

The

# American Chamber of Commerce Journal

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

BY

THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

(Member, Chamber of Commerce of the United States)

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER MAY 25, 1921, AT THE POST OFFICE AT MANILA, P. I.

LOCAL SUBSCRIPTION—\$4.00 PER YEAR. FOREIGN SUBSCRIPTION—\$3.00, U. S. CURRENCY, PER YEAR. SINGLE COPIES—35 CENTAVOS

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MANILA  
P. I.

JUNE, 1928

VOLUME VIII  
NUMBER 6

**RAINS IN MAY**

April showers bring May flowers. You cannot say that in the Philippines: April is as dry as rusk, May would sing the wings of Lucifer. But however torrid May was this year up to Monday night, May 21, anniversary of the Lindbergh flight to Paris, certain signs and portents indicated unstable weather, and these increased as the month wore on. At the beginning the sun always rose in a clear sky and was soon at blazing heat, but clouds hung on its flanks later; and some days, when the sun had passed the zenith, the sweltering afternoons were relieved by cool winds blowing off of storms gathered in the eastern mountains. Fugitive clouds would break ranks now and then, and scamper toward the west, trailing pretentious little showers along the river. There would be rain and sunshine together, and scouring downpours downtown, near the river, while half a mile away, on either side, not a relieving drop fell. The streets were parched, the houses suffocating; hardly the slightest breeze stirred the air, dank and humid, and lawns and gardens drank from the hose nozzle.

But on Lindbergh day, rather Lindbergh evening, came the welcome change. One walked out as usual, after dinner, to take the air along the boulevard, where the landward evening breeze is always refreshing; and at nine o'clock the Southern Cross was visible in a cloudless sky and tipping toward the west. But in half an hour it could not be seen. The breeze had perceptibly increased, and dark banks of clouds, real storm clouds, rose steadily higher in the south-southwest. Here was a rain at last that would not play fast and loose with Manila, would not be frightened back into the hills. It was not coming from the hills, but across the China sea. On it came, spreading all over the baking heavens and pattering down through the night and all day Tuesday. The heat of the summer was broken, a typhoon, of which the southwest rain was monitory, was passing north of Manila. Somewhere its bellicose winds were blowing, here there was only the bountiful rain.

With the errant showers that came out of the east, the white ants, termites, began to fly—falsely drawn to the evening lights, losing their wings, falling on to the dinner table, hovering and crawling over things, and making themselves a general nuisance. Kill them! Brush them off! Ugh, the horrible creatures! Such is the human reaction to termites on the one fight of their dismal lives, the nuptial flight. Some wholesome philosopher has recently remarked that it doesn't do to think, that the moment one begins to think he is lost—that optimists don't think, they feel, and that pessimists don't feel, they think. It certainly wouldn't do to think about termites, one should soon be letting them nest in the laundry basket.

As it is, they nest in wood, even the most impervious; or the ground: in the Philippines there may be a hundred species of them, and some are mound builders, raising oval mud huts to the height of a meter or more over their precious queen. Encoined in a waterproof cell down in the center of the base of the mound, or at the depths of the nest in the wood, dwells this royal individual, with nothing to do but generate eggs, thousands upon thousands of eggs, in an ugly gray viscous sack stretching out behind her tiny body, making her quite immovable. Prone and helpless, the queen thus serves the tribe; thus she responds to the will of nature; thus, it has been found, termites may live, and pass on the spark of life to succeeding generations.

All activities of a termite community center about the fat and torpid queen. But no, she is not fat; she is reduced to a termite skeleton, the demands of the egg sack sap her vitality. Around her are her court, the entire colony of ambitious termites. There are the workers, feeding the queen by carrying the eggs away to the hatcheries; and there are the soldiers, on guard. Sometimes, when one is lucky in invading a termite cell, he may look quickly and carefully and behold another individual—much inclined to slip away at the first hint of danger, ready to abandon the queen and take French leave. He, of course, is the queen's husband, and married life sets ill with him, he

would be free. He is a little chap, smaller than the workers or soldiers; he seems to be the least fit to survive in the harsh environment in which all termites struggle; yet, scrawny and emaciated as he is, there he is, ready to make a dash for it.

Matriarchies don't appeal to him, but he is a hopeless minority. With workers don't think, they work; and the soldiers don't think, they guard. And probably they too have a comforting philosophy—sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Termites are all similar when first hatched, then differentiations begin. A portion are sexually functional, the potential queens and kings. These, when adult, have developed wings, and these it is who take the nuptial flight and land in the soup or the butter. Out in the jungle, all the termites' enemies are on the alert at this time, which they have learned to predict to a nicety: the centipedes, lizards, spiders, swifts—all are there with voracious appetites, gobbling their banquet of termites, termites swarming out by scores and by hundreds, who will never make the nuptial flight, but only a meal for their neighbors.

But from the prolific queen come more termite eggs, and surviving termites say it's all in the day's work. Out of all the termites that do get away from the nest, occasional couples live to mate: the appalling mortality in this classical effort is a biologist's illustration of the law of the prodigality of nature. When they have mated, they make haste. With a flip of the wings, these Icarian appendages are gone, and one now sees them squirming over the table like blind worms. They are even less than, that, now, yet they make—heaven knows why!—the final effort to find a place to bore in and nest and found a new colony. If fortune favors them with a place where enemies may be walled off and plenty of provender kept by, then the colony will grow rapidly; but some find such sterile ill-protected places that it may be years before the colony numbers more than fifty. Termites! Ugly, nasty things! Kill them!