

THE RAIN-MAKER

BY GEORGE BALLARD BOWERS

THE Igorots of Bontoc, although natives of the Philippines, were never considered citizens while Spain ruled that archipelago. They were pagans; only Christians were eligible to Spanish citizenship; so it happened that when our Dewey thundered at the gates of Manila, the Igorots were yet devotees of Animism, spirit-worship. While American sovereignty did not give that pagan people citizenship, it did give them a legal status denied by Spanish law.

Through the centuries the Igorots had known the Spaniards as ruthless, cruel invaders, but they accepted the Americans as less ruthless only because in their fight with Aguinaldo's barefooted legions, they, the Igorots, played the role of the innocent but injured bystander.

Scarcely had peace been declared in the Philippines before the former foes of America, the Christian Filipinos, began to complain of the headhunting proclivities of the Igorot warriors who frequently descended into the coastal regions to secure the heads of their Christian enemies. The Igorot considered the head of an enemy a social as well as a religious necessity; in fact, the existence of Igorot society depended upon those grewsome trophies brought back from the lowlands. No youth of the tribe could become a warrior until he had taken part in a successful headhunt. No maiden ever **took** a mate who had never participated in a kill, the head of a foe was as much a part of the marriage ceremony as is the ring at a Christian wedding.

Governor Taft's desire to protect the Christian coast-dwellers and at the same time to help the Igorots caused him to send a troop of cavalry to Bontoc for station. Captain Peck, the troop commander, was a cavalryman of the old school. He was six-foot-four, wore long, faded mustachios, two qualities that made him an object of awe in the eyes of the pock-marked, pigmy natives. It soon

became evident that the captain himself was a whole troop; so the soldiers were sent away. Captain Peck was left alone to govern and garrison the heart of Northern Luzon with its quarter-million pagans.

Captain Peck, unaided by any other American, supervised trail-building and enforced simple sanitary measures. Tami, chief of the Igorots, really governed directed by the captain while Babalyan Buti, the local witch-doctor, looked after the pagan religious rites. Captain Peck knew little of the religion of his charges but, however, he discovered that "Lintic ca"—may the lightning strike you—was a curse too terrifying to be used when swearing at the indolent road-builders.

The Igorots were happy and contented. Every evening a crowd might be seen adoring from afar their "super-apo," the captain, comfortably resting in a steamer-chair on his little veranda overlooking the plaza. There every evening he sipped two Kentucky highballs and smoked as many big black cigars before the mosquitoes and flying-ants drove him to cover and bed. The daytime duties were few, the principal being, the protection of his wards from Christian raiders hunting pagan slaves as had been their custom for three centuries, the pagans, as already explained, having had no legal status in law; hence no protection.

Captain Peck's splendid isolation of six months was broken by a black-robed priest with an ascetic face inset with deep black eyes burning with religious fervor. He had tramped over the trail from Vigan to Bontoc to convert the Igorots to his faith. This self-appointed religious leader was a Belgian of noble birth. His wealthy parents had given him to the church, so it happened that Pere' Andre brought to Bontoc a well-filled purse to be replenished by a monthly remittance from his pious parents.

Pere' Andre was a politician as well as a priest, he courted Captain Peck's friendship until they became constant companions. The Igorots did not understand that only the racial tie and expediency bound their adored captain to the priest nor did they know that secretly each resented the presence of the other.

The priest's purse was emptied time and again. He built a church, a parish house and a school, and a convent where lived three gentle, beautiful French nuns who taught the little Igorot girls the catechism, how to make lace evening gowns for sale to American ladies, and the sin of dressing Eve-like in harvest-time and when puddling rice paddies at planting.

Pere' Andre's activities alarmed Buti the witch-doctor almost from the day of his arrival. Buti believed in receiving instead of giving, moreover, Bontoc was on a wave of prosperity. The Igorots, as do all pagans, become most generous in time of adversity rather than in prosperity. Every day Buti wrangled with Chief Tami, blaming him for his poverty and humiliation, the popular disregard of the pagan rites and for the religion of the invading whites.

Buti was squatted on his haunches on a street corner where Tami must pass on his way to early morning mass.

"Apo Tami." Tami halted. Buti began: "Yes. Thou art yet chief, but was I not once more powerful than thou? It was I who wooed the favor of the gods," after pausing long enough to disentangle an insect from his grey hair, he went on, sarcastically, "I see thou bearest a cane instead of a warrior's lance. Thy cap and coat are the castoffs of the American apo, only thy naked legs and feet are true Igorot. Shame upon thee!" Buti stood, tightened his loin-cloth, spat on the ground at Tami's feet, then turned his back upon him.

Tami was angered but feared to strike the link of the spirit-world. Instead he used his upraised cane to emphasize his words.

"Babalyan Buti, all thou hast said of thyself is true, but my valor made me chief of the Bontocs. Could I have been proclaimed chief if there had been another with more Christian heads to his credit?" Buti nodded approval, then Tami continued: "Thy poverty—well—do as the Americans advise. Go to work."

"Work?" Buti groaned as if in great pain.

"Pere' Andre declares thou art an imposter. While it is true that before the Americans came sickness was of the gods, it is not so now. The governor says that diseases causing sickness breed in the filth of our homes and streets." Tami gulped as frequently Orientals do under intense mental strain, then went on, but now in gentle monotone. "Thou, Buti, wouldst not have ridiculed me for the castoffs I wear hadst thou known their protecting comfort in the bitter cold of the mountain tops as well as in the blistering heat of the jungle valleys. I hope that I may sometime wear pants and shoes too.

Thou hatest both the governor and the priest. Thou hatest every one helping us. Even the gentle pale nuns are not spared thy insults. I am sorry for thee, Buti. All has changed since the Americans came. I fear that thou art but a relic of the past."

Tami had finished his speech, but before he could get out of ear-shot, Buti, with hands raised heavenward, muttered that terrifying

Malay curse: "Lintic sa lahat"—May lightning strike all these, my people. Tami closed his eyes and quickened his step as if momentarily awaiting a bolt.

Babalyan Buti left Bontoc. He could no longer endure humiliation and hunger. A jungle valley became his home where he lived on roots and berries. His constant thought was of plans whereby he might regain his former prestige with its ease and plenty.

Buti's longing for Bontoc overcame him in six months. Upon his return to his people he was surprised to find a second church. American nurses maintained a little hospital for his people while yet other Americans taught little girls lace-making and explained the sin of local marriage customs. A tall, serious American in a white helmet and a starched khaki suit distributed pictures and other trinkets to the people with a warning that they beware of the evil influence of Pere' Andre; for the American missionary, Maxwell by name, was a zealous Christian. Fortunately, Maxwell had abundant means provided from mission funds gathered in the States. His generous allowance made it possible for him to buy from the Igorots all the trinkets, crucifixes, pictures and beads distributed by Pere' Andre. All such articles were promptly destroyed. The vendors were always careful to conceal from the priest their method of disposing of his presents, they had no desire to incur his displeasure. Pere' Andre frequently exchanged as much as two gantas of rice for a good-sized Protestant Bible to be used to kindle fire in a little sheet-iron stove whenever his cell became too cold for comfort.

Although they did not know it, the priest and preacher were one in the belief that Captain Peck was a sinful man, but only Preacher Maxwell had the temerity to ask him if he were saved. To this question the captain only grinned and referred him to Pere' Andre. This would be a signal for Maxwell to thunder, "We must break the power of Rome! We must break the power of Rome!"

But the bitter rivalry of the Belgian and the American did not affect Buti's opinion of Christianity. From the first he had been deeply impressed. He liked the bells, candles, incense and the mystery of the Catholic service, but a tin of pink salmon and two gantas of rice made him lean toward the Protestant faith. The frugal priest gave free only pictures and trinkets of little value and had given him but a mere handful of rice for a three-pound Bible. Before Buti could finally decide upon which church he should join, he had hit upon a plan whereby he hoped to regain his former power and prestige.

The seasons of the Philippines are two, the wet and the dry. This dry season had been long and hot, and planting time was near. The old rice paddies resembled sun-dried bricks. Bontoc river had long been dry and only the deepest springs flowed. Nowhere except in the darkest valleys could green be found. Even the stately pines of the sacred grove had turned brown.

Chief Tami had told both the Belgian and the American of Buti's curse. They had laughed at his fears, but now, in view of the long drought, he urged them to implore their gods to protect his people. Both promised Tami to take suitable action.

The black-robed priest and the white-clad nuns said many prayers. They paraded the streets with their holy images. The villagers joined them, bearing candles and song of praise.

Missionary Maxwell did his part. With his nurses, teachers and a number of the villagers, he prayed in the street. The prayers of the Protestants were loud and long, but they were no less pious than those of the priest and nuns.

But the rain did not fall.

Two days later, Chief Tami reported to the church leaders that many of his people were beginning to doubt the power of the Christian God.

Buti had lost no time in bringing to the attention of the people the fact that the Christians were divided; therefore their prayers had been fruitless.

The Igorots had grown sullen and indifferent to the churches. Famine was casting a sinister shadow over the land. They gathered in groups discussing the wisdom of providing the head of a white man for their ancient ceremony. The situation had grown so serious that the rival creeds forgot their differences, so for the first time and the last time in Philippine history, the Protestants and Catholics joined in a union meeting. Together they prayed for rain.

But not even a fleecy cloud appeared in the sky to reward their efforts.

Buti had chosen a November holiday, in fruitful years a day of rejoicing, for the final effort to redeem himself. He mounted a table in the now vacant market-place where quickly the idlers gathered. After assuring himself no enemy were present, he cleared his throat loudly, struck a dramatic pose, pointing to a white spot on the mountain slope half a mile away; then, in a voice trembling with emotion, began: "Look and weep, my children. Return to the sacred grove the altar of thy ancestors anitos, then they will weep their

gratitude that thy fields may become green again. Our ancestral gods have never failed us. It may not yet be too late to escape the famine already upon us. Let us return the Anito Rock to its sacred resting place within the grove."

Chief Tami had often thought of the malign influence of the spirits because of his failure to restore the Anito Rock, yet he felt he had no right to question any action of the Storm King who had so undermined the sacred altar that it had rolled out of the sacred grove and halfway down the slope. The fact that the anitos had not been strong enough to protect their own altar had shaken his faith in them. Although with little faith in the anitos of his fathers, he could not remain blind to the desire of his people, a majority appeared anxious to give their pagan religion another trial. Tami was a politician as well as a warrior.

Chief Tami felt that his tenure of office depended somewhat on his standing with the two missionaries, so he took up with them Buti's recommendation. He tactfully agreed with the horrified missionaries that the Anito Rock had no influence over rain but, when he pointed out that Buti's failure would eliminate him forever and eliminate, too, all danger of the Bontocs returning to their pagan rites, both churchmen consented to ask Captain Peck's approval of the plan to replace the sacred rock.

Every Igorot of Bontoc volunteered to help to move the two-ton Anito Rock. Tami himself supervised the work. Buti spent his entire time on a nearby peak from which was visible the China Sea beyond Vigan. After five days of toil, Buti's evening inspection found the Anito Rock within a few feet of its former foundation. Next morning he ordered that until further instructions, the men spend their time filling the long gullies cut by storms of previous years.

Buti did not reappear till noon of the eleventh day. He personally took charge of the unfinished work. It required but a few minutes to drop the Anito Rock into its proper place.

The naked toilers had scarcely recovered from the fatigue of their final effort when out of a clear sky fell huge drops of water. A strong wind set in from the coast. Clouds formed with surprising rapidity as only is possible in the tropics. The perspiring, frightened Igorots without waiting for dismissal scurried down the mountain slope like monkeys chased by a python. Before they could reach the shelter of their smoky huts, the black and yellow sky had broken, rain descended in torrents.

The next morning the sun shone through a clear sky. The river ran full. The rice paddies were a sea of mud. Over night the brown hills had turned greenish. The villagers of Bontoc were noisy as if preparing for a holiday.

All that day the path leading to the Anito Rock in the sacred grove was filled with happy, laughing people. Each bore an offering; a dried yam, a handful of rice or a coin to leave upon the Anito Rock as an offering to their ancestral spirits.

Both the priest and the American preacher were frantic. Their churches were deserted. They rushed here and there. How were they to explain their failure and humiliation?

"How did he guess?" they questioned each other as they met in the street. Together they went to see Captain Peck. The agitated missionaries shouted to him from the street under his veranda.

"How did he guess it?"

"How did he guess it?" Captain Peck leaned over the veranda to repeat, "how did he guess it?—Well, he didn't. This was only the change of the monsoon. Happens every year. The first rain of the China Sea is plainly visible from that mountain peak," pointing toward the one where Babalyan Buti had kept vigil. "I read today in an old Spanish weather report that the annual monsoon rain reaches Bontoc three days after the first in the China Sea off of Vigan. Buti had timed his task by that infallible sign."