

Our Diplomatic and Consular Corps Abroad

By Dioscoro L. Tolentino

THERE are 17 consulates, legations, and embassies located in different parts of the world, principally in Australia, South America, United States and Europe. In writing this article, it is our purpose to consider the foreign service as a whole rather than discuss or pass upon the merits or demerits of its personnel of, let us say, the consular system.

In passing it might be well to state that the men heading these offices as well as those who were trained in the United States Department of State are, with few exception, active, intelligent, and capable Filipinos, some of them shrewd and alive to the trade opportunities within their jurisdiction. Their respective Filipino communities have been pleased with their readiness to impart whatever information they had which have been of value to them as well as with their apparent willingness to serve our commercial interests to the best of their ability.

There exists a widespread impression, however, that the duties of diplomatists are chiefly social, and that their activities in the social sphere, are purely ornamental. To this impression, so far as it may imply that our diplomats furnish to society "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," the writer is not disposed to object. But so far as it may imply that their activities are wanting in serious design and practical usefulness, it is altogether to be deplored. Certainly, a diplomatic representative, if he would gain information and acquire influence, must be active socially, must be agreeable, and with firmness, must blend conciliation.

If we abandon our attitude of superficial observation and false accusation, and inquire closely for the object to the attainment of which our diplomat is devoting the hours spent in the drawing rooms, as well as in his office, the chances are ten to one that he is concerned with the solution of some questions of commercial intercourse, with the removal of some obstruction to the exchange of commodities, the amelioration

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of some onerous rate of duty, or the unravelling of a knot tied at the customs house. Behold then, the proud practitioner of the art of diplomacy, the aloof embodiment of its aristocratic traditions, in his actual rôle of an agent of trade, is concerned not with the philosophy of Machiavelli, the policy of Richelieu and the craft of Talleyrand, but with fertilizers, nails, barbed wire, hemp, tobacco, rice, sugar, dried fish and *bago-ong* and a thousand and one other humdrum but essential things that enter into our ordinary daily life. The truth is that foreign trade is the life blood of the nation.

Our diplomatic representatives, ambassadors, and our consuls in the United States, Australia, South America, and Europe constitute together our foreign service. Their interests are not diverse, but are cooperative; and is the complementary part of an entire and harmonious organization and conservation of our interests abroad. They are necessarily under the supervision and control of our Department of Foreign Affairs which, as the special guardian, looks after our commercial interests and particularly over the development and extension of our trade.

They have duties to perform in connection not only with shipping and seamen, with the authentication of documents, and with notarial acts, but also with the issuance of passports, and with the protection of Filipino citizens and their property abroad, as for example in New York, Chicago, California and China at present. But there is a feature of our consular service as at present constituted which seriously impairs its usefulness. Any Filipino visiting the United States will immediately ob-

serve the small proportion of aliens who hold positions of more or less importance at our consulates and embassies. It is possible presumably that a similar situation prevails in our legations in Europe and South America. The clerks, stenographers, secretaries and in some instances, some of the officials are of foreign birth and nationality.

Without intending to cast any reflection upon the good intentions or loyalty of more or less small number of aliens in our diplomatic service, there is nevertheless some danger inherent in the make-up of an official family on lines so cosmopolitan in character. Should our relations with a foreign country or should anything occur to disturb the *entente cordiale*, it will be readily seen that our consul or other representative would be placed at a serious disadvantage, as he would necessarily be dependent on his staffs or aides and interpreters for that intimate knowledge of existing conditions which alone would enable him to deal successfully with the matters at issue.

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