

## SANTORUM

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*Santorum* is a name given to a certain weird and mystic ceremony performed by native medicos in northern Luzon and in the central provinces to cure those who are said to be suffering from ailments wrought by the spirits.

A *santorum*, sometimes called *pañang*, was performed for the treatment of one of the writer's acquaintances after the attending physician had given up all hope for his recovery. The procedure was permitted by the physician as a matter of curiosity, and on condition that no "medicine" would be administered.

One morning, the people living next door to us awoke to find the old man of the family unconscious. Unable to make him speak, they called in the neighbors for help. Various remedies were applied to revive him, but these efforts proving futile, they called a physician. The diagnosis was that the sick man was suffering from some acute cerebral ailment. After doing what he could for the patient, the doctor advised the man's wife to bring him to the hospital, which she, in ignorant fear of hospitals, refused to do. Instead, in a frantic effort to save the old man by any means, and at all cost, the family secured the services of a medico who lived in a distant town. He examined the man, and, after some minutes, disapproved of the diagnosis of the physician, saying that the sickness had no connection with any natural ailments common to man. According to him, the man was suffering from a sickness caused by angry spirits. The only remedy was to "pay" these spirits. The family would have to make an offering by means of a *santorum* to be performed by the medico. All this he had determined through a procedure popular among other quacks, known as the *santiguar*. He ordered one fresh egg and taking it, he mumbled some unintelligible prayers and mystic words after which, with the egg in his right hand, he made the sign of the cross three times over a big tumbler almost filled with water. Then he broke the shell of the egg against the edge of the glass and let the contents fall into the water. The yolk settled quickly to the bottom, while the egg-white assumed various irregular formations, like miniature church spires. On top of these irregular forms were bubbles. Around the top of one short

spire-like figure, a fine white filament was attached like a noose. Seeing this, the medico thought for a while and then nodded his head. "This man," he said, pointing to the sick man beside him, "is the victim of angry spirits whom he has unknowingly insulted. The spirit, in a fit of anger and revenge lassoed him with an invisible rope." Calling some of the people present around him, he showed them the fine filament about the end of the little spire. "That is the rope with which he was tied, that is why he can not talk." Thus, he prescribed the *santorum* as the only remedy.

After the diagnosis, the medico told the family to get together the following: one pig, about six months old, to be prepared in two different ways which he himself prescribed, without salt; two kinds of native cakes, enough to serve a dozen people; cooked rice of the glutinous variety, known in Tagalog as *malagkit*; cigarettes and *buyo*; ten twenty-centavo coins, ten shallow plates, and another twenty of any sort—shallow, or soup plates, but of white porcelain; three big earthen jars; one big bottle of *nipa* wine and one big bottle of *basi*. He also ordered that a high table be improvised in a corner of the yard. By late afternoon, everything was in readiness, and when night came, people from the neighborhood and some from the town had assembled to witness the performance.

The medico ordered the front yard cleared, and had lamps placed at various points to secure a uniform illumination. Five chairs were placed in line and another five in another line—these for the five young men and five young women asked by the medico from among those present to assist him as "guest attendants" in the ceremony. Between the couples facing each other in the chairs were placed the plates arranged as on a feast table on which were placed the *nipa* wine and *basi*; one plate containing the ten twenty-centavo coins; a table lamp, and the paraphernalia of the "doctor." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the benches prepared for them and to stay there.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the *sanctorum* is about to begin, and I am making this request: that you make no comment on anything I may do or anything which you may see. If you see anything which seems funny to you, do not laugh, because laughing would displease the spirits who will come to witness this offering, like you have come. If you do displease them you are liable to suffer the same or a similar affliction as the patient. There must be silence. Watch, but do not speak. I can not be responsible for anything that might happen should anyone fall victim to the spirits' wrath due to violation of the behaviour I have requested you to observe." He spoke in an oratorical manner, and heeding the warning, everyone kept silent.

The medico began stripping himself of his clothing, repeating his warning. He took off everything until only a glaring red G-string, worn like that of

the Igorot, was all that was left on him. He opened his bag and took out red paper ribbons and red paper caps made like those on sale at the gates of the Carnival grounds, except that they had no fancy trimmings. He tied the ribbons on the couples in the chairs as is done in some town fiestas, and placed the caps on their heads. This done, he got the ten twenty-centavo coins and distributed them to his guest attendants. Next he called for the three big earthen jars and placed them upside down in a triangular arrangement, just in front of the small table. After this a man whom the medico had brought with him began playing on a *kutibeng* (a native stringed instrument). He played a fast, "peppy" piece, like a Rhumba. After pacing around the three jars with measured steps, his eyes as if he were in a hypnotic trance, the medico went close to the fence enclosing the yard. For some time, he looked as if he were seeing strange figures in the darkness before him. Then, he took the whistle dangling on a string about his neck, and, between long pauses, blew it three times.

Returning to the table, he circled it three times, blowing his whistle at regular intervals. To silence those present, because the spirits were believed to begin arriving, he emitted the sound, "Ssssst! . . .", three times. He also gave a sign to his companion to play faster, and with more vigor. Then, he began a weird dance. He stretched out his arms like an Igorot dancer—in fact he looked like an Igorot dancer. First his steps were slow, but they gradually gained in speed until they were in rhythm with the *kutibeng*. His arms were moving like slowly flapping wings. Between motions, he would emit the sound "Ssssst!", evidently producing a feeling closely akin to horror in the onlookers. Then, he began summoning the unseen guests. First he would shout, then recite impromptu ballads, some of which are quoted below: (The medico was an Ilocano)

<i>Ay! . . .</i>	<i>Ay! . . .</i>
<i>Gagayem umarayat cayo man</i>	My friends, gather around,
<i>Umasideg cayo ket inkay imatangan</i>	Come near and witness
<i>Toy bassit a pagayam piman</i>	This humble offering.
<i>Ay! . . .</i>	<i>Ay! . . .</i>
<i>Umay cayo ket indac badangan</i>	Come and help me
<i>Nga mangagas ken cabsat Esteban.</i>	To cure our brother, Esteban.

At this juncture, he changed his steps. He stepped twice forward, and once backward, arms outstretched like a Gypsy dancer, feet somewhat atip-toe. The music was as fast as ever. He continued:

<i>Ay! . . .</i>	<i>Ay! . . .</i>
<i>Gayem co nga Igorot a burican</i>	My checkered Igorot friend,
<i>Ken Y-neg nga Kalantangan</i>	And you Kalantangan,
<i>Umarayat cayo cadi man</i>	Please come around.

Ay! . . .

*Ta indac coma badangan*

*Ti inac pagpeggadan*

Ay! . . .

Do lend your help

In this task of mine.

He turned about and changed his course around the jars with hardly a pause. Sweat began to trickle down his body, which gleamed in the yellow light of the lamps. He had a good physique and looked like a dancing Greek god. On he went with this pleadings to his unseen friends:

Ay! . . .

*Gayyem co nga Don Juan*

*Casta ca met Doña Maria nga kasiglatan*

*Umay cayo ta indac badangan*

Ay! . . .

*Ta adtoy dan a nakasaganaan*

*Ti pagbayadda, pagayam piman*

Ay! . . .

My friend, Don Juan,

You, too, most active Doña Maria,

Come and help me.

Ay! . . .

For they have here prepared

Their humble feast offering.

The dancer stopped for a little glass of *basi*, then, resuming, sounded "Ssssst . . ." three times, clapped his hands once, and mounted on top of the jars stepping on them once each. The crowd gaped, because none of the thin-walled jars broke despite his weight. Again he clapped his hands and began stepping on the plates, one step on each, as he went with the beat of the music. No plate broke. Then he gave ten plates to his guest assistants and ordered them to let their coins stand on their edges in the middle of the plates. Making a thin coin stand on its edge on a smooth surface is a difficult feat, but the attendants did it, excepting one of the young woman who, after many trials, could not make her coin stand. The medico saw this, but he kept on with his weird dance, shouting for aid from his unseen friends. Seeing it was impossible to make the last coin stand, the medico stopped his dancing, and also stopped the *kutibeng* player. Asked why the coin would not stand, he said that it was due to the displeasure of one unseen guest. However, the displeasure, according to him, would be more than compensated for by the second part of the *santorum*. It took the medicine man more than two hours to finish the first part of the ceremony, but he seemed not to have tired at all. He told the people to go up into the house as the second part would begin at once.

In this part of the ceremony, the viands specified by the medico were served to the spirits. The five young men and five young ladies, with ribbons and caps still on, were ordered to get the food in the kitchen and bring it to the improvised table downstairs. There were the native cakes, two kinds; cooked rice; two pork dishes prepared without salt; water, cigarettes, and buyo. Matches were also placed with the cigarettes. The table was arranged by the medico himself. This done, he ordered the attendants

to go in, also telling to the people in the house to begin praying when they heard him shout three times. Again there was silence. All lamps were taken up, so that there was complete darkness in the yard. After three or four minutes, his whistle sounded three times between long intervals. Those in the house began to pray. Then the medicine man shouted at the top of his voice and called the spirits to partake of the feast offering. Three times he shouted with the same force, and then he too entered the house to join in the praying. The prayer lasted for almost twenty-five minutes, during which time the spirits, according to the "doctor," helped themselves to the offering. When the prayer was finished, the man and his assistants (the ten young men and young women) went to get the things on the table in the yard. The food was given back to the cooks in the kitchen for another cooking; this time with salt and spices. More rice was cooked. Then a *media noche* (midnight) dinner was served to everybody present, except the patient and the medico. The *santorum* was finished, and the people went home, satisfied, and expecting the sick man's recovery.

This was the most colorful of the many sorts of ceremonies the writer has witnessed. The performance of the *santorum* varies according to the practices of the medicos themselves.

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