

Touring the Missions in the Mountain Province

(Conclusion)

APAYAO

I HAD to undertake a last trip, the most difficult and one that makes you feel afterwards as if you had reached the remotest spot in this world. Far north lies the subprovince of Apayaw where I had to visit two of our Missions, Ripang and Kabugaw. On the map of the Mountain Province it appears like a desert, a huge space of undiscovered land, with only a few names of barrios on it and still less signs of travelling trails. In fact, I believe it to be the only province in the Philippines where the motor car has not reached as yet.

From Tuaw, south of Kagayan, a horsetrail runs northward through Konner, and from Konner to Kabugaw. Kabugaw bears the glorious name of capital of the subprovince, although it is but a barrio — agglomeration of fifty houses. From Kabugaw two miserable trails run north and westward, but travelling is almost always done on little boats which shoot the many rapids of the swift and dangerous Apayaw river; this river throws its foaming water into the sea at Abulug, Province of Kagayan. From Kabugaw to Abulug the estimated distance must be about eighty kilometers. Going downstream one needs only two days to reach Abu-

lug, but travelling up-stream it takes you from six to ten days to reach Kabugaw, especially when the big river is swollen to overflow by heavy rains which are so frequent in Apayaw. Along the river bank are a few camps where the weary traveller finds a shelter for the night. Consider what great hardships this kind of travelling must needs cause the Missionary who wants to visit his scattered little flock of Christians.

We have only two missionaries in the whole subprovince of Apayaw, which is inhabited by not more than a 12,000 people, of whom almost 50% dwell in the northern part along the Kagayan boundary, where wide plains are now quickly occupied by immigrating homesteaders in quest of new lands. The rest of Apayaw is covered with mountains, forests and torrential rivers; this southern part is very thinly populated, the Isnegs living in scattered hamlets of a few huts. Even these hamlets are not permanent, because the Isnegs are living a nomadic life; they stay in one place as long as the soil produces enough to live on, but as soon as their transient *Caingins* (ricefields) are exhausted they move to another corner of the forest which they reclaim and farm, build a new shack with a few banana trees around it and plant their usual mountain rice,

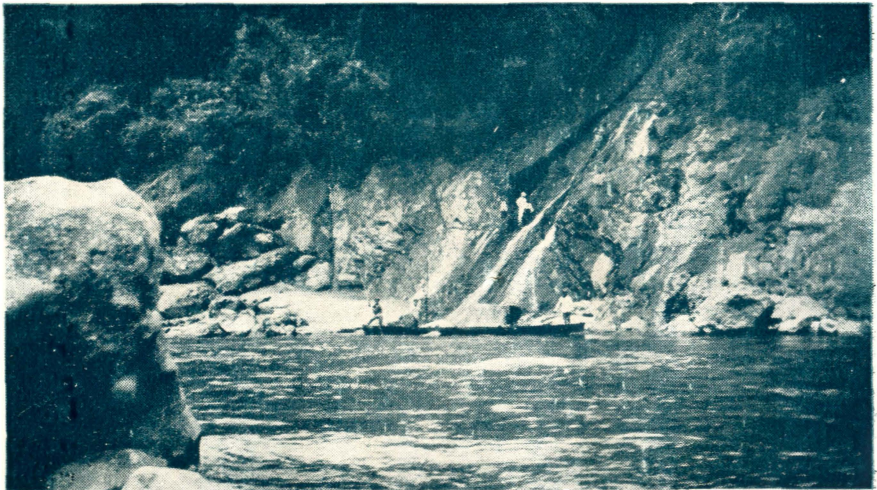
corn and gabi. It goes without saying that such a mode of living greatly handicaps missionary work.

If only a few wide and maintained trails could pierce these dense forests, be blasted along the mountain sides and connect this part of Apayaw with the vastly populated Ilocos Provinces, no doubt that the industrious Ilocano people would migrate in this sub-province and make of it a paradise of wealth. Immigration from Christian provinces would also be the easiest way to civilize the Isneg; after a few generations they would be absorbed by the Ilocanos.

The soil in this part of Apayaw is very fertile and at any time of the year crops can be harvested. Lumber of any quality group abounds in the forests, the rivers have plenty of fish, and the woods are filled with deer and an indefinite variety of fowl. Coconuts,

planted by settlers who left the place on account of impossible communications with the rest of the world, lift their foliage far above the surrounding trees and are there to testify the great fertility of the Apayaw soil. The climate can be much improved by extensive farming. As it is now the many swamps are as many breeding places for mosquitos which infect the country with malaria fever; but farming can easily do away with these swamps and do away too with the present disastrous disease. Apayaw is but waiting for a chance to become a paradise of wealth.

From Tuaw I went to Konner; a long trail of mud through the forests and interrupted by swift rivers. From Konner a still longer muddy trail led me to Kabugaw, with more and deeper rivers to wade. And to make a long story short, from Kabugaw I boarded a



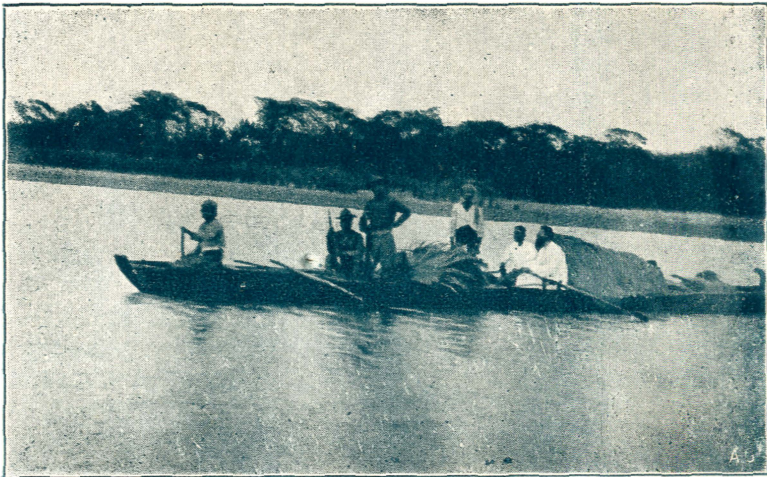
Travelling in Apayaw.

little boat and was sent downstream to Kagayan where the Laoag-Aparri motor road passes. From there I had only to take the bus which carried me through part of Kagayan, through the Ilocos Provinces and La Union, to Home Sweet Home in Baguio where I am now jotting down this little travelling report for the readers of *The Little Apostle*.

It had taken me more than two months to tour the missions in the Mountain Province. Forgetting a few hardships, I greatly enjoyed this long mission trip. Quite an interesting trip for me, not so much for the beautiful scenes to which one becomes accustomed, but rather for the ever increasing progress made by our Missions. We have now 19 Missions in the Mountain Province, and it is always a thrilling pleasure for me to land in one of them. Oh! it is a pleasure indeed to shake hands

with beloved confreres whom I haven't seen for a long time, to meet the lovely little faces of children who come to greet me, to say a few hearty words to the elder Christians who smile all over with happiness...Oh, yes! it is a pleasure to pay a visit to the good Sisters, to be led as if in procession to the church, the schools, and finally to the rectory which is soon crowded with loved and loving visitors. It is Heaven on earth—and my missionary heart abounds with praises to Him, our Father in Heaven, who so abundantly blessed the work of our missionaries, Priests and Sisters.

We have to thank Almighty God for the obtained success which has surpassed all our expectations. In 33 years over 80,000 Igorrotes embraced the true Faith, the Catholic Faith; not less than 6000 Igorrote children are yearly educated in our Mission schools.



Travelling in Apayaw.



In the forests of Apayaw.

and our catechists have reached the remotest spots in the mountains where neophytes and catechumens are taught to know better and better, to love more and more their Creator and their Saviour. No, it is no more like the days of old when a lonely traveller didn't meet anywhere the smallest sign of God's presence in these mountains. On these days, dear readers, set out from Baguio and go East—the beautiful church of Itogon will greet you on the way and invite you to come in and say a prayer of thanksgiving to the Giver of all good; go to the West, and from Trinidad to Sabangan, Kayan, Bontok, Lubuagan, Banaue and Kiangan—to mention only some of the missions you meet on your way—you will see as following in an endless line splendid monuments of worship, houses of God built to defy centuries to come, which speak of faith,

hope and love so profusely sown in this paradise of pines. Set out from Baguio and in any direction you go you see the mountains dotted with chapels pointing their tiny spires towards Heaven—with the cross, the sign of salvation and civilization, on top and brightly shining in the golden rays of a beaming sun.

Our Missionaries, Priests, Sisters and Catechists, are grateful to the God of mercies, the Father of love; they are grateful to the generous benefactors who, for the love of God and their less fortunate neighbor, have lended a helping hand in this glorious enterprise of christianization.

But allow us to say it: Our Missionaries have deserved well of the Catholic Church and of the Philippines. We salute them with profound admiration for the wonderful spirit of sacrifice and self-denial which has guided them so



With students on a picnic in Kalinga.

successfully through odds of difficulties and hardships. They have won a victory and have a right to be proud of it. They have won a victory for the Church and for the Philippines: to the Church they have given thousands of loving and faithful children, to the Philippines they have given thousands of civilized citizens.

I know at what price they obtained their victory. I have travelled with them, in the heat of a burning sun, in the drenching showers of heavy rains; I have travelled with them on sunny days and when a typhoon was wildly raging over the mountains; I have travelled with them comfortably seated in a bus, and on horseback along long and lonely trails up and down the steep mountains; I have travelled with them gaily galloping through the plains, and anxiously wading a furious stream—every one of us having his tale to tell of a narrow escape from a menacing death in turbulent waters. I have eaten with them when the table was well served with chicken and rice, and when on no table there were but a few sweet potatoes and bananas

to satisfy their hunger. I have slept with them in their rectory, but also on the way, in poor Igorrote huts on a rough board or on the floor covered with a mat. Always and always did I find them in a spirit of joy that comes from sacrifice willingly and gladly accepted. Never have I heard complaints dropping from their lips—even when complaints would have been quite justified. Our Missionaries know the life they have freely accepted for the love of God and the salvation of souls; they know that no salvation is possible without the cross, without suffering—and every dawn of a new day finds them ready to take up their cross and to carry it following Christ on the way to Calvary. The holy enthusiasm of a missionary is a wonder of God's grace, and only those know what this holy enthusiasm really is who have been called by our Saviour to continue His work on the mission front.

If only our Catholic people knew a little more of this holy enthusiasm, and of the works this wonder of God's grace is operating in behalf of the true welfare of a



A visit to Bangad, Kalinga.



A master in dancing.

suffering and many times misguided mankind! If only they could realize a little better what an abundance of saving forces emanate from this holy missionary enthusiasm and from the heroic abnegations it involves, how glad they would be to share at least a little in this divine adventure of Christ for the salvation of immortal souls!

The Little Apostle and El Misionero are the official organ of the Missionaries of the Mountain Province, and it is by reading this mission Magazine that you become aware of that something divine which makes missionaries

and benefactors of the missions, that something of Christ which enobles our feelings and pours heroic generosity in our heart. It is then that you begin to feel what an unspeakable joy missionary work and missionary cooperation entail—and in turn you become possessed of that wonder of God's grace which is holy enthusiasm to pray, to give, to work, and to suffer that Jesus Christ, our Beloved Saviour, may be known and loved by all men in this world.

Very Rev. Mauricio De Brabandere

Provincial Superior