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First National Bank

MONMOUTH, OREGON

The Herald

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RICHARD B. SWENSON
Editor & Publisher

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Monmouth Meditations

Whoever is successful in the primaries in Polk county may be said to have deserved it for some hard work has been put in by all the candidates for offices for which there were contests.

The sea breezes have all the aspects of a settled affair and the weatherwise say that when the summer breezes start our prospects for rain for the season are over.

The latest thing to be attracted by the climate of Los Angeles is an invasion of caterpillars which are said to be so thick they cover the walks.

Looks as though the Ku Klux was maneuvering into a position to say "I did it." They are endorsing all of the candidates for senator.

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sandwich apiece and a cooky. Chinese, it seems, do not picnic. After much persuasion in pigeon English, an adequate amount of food for 10 husky hikers was finally packed into baskets and given over to Ah Chiu, the "boy" to carry. We started for a monastery half way up a mountain, called White Cloud. We crossed the river in a motor boat and then took an automobile for some distance, going with all the complacency of a picnic anywhere, regardless of the fact that the country is under martial law, and bandits are the rule rather than the exception. The theory seems to be that if you meet them you do and vice versa.

We descended from the automobile at the end of a rather large village in the usual crowd of interested Chinese, crossed a few paddy fields, passed an orchard of lieche trees, and came to a second village, a dirty place with pigs, dogs, chickens and children everywhere. The denseness of the population—the smells, the dirt—is depressing. Yet there are glimpses—a shrine to the kitchen gods seen through an arched doorway, a dim interior with a woman bent above some household task—that are not unpleasant. This village, however, which looks as though nothing appetizing could come out of it and nothing could be made there fit to eat, is the original place of a Chinese dish, a sort of noodle soup, known everywhere.

From this village again we followed a road. There is a saying in China that a road is good for 10 years and bad for 10,000. After perhaps an half hour's walk we reached a monastery taken over by the military. It must once have been a lovely spot, with its lotus pond, grey walls and fine old trees. But the leaves are cut from the lotus plants and the water is covered with a green scum. The gardens swarm with young men who are conscripted soldiers one day, bandits the next. A vender sells beer and firecrackers at the gate and the whole place reeks with unhealthy odors.

The temples in Canton are being torn down and the property sold to support the army. The temple of Five Hundred Genii, with its famous images, is pathetic in its state of demolition. The monasteries are commandeered. The general who does all this is a Christian. Will future generations blame this wholesale destruction, this irreverence for the past upon Christianity.

Until we reached the first monastery, there had been crowds upon the road, coolies bearing rice, driving water buffalo, soldiers, children playing in the roadway. After we left the monastery the roadway became a stairway of slick granite slabs and there was no one; no one living that is, but acres and acres of the habitations of the dead. The whole mountainside, bare of tree or bush, is one enormous cemetery. It presented a dreary aspect, indeed. Yet because we had left the crowded lowlands beneath us, the air was clean, not too hot, and sweet with the fragrance of flowers that grew by the road. We sent Ah Chiu down a ravine and he came back with an armful of scarlet and purple blossoms.

After climbing the slick steps for a mile or two we reached our objective, the second monastery. The path led around a turn of rocks to gray gates and a clump of trees. We entered an outer court through an inner gate and came to another court filled with growing plants and surrounded by small rooms. From somewhere beyond one heard the sound of running water. A smiling priest welcomed us, bade us sit and rest on the bamboo chairs at the entrance, and brought us hot tea, the teapot in a sort of fireless cooker of a basket caddy. When we had rested we wandered into every nook and corner, through the various courts built terrace fashion up the hill, into the kitchen, into the gardens, into the temple itself, where the gilt Buddha sat cross-legged and solemn on his lotus leaf, dishes of sweet smelling flowers, fruits and wine on the altar before him. We found the spring that dripped eternally from a long spout, sending its music through all the place. We ate our Christian lunch sitting on bamboo stools around a carved monastery table that an acolyte set for us in one small room off the first court. Everything was so spotlessly clean, so immaculate, I would not have been afraid to eat food out of that kitchen, nor to sleep in one of those bare, whitewashed rooms.

I carry away from the hours spent in the monastery a recollection of the smiling, friendly priest, who did not want his picture taken because his coat was not good enough; of vistas through arched doorways, the simplicity and yet infinite detail of roof and staircase and court; last of all, a vivid picture of Ah Chiu, a slight, almost childish figure in his white clothes, sitting alone in the upper court on the edge of the fountain, gazing into the still waters.

In the peace and serenity of the place we had forgotten all about bandits until just before we left. The men of our party were playing ball in the outer courtyard, when suddenly the gates filled with ragged, dirty people. They thronged in. Bandits? They looked it. But they were only a band of coolies on their way up the mountain, who had stopped to rest and to drink tea the priest brought them—only ten or a dozen, after all.

Last night I was awakened by much shooting. This morning I inquired if there had been a battle. But I had heard nothing more important than a celebration with firecrackers in a nearby village. Such a disappointment! In all this vague rumor and uneasiness there is nothing real. We came back from our picnic Sunday, not even footsore, thanks to the automobile and the motorboat.

P. S.—You might be interested to know that, although I came down from Canton by a day boat without mishap, the next day pirates boarded the boat and carried off some \$20,000 in loot. The feeling of uneasiness has foundation after all. I was lucky in coming the day I did.



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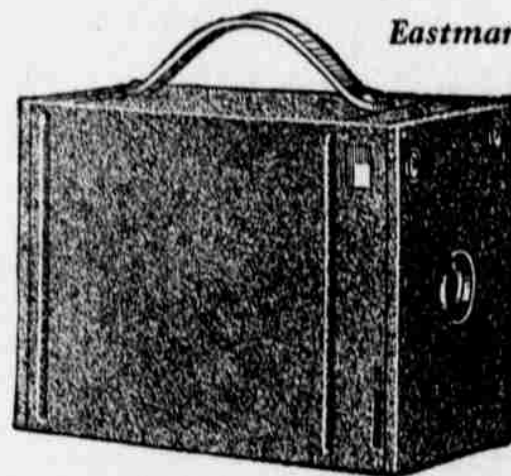
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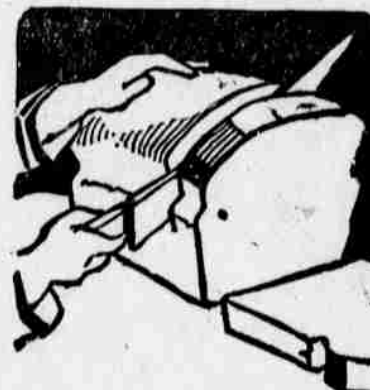
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