

BOSTON 15

HARVEST TIME

— AMONG THE —

FILIPINO PEASANTS

By REVEREND C. W. BRIGGS
JARO, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS



THE GREAT ENROLMENT

IN February, 1901, there were presented to Mr. Lund three lists containing the names of more than thirteen thousand Visayan peasants who wished to be enrolled as Protestants, evangelized and baptized. Had not our young mission already had abundant evidence that a mighty movement of Protestantism had started in Panay, we would have been conservative and incredulous regarding this great petition; but the list was considered only a fair thermometer of the real religious situation, and was accordingly sent to Boston with a statement that the missionaries on the field considered it a genuine petition from simple-minded, single-purposed peasants.

T R I E D B Y F I R E

☪ The signers of that petition, and the movement of which it was a consequence, have been tried by fire and stand the test. The mission was unfortunate on the score of health, and one missionary after another sailed away from Iloilo, until it looked as if the Catholic priests were right in saying that the Protestant missionaries were only "birds of passage." The peasants remained for three years almost entirely unvisited, unevangelized and unbaptized. Petty persecutions multiplied as the Catholic upper class came into power politically, until those who were known to be Protestants were compelled to leave their own towns and *barrios*, and organize, as best they could, Protestant communities of their own, farther back among the mountains. They were boycotted in the markets, refused employment, made the prey of a heartless petty officialism, and in every way made to realize that Protestantism was to cost them dearly.

S C O U R G E O F C H O L E R A

☪ In August, 1902, came a sweeping scourge of cholera, and the ignorant masses all about them charged this upon the pastors and Filipino Protestants. For months at this critical time no public services could be held to strengthen the faith of those who might be weak and tried beyond endurance. At just such times, however, when no other help is available, and no other means may be employed, God visits the people and himself protects the work. Leave God out, and the missionary en-

deavor is utterly hopeless and impossible. Anything less than a genuine movement, rooted in a spiritual hunger, would have died out, and its adherents have been scattered like chaff before the wind.

A F T E R F O U R Y E A R S

☛ Four years have passed and these Protestant peasants have, for the most part, remained loyal to the position they took in 1901. When for long months at a stretch no missionary visited them, they sent delegates to the services at Jaro to bring back to them as much of the zeal of the gospel as possible, and to restock them with literature. Twenty, forty, even sixty miles on foot have these little groups of delegates been traveling back and forth from Jaro.

☛ Beginning with February, 1904, I toured continuously, until the rains stopped me in June, up among the *barrio* peasants from twenty to fifty miles north and northwest of Jaro. I have had the great privilege of baptizing more than 1,000 disciples, most of whom have been Protestants for three or four years, and given abundant proof that the gospel meant much to them, even though their minds were benighted and their horizon narrow. These tours were so fascinating that neither the deacons and preachers who accompanied me, nor I myself, knew what it was to be tired out. I have walked more than twenty-five miles in a single day under a tropical sun, farther than I ever walked at a single stretch in a cooler climate, and was none the worse for the work. On the last tour in June the rains overtook us far from home, and, after waiting in vain

for a let-up, we waded back through ten miles of the stickiest and most slippery clay I ever saw. Shoes became so heavy that walking with them was impossible, and I gave mine to a carrier and came in barefooted. It requires heroic measures to meet the situation here, and no man could do less with good conscience.

“OPPORTUNITY” THE WORD

During these months of touring, the work of Mr. Finlay and myself in former years was followed up and strengthened, and five churches were regularly organized. But that which impresses me most is the revelation it has afforded to at least one missionary as to the meaning of the great word, “opportunity.” I was able to touch only the fringe of the skirts of hundreds of *barrios* in which live those who are now Protestants, and those who will easily become such if rightly influenced. A wide expanse of standing grain, ripe for the harvest, is the only adequate simile of the situation. The great movement among the peasants in Panay that was reported in 1901 is now a greater and more significant reality than it was then. The only reason why we have not ten or fifteen thousand baptized believers in that district to-day is that our forces here have never been sufficient to enable us to reach the people and baptize them, and arrange for their further instruction.

LITERATURE DEPARTMENT
AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSIONARY UNION
BOX 41, BOSTON, MASS.