

Consuls in Manila: III—Gaston Willoquet

By BETTY SIMPSON*



GASTON WILLOQUET
French Consul General

Le Consulate de France in the Samanillo building is the formal home of duties attendant on an important consulate. Yet its portals are not forbidding. When interviewed for the third article of this series, the Consul with true Gallic courtesy delved into the archives and produced extant records of "ships, and shores and sealing wax" for the past 139 years. He delved into memories of his youth, too, telling incidentally the inimitable story of his final choice of a CAREER.

So there follows Consul Willoquet's tale of the elevator accident that made him a diplomat; that, in due course of time, brought him to Manila 5 years ago as head of the French consulate here, an office venerable with history since it was established at the time of the French revolution and played a large part in the commercial and historic evolution of Malaya.

Foreign service was not a boyhood ambition of the Consul's. Graduated as an attorney from the School of Laws, Paris, in 1908, he was too young to commence practice. Relatives invited him to the Argentine. There, learning Spanish with fluency (as he has English, Portuguese, Russian and German), he assimilated the impressions that later were to make him discontented in Europe.

His country's *Marseillaise* sounded to those far shores in 1914. Returning to France immediately, he took part in but 3 months of actual warfare, undergoing what perhaps was the harder fate for enthusiastic youth: capture. He spent an interminable 4 years as a military prisoner. Two things consoled him: the opportunity for study, and the pleasant memories of lands across the sea.

Released upon the signing of the armistice, the young barrister represented several French navigation companies in the courtrooms of London. To him the litigations were tiresome, and he came to dislike civil jurisprudence. Then it was that he became imprisoned for a half-hour in a jammed elevator, with the happy consequence of finding his true vocation, diplomacy. The English lift in which he was ascending stuck fast at a certain floor, yet its passengers could not emerge. Through the glass door, he saw the sign of the French consulate. The longer the lift was jammed, the greater became the young man's conviction that he wanted to be a consul. The few words of that sign had unveiled vistas of foreign travel to his inner eye.

"I informed the Paris headquarters that I was entirely willing to represent them abroad," Consul Willoquet recounts with a chuckle. "And they informed me, matters were not so easy as all that." There was the slight obstruction of a competitive examination, 200 aspirants for 12 posts. His opportune study of both languages and world conditions brought the ex-lawyer a first place, to his own unbelieving surprise.

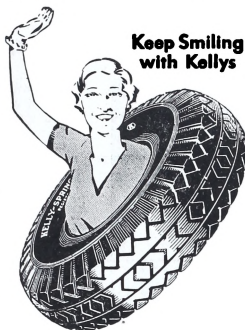
The career that followed was richer than even he visioned, testifying to his open-mindedness and adaptability: attached at Rio de Janeiro, three years at Shanghai, consul in Bahia, and finally Manila. In March, he leaves Manila for six months' furlough in France. With him will sail his wife and their 4 children, the children (who speak 3 languages) anxious to see Eiffel tower. However, such fondness for Manila is the Willoquet family's that its head has decided to make every effort in his power to return here in October, even to the point of renouncing promotion.

Then, too, he forges a wider field of commercial relations between the Philippines and France. "Conversations now under way," he says, "between Paris and Washington, on reciprocity, may very much develop the trade in tropical products, and therefore benefit the Philippines."

French nationals in Manila are few in number, he says, but these few are active in upholding French tradition. Two colleges are staffed by French nuns. The *Alliance Francaise* whose president is Rene Levy, conducts study courses under the direction of Madame Jeanne D. DePrida. Angkor, the architectural record of an amazing lost civilization in Indochina, will be the goal of a student travel-party sailing under her guidance soon.

Indochina is most closely connected with the *Consulate de France* here. A file of yellowed papers dated 1839 reveals that Manila was the basis of plans for the French penetration. Another handful of documents discloses a different rôle: at the time of the American occupation, the French consulate was in charge of Spanish interests until the time that the defeated nations' claims were settled.

France instituted the consulate primarily to oversee the thriving trade between herself and the orient. *Naviges du commerce*, great



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white-winged galleons, skinned the dangerous way from Marseilles and Havre to Manila, carrying back the treasures of the east. Almost each week saw a French ship in the *puerto de Cebu y Manila*.

An actual manifest of 1838—one of the many romantic documents which are Consul Willouquet's hobby—in delicate scroll with the ink browned by nearly a century—is gone over.

This manifest shows that the French ship *Nicolas Geaure*, Captain P. Adam, leaving Manila July 3, 1838, for Havre, carried: 149 cases mother-of-pearl, 3,407 bags of coffee, 331 cases gum elemi, 21 cases of spices, 720 bales of Manila hemp, 521 parcels of bamboo (and perhaps rattan), 1 lot of sapan bark, dyewood, 13 cases of indigo, 5 cases of cigars, 2 boxes of sheet tin, 1 large plank, 1 small case of crepe de China, 2 cases of miscellaneous commodities. This was a typical French-destination manifest of that period.

No doubt the *grande planche* gleams today as a table-top in some French manor. Another use of Philippine wood, a most unexpected one, was to produce artificial coloring for certain French wines. Philippine rattan was the material for the cane of many a Beau Brummel.

Typhoons hurled some of the merchant ships into strange ports. Manila extracted them. Pirates robbed and murdered, had to be treated with, and crews rescued. The adventures of the consulate still live, in pen and ink. With the records, the consul relives those sudden times of stress, of derring-do.

His own part in the great upheaval of the 20th century won him the distinction of a War Cross and the Inter-Allied decoration. He was made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor on February 2, 1929, for outstanding service to his government. Forty-eight years have been his, and a host of Manila friends wish him as many more.

*Kenneth Romney, Jr., leaving Manila, seeks his brief association with the *Journal*, the work he did having been most satisfactory. Mrs. Betty Simpson will carry on his departments until further notice.

Basic Is Practical

(Continued from page 38)

the lower part, so that the fowls have to get upon one another's backs to come near it and some are unable even to put their mouths in. In this way they are troubled all the time by their need for water, their digestions are unable to do their work because the food is so dry, and they quickly get ill, and that is the end of them. Every morning there are dead ones among them, and these are dropped into the sea, while those which are used for the table are in such a condition that it is as much as one is able to do to get one's fork into them. To put this right, it is necessary to have a number of small divisions in their water vessels and to see that every one gets some water in it; but this is not generally done, if ever. For this reason, sheep and pigs are the best animals to take to sea for food, the sheep's meat being generally very good, and pig's meat first-rate.

"Possibly some of the food and stores I have here been talking about may not be needed at all, because of the care the ship's chief has taken to get in the right things. But, if this is so, you may give it away to the poor persons who are making the journey more cheaply and are living among the common sailors, with no right to the ship's food or to only that part of it which is used for the seaman's meals. These persons are sometimes ill and unhappy, and there are frequently women and young ones among them, who have no chance of getting those things of which I have been talking and of which, possibly, they have the greatest need. By making a donation among them of your unnecessary food, you may be of the greatest help to them. You may get them well again, keep them from death, and make them happy, which is at all times a most pleasing experience for a feeling mind."

—The Farum.

*Alcohol's Note: A sweet drink made from a plant (Austrian Equilicaceae).

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