

MOUNT PULOG—HEAVEN OF THE IBALOI

By Cecile Cariño

“*Ti chi ay cayo, ima amon pbsing kolay Pulog.* (I think I must leave for I have to go to Pulog).” Such are the last words of resignation a dying Ibaloi may utter. He believes a new existence awaits him in the Hereafter, land of his ancestors. He says again, “*Chi ay cayo* (I must take leave).”

The necessity of equipping the soul of the dead man for the long and difficult journey to the highest peak in Luzon is the reason behind the complicated and expensive burial ceremony called *chiandes*, one form of *cañao* (feast) that usually lasts from two to three days. It is believed that it takes from two to three days for a soul to make the journey to Pulog. The ceremonies start right after the death with the butchering of a horse and a dog that belonged to the deceased because he will need them for his journey to heaven. The bones of the animal are deposited with his corpse in a cave

or burial mound. After that a hog, a carabao, a cow, and some chickens are also killed and offered by the priestess in a sacrificial prayer to the Ibaloi god, Kabunian. Entreaties are made in wailing prayers for forgiveness of sins of the deceased in order to lighten his punishment. The Ibalois fear Kabunian for, like the Christian God, he also inflicts punishment on his sinful creatures.

At the beginning of the three-day celebration, pieces of meat and *gabi* (a tuber) wrapped in banana leaves are suspended on the ends of bamboo poles stuck short distances apart all the way from the home of the departed to the end of the path. It is believed that the soul on horseback will reach for this food on his way to Pulog to eat as he goes. "*Samad mola ita sidope mo* (Reach for them; the soul must eat too)," so says the priestess to the dead.

At the approach of the third day, the sound of the horse's hoof will be heard on Pulog by the ever anxious spirits who were sent by Kabunian to meet him. They welcome him at the foot of the mountain, where his horse is turned loose. Accompanied by these other spirits, he makes the steep ascent to the top, where Kabunian awaits. Other spirits now and then stop the newcomer and inquire about their relatives on earth; one about her sister or mother, another lonely spirit about his or her betrothed.

Before his Creator and Supreme Judge the sins of the new spirit are carefully considered with the corresponding sacrifices and prayers offered at the Chiandes. If Kabunian is displeased, the soul is turned into a rock to be trampled upon by animals and men alike until he has made due penance for his sins. After that he may be changed into a tall tree or a bird. The female spirits are the butterflies and the flowers.

When twilight approaches, the uglier spirits come out of their hiding places and shriek and fly about in the air. When night covers all, strange noises are heard, while now and then the deep forest silence is also pierced by sharp cries of agony, supposed to be those of suffering and restless spirits who are dissatisfied with life as they keep groping in the dark on and on, looking for their lost selves.

The frequent downpour of rain on the mountain is caused by Kabunian in order to insure the comfort and life of the spirits. In the crater lake, fish abound, but no Ibaloi will touch them for fear that one might happen to embody the spirit of an ancestor.

Pulog like the famous Mount Makiling has its share of tales about fair women. There is the story about Chamdia who was fair and young when she died. Her betrothed promised to go and join her some day, but he broke his vow when he married another maiden, though not half as fair as she. When a kindred soul told Chamdia about this, she tore her black hair and her multicolored skirt and left for the deepest parts of the woods

on the mountain. Some times she can still be heard bewailing the faithlessness of her lover. The green, yellow and red leaves are Chamdia's skirt which she tears away from her in her sad flight. The spirit-birds keep picking them up to take to her, but Chamdia no longer loves to adorn her lovely self.

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