

American Universities Field Staff



**REPORTS
SERVICE**

Reports from Foreign Countries

MOROCCO:

THE ATTRACTIVE AMERICAN

by Charles F. Gallagher

Tangier

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Phillips Talbot
Executive Director

R. is not really a good friend of mine, rather a business acquaintance, since we are both essentially concerned with the same product--Arab society. In any case, I think the fact that we meet only infrequently makes it easier to judge and write about him.

He is the Public Affairs Officer at an American diplomatic establishment in Morocco, where he has been stationed for the past few years. This has been his first post and he and his family are to leave very shortly for a well-deserved home vacation. In happy augury of what seems more often to be becoming State Department policy there is every assurance that he will return late this year to the same job, although, as he himself says, it is dangerous to count on anything until you have the orders in your hand.

R.'s return here will mean the continuing use of his talents to the fullest, for he has been prepared for his present post by a solid background of study and predilection. After having done three years of work in Arabic studies as a graduate student in America, he was given a Ford Foundation fellowship to a Middle Eastern country, where he wrote a thesis on the history of Aleppo. And where he perfected the kind of good, eastern Arabic which North Africans admiringly, but incorrectly, call "Egyptian," and which is the Arabic they would most like to speak themselves. So the visitor to R.'s office, waiting in

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the outside reception room, can hear the soft flow of Arabic conversation back and forth between him and his Moroccan callers, a first shock for those who assume that all Americans are linguistic dolts.

R. is adamant on the need for American representatives abroad to know the local language and society--not merely via the brushup course that is becoming so popular, but based upon a thorough study of the total culture of the area to which the man is to be assigned. And he has noted hopefully that specialization is becoming more of a reality in today's foreign service. But it should be pointed out in passing that R. wound up in his present career not so much through the generosity of the government as because of the niggardliness of American academic circles--his best offer after finishing graduate work was for less than five thousand dollars a year, not including the cost of transferring his family from the East to the West Coast.

R.'s job as Public Affairs Officer is more than just chatting with visitors--as important as it may be not to discourage a group of teen-age Moroccans who come in and ask how to write to the "Broadway Dramatic Academy, Broadway, New York" for information on how to form a theater group. (His answer was to undertake himself to write to Washington, find out what organizations were willing to supply correspondence outlines, and put the parties in direct contact.) It is, as he admits, a bit of everything.

Technically he is responsible for what are lightly termed cultural contacts in the field of press, radio, films, and personal relations, for a good part of a country of ten million persons. And as the only American officer, supervising a staff of eight local employees, plus a half-time secretary, to a substantial number of the Moroccan population he is America.

Good personal relations must be maintained with local information personnel--newspaper men and radio broadcasters, not to mention government officials, who, it might not be necessary to add, have the highest regard for him. The job also

CHARLES F. GALLAGHER, one of the few Americans to concentrate on North Africa, writes about Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. He first became interested in foreign area studies during World War II when he attended the Japanese language school at Boulder, Colorado. After wartime service as an officer in the Navy, Mr. Gallagher became fine arts adviser on Japanese cultural property during the occupation of Japan. He entered Harvard University in 1949 where he majored in Far Eastern languages and history, and was graduated *summa cum laude*. In 1951 he began the study of Islamic society. Awarded Fulbright and Ford fellowships, he was able to devote two years in Paris and three years in North Africa to his Islamic program. Upon completing his research in Rabat, he settled in Tangier to write a history of Morocco and a grammar of Maghrebian Arabic. He joined the AUFS in 1956, and first toured AUFS member institutions in 1956-57.

means arranging for the appearance of the Ballet Theater, American pianists and singers, basketball players from a U.S. Navy team, each contributing in its own way to the amalgam of impressions of America. And to provide these not merely for the big city but for the sticks as well, where the reception, if often lacking in sophistication, betrays a more genuine appreciation of what it means to have the touch of entertainment from the foreign world. In all these tasks R.'s ease of linguistic and social movement comes out, as readily when explaining the American exhibit and its model satellite in literary Arabic at the inauguration of the local fair, as when moving through a crowd of ordinary Moroccans giving a smile and a friendly word to everyone.

One thing that the job is not, in R.'s view, is selling the United States with a huckster approach. It lies more in developing and fertilizing a sense of cultural identity, even in those cases where diversity heightens understanding. So his deepest feeling of reward has stemmed from the fact that in the past year, after a period of what he calls "displaying his wares without any high pressure salesmanship," the program has now begun to move along on its own, with spontaneous requests coming from individuals, sports and youth movements, even political parties, for the materials he has available. Understanding, he also feels, is a two-way street, and this has led him to schedule lectures by visiting American scholars on such subjects as the degree to which Arabic studies have developed in America in recent years. One of his few regrets is that for this kind of meeting, as for some others, he often finds himself the only Westerner among the listeners, a fact which is quickly noted by a sensitive Moroccan audience. Understanding is also a lonely street.

R.'s energies extend to a peripheral activity which is only partly extra-official. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the American School which exists in the city where he is stationed. He justifies participation officially because the school receives a small part of its operating income in a roundabout way from the State Department, and his interest is perhaps heightened because three of his five children attend the school. But his engagement also stems from his implicit conviction that the school--which is attended by a cross-section of Moroccan and European children--represents in microcosm just that kind of intercommunication with which he is concerned in his job on an adult level, and if there is any meaning to his daily routine it is enhanced by the vision of the future which this embryonic international institution stands for. I suspect that it was primarily this which led him, when quite recently a visiting foundation official of considerable stature and ample purse came through, to knock himself out arranging a visit to the school and a lunch with several of the directors, all to be followed up by his visit to the foundation home office on his return home next month.

Timewise, R. is not bound by the nine-to-five routine, less time out for the golf course. He makes a point of accepting any Moroccan invitation (it is only European dinner parties that bore him) and when showing films in the countryside last year he kept Ramadan hours during that month, working all

night and sleeping by day. Nor does he stop for the English week-end for, although there is perhaps no necessary merit or demerit attached in our lay society, he gets up Sunday morning as usual to head a Sunday school class.

It would be unfair to suggest in all this that R. is being singled out for description because he is sui generis. On the contrary he is not unrepresentative of a good many like-oriented individuals staffing similar posts in the foreign service. Granted that there is an occasional gold-brick, it has been this observer's opinion, at least, that in just about every diplomatic post he has visited there have always been several top-notch officers. This is what should be expected, of course, and there would be no question about it were it not for the lamentable tendency of public opinion at home to blame a whole corps, and the individuals in it, for unexpected or unpleasant developments in foreign affairs which more often are the result of the indifference, ignorance, and apathy of the public itself.

What is worse, however, is the recent capitalization on this attitude by foreign-adventure writers, or disgruntled hacks dishing up pot-boilers for sensationalist consumption. This short letter is not designed to be a commercial success, but it may serve as an antidote to that unfair kind of advantage-taking by reassuring those who read it that not all Americans, and particularly our official representatives, are quiet or ugly or incompetent. As a matter of fact the city in which R. works has its share of the latter--sharp, loud businessmen out for any dollar or franc, fugitives from responsible society, remittance women living on alcohol and paid lovers, and the inevitable tourists, perhaps well-meaning but flamboyantly exasperating at times. By comparison with them R. and his kind create a good image for America abroad, and in being true to themselves they cannot be false to their country. Could one reasonably hope for much better representation?

Charles F. Gallagher