

JAPAN HAD FRIENDS

Written for "The Listener"
by A.M.R.

IN THE PHILIPPINES

[If you look at a map of the Philippines, you will see a deep bay on the southern end of the most southerly of the major islands. That is Davao, which the Japanese were reported the other day to have occupied. And here is an account by our contributor, A.M.R., of a call there before war came]

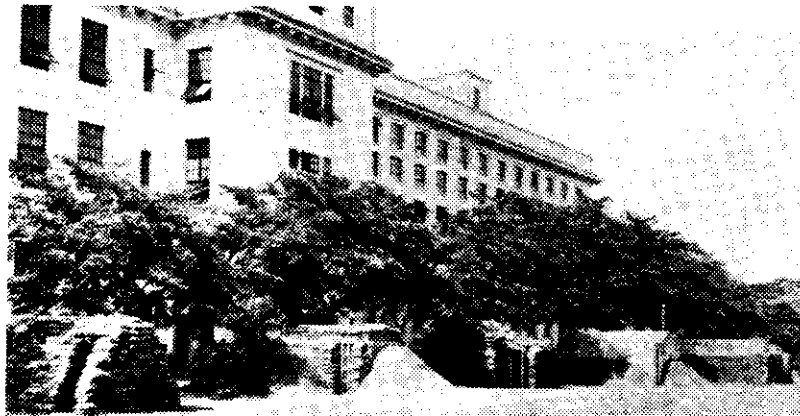
AFTER forty hours sidling through a generous mixed sample of the seven thousand and eighty-one Philippine Islands we were off Zamboanga. At last young Boris Rumski's silly song "The monkeys have no tails—in Zamboanga: They get bitten off by whales—in Zamboanga" did make some sense in Zamboanga. For there was no port or roadstead; just green mountainous Mindanao running out a great coral shelf laden to the edge with seventy-foot coconuts that dipped over the deep strait. We threaded the partly-sunken mountain chain that leads the Sulu pirates to and from Borneo, and at 2.30 swung due east. "Davao to-morrow night."

But why to-morrow night? Down past Mindoro and Negros the *Atsuta Maru* had hit a spanking pace. But now her crawl was such that it could hardly have been slowed down further without going into reverse. Dawn's coloured mists unwrapped in the north the ten-thousand-feet smoking mountain whose solitary and enormous black outline surely inspired the first Chinese peasant sunhat. And sunset's flames flared out behind the same grim silhouette, now on our west. Creston, "Aussie Imperialist prospector" (his own self-portrait), "doing in" a lucky strike in New Guinea by a trip to Japan, looked wisely suspicious. But even he would not commit himself on so mysterious a subject, beyond, "Well, apart from sampans and prahus (which, being native don't count) this is the only ship that ever touches Davao."

A Jetty and a Statue

We landed in the scented tropic dusk—overwhelmingly scented, at this point, with copra—on a dim, steep, swishing beach. No clamouring rickshaws here, competing to whisk the traveller up-city. No go-downs and wharves; just one wooden jetty. Only a mat shed or two and one long straight asphalt road striking inland over the sea swamps. We walked two invisible miles and met a statue. Thereafter we were on sandy turf with trees showing against the stars and an occasional house light. But what was so strangely familiar about the guessed-at outlines of these cottages creeping into being among gardens and banana clumps? A curious malaise of incongruity possessed us.

And then a diffused aura of dimmish light welled up ahead. We topped the rise that hid its source, and there lay—Japan! It was an open-front shopping centre purely Japanese from its unpaved alleys underfoot, suitable for



JAPAN laid her plans well, but the Filipinos were not altogether unprepared either. The photograph shows air-raid shelters in the grounds of the University of the Philippines, at Manila, where enemy raids have been heavy

wooden shoes-on-stilts and gum-boots and its overhead strings of pale low-power electric bulbs on loose-looped flex. Indeed its only first-glance difference from a thousand small-town centres in Hondo and Kyushu was that tropical walls of splintered bamboo replaced the homeland's internal partitions of paper and external solid sliding panels. There was the hanging wall of coloured toestrap slippers and wooden *getta* alongside the shelf of western-style mock-weather "rubbers."

"Land of Promise"

But there were differences from Japan, too. A Chinese shop, for instance, and morosely bargaining in it, a shy "wildman mountain" as the shopman called him, who with his bride descended to buy an elaborate marriage chest. A tiny, but perfectly athletic, young couple they were, in brass-decorated saffron jackets over copper-brown bodies and short red sarongs.

Presently we became aware of the regular rhythm of brass music, and located a second centre of light some considerable distance away. As we stumbled our way carefully over the grass "streets" broken by sandholes we became aware of a white-clad ghost accompanying us. "Pardon, sir and senora," protested a rather abashed young voice as we turned to him, "I wish you to meet me. I am here teacher at Davao High School. But I am a Filipino, I, from Luzon . . ."

He told us all: Davao was "Little Japan." Ten thousands of its fourteen thousand inhabitants were Japanese—thirteen thousand in the Province. Many were miners, and very good miners. It was "The Land of Promises Fair" whose Japanese jazz was drawing us forward and whose faint reflected glow had revealed his presence. (How

exquisitely and typically Japanese was the unintentional ironic twist given to that title. "Best of good shirt. Authentic made!") A Japanese girl had been chosen Queen of the Fair. "Was that resented?" we asked. "And how in general did the original inhabitants and other races regard these pushful invaders? Were they arrogant, cliquish, bad colonists, and bad mixers as usually alleged?" He seemed a bit nonplussed. No, he had not heard these things. He had not felt the heat of friction. But, of course, like us, he was a stranger—from Luzon.

The Tale of Davao

The tale of Davao, as he told it, is one that cannot be duplicated even at the command of the God-Emperor backed by the complete machinery and resources of the world's most established totalitarianism.

About thirty years ago (as it then was) the Americans, struggling to make actual their "occupation" of the Philippines, imported thousands of labourers from Japan to build roads. A hundred or so of these, their contract finished, turned to hewing farms for themselves out of the jungles long abandoned to the ferocious head-hunting Moros. They worked, at times quite literally, axe or spade in one hand, rifle in the other. And more than six hundred perished in stockade or clearing (for others drifted in to join them) before Pershing came to "pacify" Mindanao.

Far across the salt flats sounded the warning whistle. We must fly. From the open doors and windows of a family dance floated out American hits. Back from the Fair throbbed the *Tokio Ono*. A monotonous succession of muffled shots came up from the wharf. Beside the road ditch back in the shore atmosphere of copra some small boys

were applying alternately drops of kerosene from a bent tin and a live coal from a brazier to the bunghole of a cannon shaped from a hollow log, doubtless transporting themselves back to the good old days. In our stern sheets sat someone we had not seen before and scarcely glimpsed again on the voyage, an immaculate Japanese aristocrat, with "agent" or "diplomat" written all over him from the perfect creases of his pants up. Then up anchor and away to the Celebes and the Milky Way of islands, tiny and huge, sprinkled through seas as large as Europe, which the dominant Dutch call India.

And was Creston right? Is Davao a "Fifth Columnist" strategic fortress? Well, you know as much—and as little—about it now as I do (and that is more than ninety-nine in a hundred tourists to the Philippines ever know). Of this only, however, we may be certain: that, while "peaceful penetration" is "off" now that war is "on"; and while the enforced colonist freezing in Manchukuo sickens and will continue to sicken for Cherry-Blossom-Land "little Japan" in Mindanao is different. For, though the present attempt forcibly to incorporate the Philippines in the Greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere may fail, blood and sweat, peasant longings and disappointments, and four thousand bodies under the sod have made Davao Japan.



MANY OF OUR READERS won't need to be told that this is the Paramount star William Boyd, in his famous screen role of "Hopalong Cassidy," and just as many will be pleased to learn that the hero of 19 novels and 30 films is now to make his radio debut in a serial from 2YD at 8.0 p.m. on Tuesday, January 13. The setting will be the familiar Ranch Bar 20, a special attraction will be the inclusion of many cowboy songs, and Clarence Mulford's famous characters will be portrayed by top-rank Australian radio artists, including John Morley (as Hopalong), Lou Vernon, and Lyndall Barbour.