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Santos and Carunungan: Like a Big Brave Man and Brother, My Brother

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The constant recurrence of the subjective element, though certainly entertaining to fellow Servites and personal friends of Father Calkins, is somewhat out of place considering that "UMFUNDISI" was published for the general public. It would seem that a more objective approach would have been more satisfactory to the casual reader. However, the message of this "Missioner to the Zulus" all but forces the defects of style into the shadows.

To any member of the Church Universal, the following words of Father Calkins, applicable to every era and clime, furnish the key to the motivation of the Catholic missioner going forth to bring the world to Christ:

"We deal in things of the mind and heart and will, not shovels and picks and forks. We have to get under the crust of the native with our wares; we must burrow deeply into their lives, touch the very core of their being, blast out paganism and lay in the Truth. That is why native helpers are so important to us. That is why we need good native bishops, priests, Sisters, Brothers, catechists and teachers.

"Ours is not a white man's religion to be used by the blacks. What we want down here is literally Black Catholicism. Anything short of that is failure."

SISTER ANN STEPHEN

SANTOS AND CARUNUNGAN

LIKE A BIG BRAVE MAN. A Novel. By Celso Al. Carunungan. Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy. New York. 1960. 275 pp.

BROTHER, MY BROTHER. A Collection of Stories. By Bienvenido N. Santos. The Benipayo Press, Publishers. Distributed by Bookmark. Manila. 1960. xiii, 244 pp.

I

Relatively few Filipinos achieve the distinction of having their books published abroad. Carunungan is one of these, and the distinction is well deserved, for the book is charming and entertaining. Several Filipinos of this reviewer's acquaintance have expressed themselves very much disappointed with the book: they find the humor forced and the details inaccurate. On the other hand, foreigners (Americans, Australians, British) have found the book highly interesting. Perhaps the reason for this wide divergence of reactions is that the

book was written for a foreign audience, particularly an American audience. Such a fact (if it is a fact) is not without its inconveniences, for it is apt to beget a self-consciousness which in turn is likely to trammel art. Moreover the Saroyanesque genre requires expert handling.

The book is called a novel, but it is really a series of episodes in the life of a Filipino boy whose family in Laguna has helped an American airman to escape from the Japanese. The airman does not survive the war, but his family show their gratitude after the war by sending an airplane ticket to enable the boy to visit the United States. The episodes are thus divided into two groups: those laid in Laguna, and those in the United States.

But the most interesting character in the book is not the boy but his uncle, a likeable rogue. Many a reader has expressed a desire to know more about the fellow.

II

The other book is the first of a new series on "Philippine Contemporary Writing" published by Benipayo Press and distributed by Bookmark. To judge by this first volume, this new series will be a distinguished one in the quality both of the writing and of the printing. The older Benipayo series (which had included Santos' *You Lovely People*) had been designed to be as economical as possible; this new series throws economy to the winds. The result is a handsome volume: in larger format, attractive jacket, good paper, wide margins, readable type—marred, alas, by innumerable misprints.

The stories in this collection may be divided into four groups. To the first group belong a number of stories which have for their common theme the return of a person after long absence to the scene of his childhood, which in this case is Sulucan, portrayed as a shabby slum district in Manila. The returning wanderer is by no means a prodigal. During his long absence he has acquired a superior education and a superior social status. The temptation in such cases is to disown one's humble beginnings and to treat patronizingly those whose social sphere one has outgrown. The returning wanderer in these stories does not yield to these temptations, though there is a hint that he is aware of them. Poor as they are, the people of Sulucan are his people. He finds them still lovable and still interesting; there is a trace of regret — perhaps even a slight feeling of guilt — that he has been uprooted from this native soil. The people are portrayed as they are — good and bad — with sympathy and with respect.

A second group of stories have for their setting the Bicol countryside, under the shadow of that magnificent mountain — Mayon Volcano — which is a source of beauty and serenity when quiescent, but of

terror when erupting. Among the nipa huts and coconut groves, life is slow but not uneventful, and one develops a fierce love for land and home. As in Sulucan, so here there are unforgettable people: among the most poignant pictures is that of a young girl who sebs in secret at night during a wake, not because of the dead, but because her father has decided to marry her off to a moron whom neither she nor anyone can be expected to like. Yet she accepts her father's decision without question and without complaint — and also without hope.

Two stories in particular are unusual because the protagonist in each case is a priest. In one, a Bicol parish priest goes to Manila on business for one day, hoping likewise to visit his relatives in Sulucan where he had grown up. He has not seen them for a long time, and he looks forward to the visit — only to find that they are no longer there. The other is about a parish priest of a cathedral town who has grown old and whom the parishioners want replaced. The bishop eventually orders the old priest transferred to a remote parish. Bienvenido Santos writes with sympathetic understanding of both sides of the sanctuary rail. He suffers with the laymen from the priest's shortcomings, yet has genuine affection for the old priest who has become useless and who, like all lay people, like one's own father, is tainted with mortality.

Some stories in this book are entertaining ("House on the Hill" is a good ghost story); others are weak, like the war stories and those about school and teachers and students; the collection might have been improved by their omission. Many of the stories in the book are told in the first person: the reader, expecting some continuity, is disconcerted to find that the identity of the narrator changes with every story.

Allowing for this inconvenient fact, the book is good, full of the milk of human kindness, yet not wanting in a certain critical attitude that keeps things in proper perspective. In a previous book (*You Lovely People*), Bienvenido Santos portrayed the Filipino in exile in America. Here he portrays the Filipino at home — or returning home — whether "home" be a slum district in Manila, or an anay-eaten cottage in Diliman, or a large house in the city of Legaspi, or a nipa hut in the countryside, within sight of Mayon.

The Benipayo Press and the Bookmark, and the Board of Editors (headed by N. V. M. Gonzalez) deserve great credit for starting their new series with such an excellent volume.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD