

Beirut Hashish Smoker's Den May Be Disappointment

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
The wickedest thing you'll see in a Beirut hashish smoker's den is an Esquire calendar on the wall.

Anyone expecting to see Oriental vice at its worst would be sadly disappointed. Doesn't even compare with newspaper stories about marijuana parties in the United States.

Hashish is something like marijuana, but comes from a different plant. The plant flourishes in Lebanon's rich Bekaa Valley and draws such a fat price that peasants are tempted to neglect wheat and fruit growing in favor of hashish. Regularly, the government destroys hashish plantations, only to have them crop up again when the government turns its back.

Imagine you're pretending to be drunk and almost a deaf mute in the company of an Arab. The entrance to the den has an atmosphere of Oriental mystery. It is located inside a walled compound in the dark port district of Beirut. Inside, after the usual whispered conversation through a tiny window in the main gate, the smoke-filled den is well lighted. Around the walls, seedy clients sit quietly on low straw-bottomed stools. At intervals, a waiter makes the rounds with a hashish pipe, giving each man a quick puff.

The pipe is a cup-shaped burner set on top of a bottle of water, through which the smoke is filtered. The bamboo stem is about two feet long. After each puff, the customers burst into fits of coughing. Otherwise, all is quiet and orderly.

Advertisements from American magazines and Hollywood pinups plaster the walls. The most daring is the Esquire calendar, featuring a girl in a transparent negligee.

Clients wore Western clothes, with only an occasional red fez giving the place an Oriental touch. All were men. Almost all were from the lowest level of life.

By American standards, the hashish smoke was cheap—roughly 10 cents a puff. For a dollar, an experienced addict could have a big evening. But a dollar represents a big part of a month's wages to these men. One blind fellow spent his days begging on street corners so he could enjoy hashish at night. The other clients were mostly porters, beggars, pickpockets and unemployed hoodlums.

Instead of stimulating these people to violence or excess, the blue smoke of the hashish pipe led them into a dream world far from the sordid life of Beirut's slums. The more they smoked, the quieter they became. My guide ex-

plained that most of them were having dream romances with the Esquire girl on the wall. "If these people were not dream- guide explained. "Remember this: no hashish addict ever goes Communist."

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PLOT

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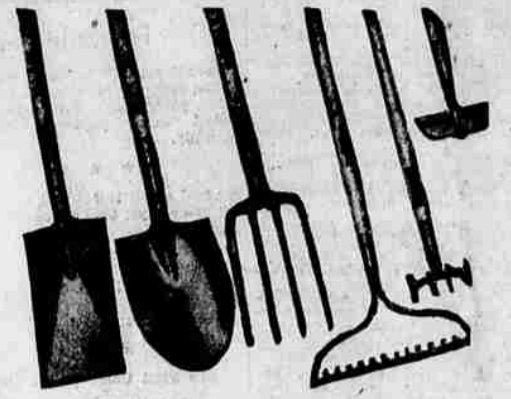
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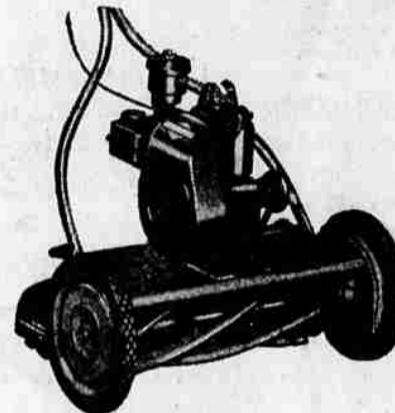
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