The surrender was negotiated so quickly that our men had no time to reflect on their possible fate. The decision of their leaders was made known to them at ten in the morning and by noon they came face to face with the spearhead of the Imperial Army. Rigid discipline was enforced by the Japanese guards. This was necessary for an orderly round-up of the prisoners of war.



## *Profiteers and Racketeers*

The Filipino soldiers arrived at the concentration camp weak from starvation, fatigue and above all disease. They were treated fairly and with respect by their captors, who did not interfere with them and permitted them to receive donations of food, clothing and much needed medicine. It is to be deplored that at this point it was the Filipinos themselves who failed their suffering countrymen. The prices of malaria and dysentery cures and vitamin compounds soared sky high. Druggists knew that there were no consumers of quinine, atabrin, plasmochin and the like other than the interned soldiers, yet they took advantage of the great demand to profiteer. Wives who had had to support themselves as best they could, now found their resources taxed to the

utmost. So much so that many a bewildered prisoner was heard to ask "Are these the people for whom so many of my comrades sacrificed their lives?" Many internees died the first days, and for lack of medical supplies the death rate increased.

Another evil were the racketeers who preyed on anxious relatives promising to intercede for their loved ones for monetary consideration. Fortunately, they found few victims. The Filipinos are fully aware of the fairness of the military administration and know that privileges are not to be bought.

There was a good side to all this. The devotion of the Filipino woman was brought to the fore. With individuals and with social welfare groups she worked for the relief of her fallen champions. The sincere fellowship of Japan was, also, made evident. As much as they could without being false to their duty, Japanese officers helped the prisoners communicate with their families.

## *Filipino Prisoners Released*

The days dragged slowly by. Suddenly the unexpected happened. Contrary to all provisions of international law, His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan granted the release of all Filipino prisoners of war. The sick were sent home first.

The ex-soldier was happy to find his family as he had left them. True they were in financial difficulties, but this was a minor consideration forgotten in the joy of reunion. Contrary to his fears at the outbreak of the war, the Japanese Military Administration was doing its best for the welfare of the people. The unemployment problem was under study, labor was protected, commodities were being distributed at controlled prices, and public health was attended to as was every other need of the people.

At first the released war prisoner was slightly apprehensive of his position in the New Philippines. His anxiety was soon allayed. The military administration had promised him complete amnesty and was better than its word. Every chance for rehabilitation was given him. Free hospitalization and medicine were offered at government clinics. Offices were told to give preference to released prisoners of war in making up their personnel.

### ***Ex-Soldiers for Reconstruction***

The Philippines is an agricultural country. And while there were many town men in the USAFFE the majority of the soldiers were farmers. The latter and even a large number of those who had held office positions wished to return to the cultivation of the

soil. They had been through a nerve-racking ordeal and longed for peace and quiet. They had been hungry and were determined to make the Philippines self-sufficient. Japan had been more than generous to them and they wished to thank her. She asked nought for herself, but that they cooperate in the reconstruction of their Fatherland.

Now, some of these men, who feel that they have been given a new lease on life, are frustrated in their desire to start anew. They are permitted by the military authorities to return to their homes, but dare not venture into unsafe regions. They cannot work in an atmosphere of insecurity. Therefore, as long as we are disunited we cannot hope for economic stability. Bandits, who claim to be fighting for the freedom of the Islands, interfere with those who would work towards this end.

The Kalibapi carries the message of pardon and friendship offered by the Japanese Army to the farthest provinces, but they cannot reach the hearts of all these misguided elements. It is the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters, who must convince them of the wisdom of surrender. They must bring these men back to ways of peace and order, for thus only shall we arrive at the enjoyment of a prosperous and independent Philippines.

