

NOTES OF A WAIKIKI BEACHNIK:

THE MIGHTY BATTLE AGAINST THE MYNAH BIRDS



By H. ALLEN SMITH

*Hawaii is indeed a glorious place:
where else could you find
such valiant creatures which
refuse to bow to the will of man?*

Here is the outrageous tale told by a master humorist

EDITORS' NOTE

■ Fred Allen once described H. Allen Smith as "weighing about 110 pounds with his bridgework in and the complete works of Dale Carnegie under his arms." That weight would increase considerably if Smith started lugging around his own writings, even as light and breezy as they are. Since 1941, he has delighted audiences with 18 books, the latest of which, "Waikiki Beachnik," you are about to sample.

Not that this reputation did Smith much good in Hawaii. He learned that nobody since Captain Cook has staked a claim to as much of the Pacific as James Michener, author of "South Pacific" and the current best seller, "Hawaii."

"In fact," says Smith, "one of the first things I did on arrival in Hawaii was to check in with him and apply for my license. He controls all literary endeavor in the Pacific. This Ocean belongs to him, scribblewise. If anybody else wants to write about it, he must make application to Mr. Michener and state his qualifications, and then deliver one wheelbarrow load of coconuts to the Michener apartment on Lewers Road in Waikiki and, after that, perhaps he will get his license. When Mr. Michener handed over my papers, he said, 'Remember now, no laughs.' And I replied, 'Don't worry.'"

Here, then, is a witty tale proving, we think, that Mr. Smith didn't quite keep his promise to Mr. Michener.

EVERYBODY IN HAWAII knows about the mynah birds and especially about the mynah birds at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Waikiki. The window of our room overlooks the automobile entrance to the hotel, and in the center of this beautiful courtyard is a banyan tree that looks to be almost as big as the hotel itself. Its branches are inhabited by mynah birds, several hundred thousand of them, judging from the noise they make.

For a day or two this is a major nuisance, and a majority of the travelers who check in at the Royal are soon bellowing at the management, demanding that something be done about those jabbering birds. It has been one of the hotel's problems for years.

From newspaper files and from hotel employees, I have assembled the facts concerning the campaign against the mynah birds which ended in the defeat of Jack Fischbeck, then manager of the Royal Hawaiian.

The main battleground was the big banyan in the entrance court. Mr. Fischbeck began by having a dozen hoses strung into the court and a dozen streams of water turned into the trees. The mynahs loved it, frolicking in the water and screaming their delight.

Mr. Fischbeck then tried firecrackers, tying them to the lower limbs of the banyan and touching them off all at once; the mynahs behaved like children on the Fourth of July, and

some witnesses said they jumped up and down to show their pleasure. So Mr. Fischbeck had his warriors turn Roman candles into the tree, and watched with satisfaction as the birds swarmed out of the foliage and flew across Kalakaua Avenue like a great black cloud.

"Head for the hills, you dirty dogs!" cried Mr. Fischbeck, jubilant and triumphant on the entrance steps to the hotel. Within an hour every mynah was back in the tree, and Mr. Fischbeck was assembling more Roman candles when someone told him he might burn down both the tree and the hotel, so he decided to try other weapons.

Maintenance men spent half a day tying dozens of strong ropes to the limbs of the banyan, each rope extending down to the ground. At periodic intervals, for several days, bellboys and other employees would troop into the court. Each man would take hold of a rope and pull down on it, putting his whole weight on it, bending the limbs toward the ground. Then Mr. Fischbeck, again standing on the steps, would cry, "Fire!" Each man would let go of his rope, all the limbs would spring upward, and mynah birds would be thrown all over the landscape. They simply loved it—they were like kids enjoying the rides at Coney Island. The limbs would spring upward, hurling them into the cerulean sky, and they'd all come back, chattering and giggling, and take their places for the next cry of "Fire!"

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