

BOYHOOD IN SAGADA<sup>1</sup>

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IGOROT parents are very likely to present their sons to the Principal of a mission school in Sagada in the Mountain Province of the Philippines for enrollment in the dormitory with the statement: "We don't beat him but we want you to." That this is not an isolated situation is indicated in the "spanking a la Igorot" reported by former Governor Samuel E. Kane: an old Bontoc warrior presented his daughter at the capitol with the admonition, "I want my girl to go to school and learn how to weave blankets and gee-strings. You, Apo, give her a licking. I can not do it because it is not our custom to strike our children."<sup>2</sup> If the whipping of children is actually foreign to native techniques of child training and was only introduced by extra-montane teachers and officials, one wonders how it came to be so quickly and so highly esteemed.

This presumed incapacity for whipping, however, seems to be only an extreme example of lack of parental authority. To the same school principal come letters that run like this: "Dear Sir: I want my son to stay in your school so he will get an education. But he does not like. So what can I do? Please dismiss him." This situation is evidently not restricted to the people of Northern Luzon; Landgraf writes of a tribe in British North Borneo that "parents in Murut society do not have the authority over the persons of their children that is true of Europeans and Chinese. Even a toddling infant cannot be forced by his parent in the villages. Surprising as it may seem to the western mind, a Murut man cannot make his son go to school."<sup>3</sup>

Observation of Sagada society indicates that the actual beating of boys, at least, is a normal part of the practices by which the

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<sup>2</sup> *Thirty Years with the Philippine Headhunters*, ch. xxvii (1933).

<sup>3</sup> Landgraf, John L., *Interim Report to the Government of the Colony of the Department of Medical Services, 1954-55*, para. 3.20 (1956).

Igorot youth is taught to be a good Igorot adult. But there is a significant difference: the beating is not administered by the parents; instead it is sanctioned by the village elders and applied by adolescent boys. Although a father is reportedly respected for administering such corporal correctives when his son is old enough to endure a paternal caning without rousing the pity of neighbors, the infrequency with which such respect is won by Sagada fathers suggests that real embarrassment over this failing stems from extra-Igorot educational influences. The norm of parental responsibility for child training requires such things as nourishment, protection and affection; society has provided other techniques for instilling male discipline.

Life in Sagada requires stern physical labor and the Igorot farmer accepts it stoically. The pain of often cruel work in rice fields and forest he endures as unavoidable for the man who hopes to raise a family and enjoy a good old age. But he does not voluntarily undertake any such exertions as he can avoid. He spends little time dreaming of goals he considers less than essential and the expression "I do not like" is valid reason for any inactivity or indecision. The Igorot father thus sees a basic conflict between loving a child and inflicting any displeasure upon it and his relations with his offspring are characterized by the warmest sort of affections.

Igorots do not have as many children as they would like—though certainly not for lack of trying—and probably the first lesson a baby learns from the society about him is that he is wanted. From his earliest days he is fondled and handled, and he gets his first exercise clambering over the bodies of lounging, doting relatives. What he wants, he cries for, and what he cries for, he gets. If he takes hold of something which actually threatens his safety, he is distracted by being offered something else, and if he obstinately resists all such blandishments, his attention will be directed to anything so conveniently shocking as a big dog or carabao, the "one who vaccinates" or, in the case of a few villages blessed with such modern bogeymen, "Look out, here comes an American!" But he doesn't hear the command, "Don't," and if mother is too busy cooking to hold him, eager pairs of hands reach out for him. In Igorot land, the child is the toy of the adult.

Folklore keeps reminding parents of their duty to provide the best of food and fond attentions for their children, and the child soon learns these tales. His questions about where the birds came

from or who made the first monkey are answered with grim accounts of children who turned into beasts because cruel parents overworked or underfed them or both. A boy throws down his own bones as firewood from a tree and flies off a hawk; a girl becomes a fish because her parents won't let her marry the young man of her choice. If there were an Igorot Noah's Ark, it would be filled with pairs of snails and leeches and sparrows who preferred that life to enduring the abuses of irritable parents given to nagging and quick temper. Few parents in Sagada today seem likely to bring down such calamity on their heads, nourishing their offspring with such tender acts as bringing home special treats of which they do not themselves partake, like wild blueberries and corn-on-the-cob, or perhaps even such "store-bought" luxuries as that cake and bread which forms the ambrosia off which the godlike Americans feed.

The Sagada house is a dark smokey den designed to defend its occupants against the raw midnight temperatures of the winter months, and the child scampers off to join the sunny world of his contemporaries as soon and as often as possible. In that world he must learn to get along without the patronage or protection of his parents, for the Igorot adult holds himself aloof from the play of children or even from commenting upon it. Such interference as is made by school teachers or foreign missionaries in this line is noted with mild interest by parents trying to adjust themselves to a changing world but with bitter if secret resentment by children exposed to it. Among his playmates, the boy quickly learns that approval is given to the one most inclined to do what the group wants to do—even as he learned at home that he could pretty well do what he wanted if he insisted on it vigorously enough. The marks in adult Sagada personalities of those who learned the one lesson better than the other are not difficult to recognize.

The play of little children reflects directly and indirectly their parents' preoccupation with food-getting, so directly indeed that the distinction between work and play in this aspect is completely blurred. In addition to making those toy rice terraces which is the favorite play of the male child, he soon learns to weave fish traps with which he considerably augments the family larder, although these catches are always considered his own property and he is free to barter them for other things he may fancy; when he brings them home too few for the whole family, they are cooked for him and his young brothers and sisters. In villages with access to a river, this

childhood activity keeps boys so long in the water that it is not until they are mud-besmeared adults toiling in the terraces that they learn. The personalities of his elders are not discussed with the child and only rarely are the alternatives called to his attention. He might be encouraged to eat his food so he'll grow up big and strong like Pedro, but he would not often be warned against wearing two shirts like Juan who tucks a red flower back of his ear and puts on airs like a rich man's son. Certainly it would never be pointed out that four-foot Julian carried a smaller load than three-and-a-half-foot Miguel; only behind his back would the lazy boy be so spoken of by others and only in the privacy of his home by his parents. Whoever says "Shame on you" to an Igorot boy or calls him a "sissy" is a member of his own age group. But with this group he identifies himself so early and so firmly that what he values is, by and large, what the group values. Old Igorots queried on the subject recall their childhood motives for donning their G-string as "My playmates all had G-strings." In Bontoc villages the same sanction is extended to even such considerable matters as circumcision. A group of small boys who may have hung back in timid fascination during such operations in the past, get together and decide to approach whichever old gentleman's techniques have recommended themselves to them; only after the unceremonial operation has been performed do the boys' fathers learn of it by being called upon to compensate the surgeon for his labors.

Revenge for slights against family or village honor has been such an integral part of the headtaking warfare which Igorot society has only recently put behind it that it is considered perfectly natural for a boy defeated by his playmate in any quarrel to seek bitter redress through a rematch. But however natural they consider it, they abhor it as endangering village safety and everything is done to spare the child a humiliating experience. An adult scrupulously avoids embarrassing a child, and wise oldsters point out, "It's our observation children don't like to be embarrassed." Children choose sides and play games for hours on end without keeping score, and adults either ignore the outcome of such games or discourage any rivalry which results. In modern Igorot society, a teacher fails a student who did no homework and averaged 30% on his exams with a mark of 72%, and if called upon to judge a singing contest is not content merely to select the winner but extends the glory to all the contestants by awarding 380 points for first place, 378 for second.

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and so on. Somebody may lose the contest but nobody loses face.

Parental affection is reinforced in establishing the family group by teaching the child early to share responsibility and advantages with younger brothers and sisters. The Igorot is hardly able to walk on himself before he is carrying the next younger member of the family on his back or solemnly breaking in two some prized goodie like a boiled sweet potato to share with baby sister. He also early learns which groups he does not belong to by virtue of his sex and kinship. From his fifth or sixth year on he must not play with his sister, and during his whole adolescence he will avoid her under any circumstance suggestive of their difference in sex and kinship. In more conservative villages, such avoidance includes his mother, too: in Tetep-an, brothers will not join the same working party in groups exchanging field labor, and in central Bontoc they will not even sleep near one another. A vestige of this pattern appears in Sagada in the fact that brothers of courting age who happen to find themselves at the same petting party will separate.

Except for occasional excursions to the blacksmith with his father or tagging along with the older boys to pasture the carabao, the growing boy interrupts his activities with playmates only to come home to eat and sleep. For seven or eight years this carefree life goes on. Then comes the sudden shock of leaving home to go and sleep in one of the *dap-ay*.<sup>4</sup> Until this time he has slept in the same house with his parents, as a baby actually snuggled in between them as he fell asleep and later at any place, or at any time, he felt like curling up and dropping off. But his elder brothers and sisters never slept at home with him; at nighttime they went off to sleep someplace else. Now he, too, must with one blow give up both the womblike security of his parents' house and the birdlike freedom of his daily playtime: he must go off to sleep with the other boys in the *dap-ay*.

The *dap-ay* is a sort of male clubhouse and the young boy already knows it well for it is here that he has always found his father's and grandfathers' relaxed bodies most available for scrambling over and their caresses most free; and here, too, he used to come in short-lived fascination to hear a few minutes of adult legal talk so complicated he soon ran scurrying off again to play. But,

<sup>4</sup> Called *ato* in Bontoc; cf. A. E. Jenks, *The Bontoc Igorot* (1905).

whatever the *dap-ay* may have meant in his life in the past or will mean in the future, at the moment it looms foremost in his mind as his new sleeping place, for the *dap-ay* is the dormitory for unmarried males.

The *dap-ay* usually stands on a slight elevation and its most prominent physical feature is a flat stone platform about ten feet across; indeed, the word *dap-ay* in central Bontoc means just that: a stone-paved area. Surrounding this paving are upright stones set in the ground at an angle which renders them convenient as back-rests, and from place to place are stone or ferntree posts as memorials of successful headtaking forays in the past, occasionally decorated by being carved in the crude semblance of a human head. Adjoining or opening onto this platform is the *abong*, the actual dormitory, a building especially suited for sleeping and for nothing else. Too low to stand erect in, it is built of tightly packed, mud-chinked stones, a style of architecture which enables it to be almost hermetically sealed at nighttime against the low temperatures and distinguishes it from the tall wooden houses of married families.<sup>5</sup> The bed itself is a row of boards—in villages at lower altitude often a woven roll of reeds—loose enough to enable them to be picked up and dropped in a rather vain attempt to dislodge vermin, with an identically shaped headrest and footrest at opposite ends which elevate about two inches the head and some portion of the leg or foot dependent upon the height of the sleeper. The bed, or beds, is raised off the floor where, at one end or in the center, a small fire of reeds is kept burning or smoldering all night, warming and smoking the naked bodies of the occupants. Although nowadays men and boys generally wrap themselves in those thin cotton coverings the Igorot calls "blankets" in English, just a generation ago any such impediment to leaping out in battle trim during the middle of the night was forbidden.

Keeping this reed fire alive during the night is the job assigned the smallest boys in the *dap-ay* who are as a class called *mama-o* to distinguish them from the bigger boys whose job it is to collect real firewood for the early morning *dap-ay* fires in the center of the stone platform around which the men warm themselves on waking, and

<sup>5</sup>A *dap-ay* with many members may have two such dormitories, in which case the "senior" one frequented by the older men and housing certain religious paraphanelia belonging to the *dap-ay* may be called an *along*.

who are called *mangmong*. Igorots move about a great deal in their sleep, a whole row of sleepers unconsciously turning when one wedged into their midst turns over, and old men with poor circulation are wakened frequently enough by the cold or the pressure of their body against the hard boards to keep demanding fire-kindling services from the hapless *mama-o* on duty. To the boy of pre-*dap-ay* freedom, this particular aspect of the new life about to be forced upon him recommends itself so distastefully as to inspire some real resistance to the change, and in the old days actual coercion was often necessary in obstinate cases.

All Mountain Province peoples consider it obscene for a child beyond the earliest innocence to be present during the conception of his younger brothers and sisters, and even in Benguet where all unmarried members of one family may sleep in the same small house their parents carefully wait until they are all asleep before indulging that pleasure whose intention is to make the family still larger. In Banko it is believed that a child witnessing the sexual union of his parents will sicken and die, and in Sagada it is the concensus that such intercourse will be fruitless. Nowadays a growing number of "modern" Sagada families, especially those in houses of a typically spacious design, do not force their boys to join their contemporaries sleeping in the *dap-ay*, but as little as ten years ago the older sanctions were still being invoked. The younger boys of the *dap-ay* in which the offending boy should be sleeping but was not would be dispatched at daybreak to assemble outside the house where he was sleeping in the same room with his parents and sing a song beginning with the words: "Sot sot, ak ak sot," one of which words is an obscene term for copulation and the other an onomatopoeic term for the accompanying sound, a song which also suggests to the offender that he make a bird-snare out of one of his mother's long pubic hairs. This treatment is reported to have been 100% efficacious.

The qualifications for *dap-ay* entrance—as for advancement to the *mangmong* class, the donning of G-string or, indeed, the taking of wives—do not depend upon age but rather upon a sort of public opinion based on various considerations, not the least of which is the personality of the boy in question. All boys want to move to the age group above them and their behaviour and expressed desires can influence the time when a group of old men decides that they are big boys now and ought to make the next move. It may be suggested to a boy promoted to the wood-carrying class that he now bring into

the organization a younger brother to replace him as reed-gatherer. Throughout boyhood, youth and manhood, the Igorot behaves with the levity or lightness appropriate to his time of life, but movement from one stage to the next is not marked by necessary ceremonies or a fixed schedule of ages or sizes. A schoolboy once being interviewed by a western student of his dialect found it difficult to say why he called himself but not certain of his contemporaries by the term which suggested the English word "mature"; it wasn't height, it wasn't age, it wasn't grade in school. Soon thereafter this boy left school upon becoming the father of a seventh-grade classmate's child.

For the first years of his *dap-ay* life, consideration is given to the new boy's youth and many indiscretions are permitted him which will later evoke censure or actual corporal punishment. The fear of the dark ghost-filled night which moves the very young to dedicate nearer the *dap-ay* site than the interests of public hygiene will permit is considered normal but undesirable, and the older boy will be beaten for giving way to it at an unbecoming age.<sup>6</sup> There is an inverse proportion between this sort of consideration, however, and the age of the *dap-ay* member exhibiting it, and the new boy's exact contemporaries see themselves as all being in the same boat together and expect him to pull his weight. The anguished howl that shattered any resistance to the childish whim at home in the *dap-ay* not only does not facilitate getting one's own way, it isn't even tolerated. The boy who used to cry "I won't!" and scamper off, leaving a resigned father to murmur to sympathetic bystanders, "What can I do?" is now run down like a deer in the chase by his fleet-footed *dap-ay* mates who find such athletic diversion not at all unwelcome. When he is considered to be big enough that the large muscles of the back of his body and legs can endure beating without damage, such beatings are administered by older boys either at the behest or with the approval of the old men. Not only is failure to bring in the allotted fuel or direct disobedience punished in this way, but the older boys also take it upon themselves to chastise any who cause the little ones to cry over such practical jokes as applying hot pepper to tender parts of their person or forcing them to masturbate. The

<sup>6</sup>Every age of youth seems to have particular misdemeanors tolerated as appropriate; in Bontoc the rather serious crime of breaking into a granary and stealing wine is laughed off if committed by a boy at an age when an interest in wine is expected to deve'op.



laying of hands on another person is not a light matter among Igorots, and corporal punishment is a carefully legalized procedure. The only boyhood fight which has the sanction of the adult group is an annual sort of mock fight left over from warring days when it simulated the actual conditions of battle as closely as was compatible with sparing the lives and limbs of the participants. Ordinarily, the exchange of blows leads to bad blood between families and is therefore to be avoided at all costs.

The boy in the *dap-ay* has other tasks besides the gathering of fuel. One of his most common assignments upon coming back to the *dap-ay* for the night is scratching the old men's feet. A lifetime of barefoot labor in rice fields and mountainsides equips the Igorot with a thick-skinned foot and it is his pleasure to have this leathery sole scratched with sticks before falling asleep at night. Men coming in from a hard day at work also require their backs, legs, feet and fingers to be massaged, big boys rendering this service to men, and little boys to big boys. Some of the smaller boys' chores are connected with the practice of religion: they are sent round the village to declare holidays during which labor and travel are forbidden, and to seize chickens as fines levied on those who do not keep such holidays. They are sometimes called on to assist their priestly elders in the performance of pig or chicken sacrifices and for this duty there is compensation in the form of certain specified portions of the meat so provided. So specific indeed is the schedule by which this sacrificial meat is allotted that no envious older boy would demean himself by stealing it from a younger, although the lucky assistant to the sacrifice takes pains to avoid his age-mates who would have no such hesitation.

It is to be expected that boys who sleep together every night should develop a certain camaraderie, yet neither the aim nor the result of *dap-ay* activities is to develop any real *dap-ay esprit de corps*. During the day *dap-ay* members go their own ways and take their food in the homes of parents or relatives, and they are inclined to play around a *dap-ay* that happens to have a lot of children their own age. In the more conservative villages of central Bontoc, the fact that brothers belonging to their father's *dap-ay* would neither sleep nor play together actually militates against any such *dap-ay* group spirit. If boys gang up for occasional group fights or contests, several *dap-ays* close together challenge a combination of *dap-ays* from another part of town. After such a contest, the elated winners can-

not expect to be lauded for their team spirit when they come in for the night; instead, their seniors will look up from their contemplative pipe-smoking or the levity of some serious adult conversation to comment adversely on such hooliganism: "Suppose it was one of your own cousins who got hurt?"

Much of the religious life of the village centers around the *dap-ay*, and boys living there are exposed to the texts of prayers and long myths and the details of a series of sacrifices that hark back to headhunting days. There was a day when the *dap-ay* was the sacred courtyard where community wisdom on the subject of warfare was pooled, and it was the only place in which a freshly taken enemy head, virtually radioactive with black magic, could be subjected to spiritual prophylaxis prior to burial beneath one of the *dap-ay* paving stones. Even now that headhunting is three generations gone, the sacred aura still clings to that platform whose very stones can be addressed directly in prayers of petition for the welfare of the members qualified to congregate on them. The fact that the *dap-ay* was once the barracks of a town defense corps on perpetual duty is reflected in the sternness with which boyish noise and commotion is discouraged by old men not so far removed from a day when the male adult loitering in the *dap-ay* might be expected to respond to a woman's cry of danger from the nearby fields.

Little or no instruction is given the growing Igorot boy and he acquires those skills necessary to successful adult life by imitation. Likewise, his seniors do not deliberately pass on to him such knowledge of the world as they have accumulated; instead, he collects this information for himself by listening to adult conversation, and the validity of the particulars which he extracts from the general varies with his personal astuteness. There is one subject, however, which is never discussed in his presence and that is the matter of procreation. He has already been dependent upon his adolescent contemporaries for companionship and assistance in autoerotic expression, and when his curiosity is sufficiently roused on this more mature subject, he has to turn to the least amateur of the courting young men as authorities. The silence maintained by married men on this subject is not an incidental part of Igorot adult aloofness from the affairs of children. In the Mountain Province, part of the pattern of courtship is sexual intercourse and toward this part the various parties involved have different attitudes. Parents see this contact as the sensible beginning of a child-bearing marriage

and young girls are advised by their elder sisters how best to avoid the advances of young men who may not have serious intentions. The young men, on the other hand, frequently nurse hopes of enjoying some experiences along this line before committing themselves to the responsibilities of fatherhood and so are eager seekers after such biological knowledge as would enable them to attain this end. Any male adult who discussed this subject with young unmarried men would risk public condemnation as promoting moral looseness, preventing the birth of babies, circumventing the basic purpose of marriage, and inviting on the village actual biological extinction.

Lacking formal textbooks on Igorot civics, in every level of his *dap-ay* training the Sagada youth learns better one lesson he first learned among his earliest childhood playmates: highest esteem is given the one who wants to do what the group wants to do. The commonest adjective of opprobrium is *kedse* usually translated as "cruel" but covering equally well situations which in English would be described as brash, headstrong, recalcitrant or aggressive. People who are *makedse* frequently have their own way but the price they pay in society is no small one. Although insult ranks next to striking a blow in the local list of crimes, the man who "tries to be center," who's "too big for his britches" runs the risk of being publicly twitted about some past blunder or even reminded of some moral failing of his ancestors by some older man with enough social stature to register this communal opinion with impunity.

If the *dap-ay* is the classroom in which the Igorot youth is schooled, his senior lesson is one of jurisprudence: he must learn to sit closemouthed and unmoved when legal decisions of the council of old men are handed down against his father or some other member of his family. Although some modern Christian converts have been able to break away from the economic control of the society, the ideal remains that all adult men belong to one of the *dap-ays* in town—usually the one closest to their house—and support it by contributing to whatever animal sacrifices it requires throughout the ceremonial year and by joining its council of old men in later life, and all members of their families are expected to submit to the jurisdiction of the *dap-ay* council. In the case of litigants from different *dap-ays*, a council will be convened from both *dap-ays* to judge the case. The Igorot grows up with the often bitter taste in his mouth of subjugating his family loyalty before a body whose interest is presumably the welfare of the entire community, but he

is aware that blood relationship with members of the council is nothing to be overlooked in considering the outcome of a case. Indeed, litigants often agree to submit their case to an old man before whose reputed impartiality they feel they stand a better chance for fair trial than before a council which may contain an undue number of judges related to their opponent. But the old time Igorot was also aware that it was just this submission to village discipline which allowed him to pursue his livelihood without fear of treachery from his neighbor, to direct his full headhunting zeal against enemies on the other side of the mountain, and to send his children out to play between the village houses secure in the knowledge that they would not become victims of lingering intravillage feuds.

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