

The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

Mandarin on the Road

Editor's Note: *The Bowling Green* is pleased to translate excerpts—carefully chosen—from a letter of the Old Mandarin to one of his cronies in China. We have had to abbreviate: Oriental philosophers like to expound their thoughts in full, with many divarications.

The "Idlers of the Bamboo Grove" (sometimes translated "Tipplers") are the direct descendants of the group of poets founded by Li Po 1200 years ago. It is the oldest literary club in the world. See Herbert Giles's fascinating *History of Chinese Literature* (Appleton), p. 152.

EXCELLENCY, *Thinker of Long Thoughts*!—I shall not return to China this summer. This Hegemony of Haste, passing (on the whole, with enviable tranquillity) through deep social change, is too interesting. Particularly at this season, when the Sons of Speed are on the road in swarms, the time is valuable for observation. Even after all these years there is much I do not understand, and probably misinterpret. But I tell you plainly what I see. You say that when the Idlers of the Bamboo Grove retire to the pagoda for wine and contemplation they read aloud my letters. Salute them from the ancient expatriate who has learned from these delightful "folks" (their name of affection for themselves) to exonerate himself from the burden of thought. (Yet there are sad symptoms that this most persistent of human maladies may eventually infect the Americans also.) . . . Give my love to the comeliest of the serving maids. I am not sure of her name—I think it was Po Lil Chile—but I remember her pretty ankles.

A few notes on a trip, by gasoline-litter (motor palanquin) in the great province of New York. . . . Many signposts along the way commemorate events in the history of this nation; particularly where something happened to the detriment of the British or Red Indians, whom these people seem to have disliked with equal fervor. I should have been pleased to pause and study some of these notices, feeling they were certain to arouse conjecture; but they usually come where the palanquin is travelling 40 and another vehicle just behind is impatient to pass. Besides, as my host casually remarked (on a steep slope of the Mountains that Kill Cats) his brakes were loose and it was difficult to stop. Sufflammation, I said, is not an American specialty; to which he made no answer. So our halts were only at replenishing stations, which my friend chooses by some occult principle, based on plumbing and the necessities of his

family. . . . Consideration for the female is a fundamental doctrine in this country; undoubtedly for that reason the British and Red Indians fared so badly here.

. . . . From the Island of Length we crossed into the Island of Height by the upper roadway of the Bridge of Queens, and saw the magnificent sweep of their extraordinary buildings. One of the finest of these is a huge hospital (the design of which, I am told, was suggested by the Palace of the Popes at Avignon) where the patients have a salutary view of the hastening vehicles over the bridge; thus those already injured in traffic are encouraged by watching those who are about to be. At a pause in a crowded street a peddler urged us to buy a toy called "Joe Penner's Duck." This, I vaguely gathered, was an instance of the native passion for catchwords, fetiches and jocose effigies which are suddenly popularized by voices in air or print and flood the country in recurring spasms. Another example would be the frequency of legend about a well-formed actress, Miss West, who has become their mythical Venus Callipyge or Venus Genetrix. It would be difficult to imagine in a civilization of more age and lassitude, such delightful enthusiasm aroused by familiar mammalian fact. Perhaps it shows how deeply (even if subconsciously) the American male resented the epicene tendency of his women a few years ago. Or perhaps it shows a return (after the Era of Fiscal Effusion) to the simpler pleasures; as they used to say in Chicago during the Great Deficit, Wine, Women and Song turned to Beer, Momma, and the Radio. Or perhaps (most likely of all) it shows nothing except that the enjoyment of stupid old men (like Keyserling, Spengler, Pareto, and myself) is attempting to account for things. Some of the folklore about Miss West is difficult for the foreigner to understand: for instance the riddle about the Province of Montana. . . .

Going up the Drive Beside the River that bright Monday morning I noticed two unexpected things. One, a neat little horse-drawn green wagon trotting uptown. *Spick & Span Laundry*, it said. If my dividends continue to fail I shall probably have to take to the laundry business myself (surely there is no occupation more genuinely serviceable) so I was interested. Messrs. Spick and Span, I assume, are two alert Jewish fellows: I have seen in the Book of Telephones (the best reference work on sociology) that they also own a dairy, a window-cleaning business, and a hosiery. Other memorable glimpse was an old ship of sails, *Tusitala*, still at her long mooring on that barren shore. When salty tide sweeps up the

Henry Hudson River it must itch at her keel. She lies there, under the high cliffs of apartment houses, like a poem that got stranded in an anthology of prose.

Across the Bridge of George Washington we were now out and away, in the clear. Young men beside the road embarrassed me by a fixed glance and gestures of the thumb seeming derogatory; but these (my host explained) intend no disdain; on the contrary they are Desiderators of Hitch. Disregard them, said my friend: the litter is full; besides, the driver's responsible for any injury to a non-paying guest. (Which I also was, I reflected.)

It was the first of the month of Julius, the beginning of the great holiday season, and most vehicles were loaded with camping and æstivating gear; some families were packed into bright-colored tax-palanquins which sped along as though demoted by escape from the city.

You will remember, O Lover of Detailed Information, that I sent you several large-scale maps to identify my inquiring excursions in this remarkable country. To these I pray you refer. We crossed a small corner of the Province of Innovated Jersey; what my host describes as the Scot-tie Country, for indeed that section is greatly given to the breed and sale of Scottish terriers. In dogs—as in wine, sporting gear, dress clothes, literature, steamships, headwaiters, perfumery, lecturers, and all other luxuries—the Americans are distrustful of their own products. See on the map Hohokus, Saddle River, and Ramsey, all of which I thought attractive; and Ramsey placards itself as "the 3rd healthiest place in the U.S." I was eager to stop and inquire about the other two, and why, but my host was urging his car forward, anxious for more truly savage scenes. When near Sloatsburg, in the Hills of Ramapo, he saw a sign advertising overalls, he announced that we were really in the country. Where the Blue Jeans Begin, he added; a remark not worth repetition save that it reminds me of an interesting philology: the word *jean* (coarse blue cotton cloth, worn by the American coolies) is corrupted from the name Genoa. Now at a roadside counter we halted for Beer and Hamburgers; the latter are fried patties of triturated beef, augmented (unless you expressly veto) with onion. My host, who falls readily into casual conversation, asked Mrs. Wanamaker (who manages the stand) if she were related to the renowned mandarin of that name. "No," she said; "if we were maybe we wouldn't have to work so hard." . . . My own acquaintance with the late Mr. Wanamaker was limited to the literary form invented by him, the Depart-

ment Store Essay. These homiletic maxims (or minims), respectfully known as The Writings of The Founder, were in praise of piety, patriotism, and other encouragements of the bland, benign, and beautiful. Considered as opuscles of prose they were opaque in style but mercifully brief. . . . A study of our Chinese epigram-form known as the *stop-short* would be of great value to American writers. But it is amusing that every nation considers the others so unnecessarily verbose. . . .

Sentimentalists often deplore advertising along the highways. Not I. Often these notices are valuable glimpses of the national psychology. Admirable lyrics, and much in the sly humor of our own race, are those in honor of a shaving unguent; they are cunningly spaced on succeeding posts so that they may be comfortably read at about 50 miles per hour. They inculcate the virtues of prudence or æsthetics. I hoped my host would notice:—*Keep well to the right—Of the oncoming car—Get your close shaves—From the 1-pound jar*; and this, again indicative of the national delicacy toward women:—*If you think—She likes your bristles—Walk barefooted—through some thistles*. As this shaving cream comes from Burma it naturally has some of our Oriental subtlety.

I had supposed that the County of the Sullivans, of whose beauty I had heard, was chiefly Irish or Celtic. This however was not so, at any rate along Road Number 17. From the town of Goshen onward the instruction of Genesis 45, 10, has been taken seriously. Surely characteristic of American paradox was to find, in the heart of this inland region (in the town of Monticello) eating houses proclaiming "Chinese and Sea Food." So does this heteropathic nation always hanker for that which is difficult, different, or far-away. To be indigenous, here, is to be indigent . . . in Chicago, I remember, the most prosperous cafés are those which represent themselves to be London chop-houses or Heidelberg beerhalls. . . . Of course the most creative artists are usually hybrid; our Chinese lethargy is probably due to inbreeding? The great advantage of America, from the point of view of humor and eventual artistic achievement, is the strong infusion of Irish and Jewish, whose nimble wit and excessive volatility prevent the dull Saxon temperament from subsiding into its customary stupor.

A slightly ferocious feeling is imparted to this pretty upland region by the frequent repetition of the word Kill in their names of place. The early settlers must have been a bloodthirsty lot: not only are cats killed in those mountains but beaver, deer, bear, and I dare say an occasional pedestrian. Thither also prizefighters usually retire for strengthening before their combats. Among the vacationists it is often difficult to distinguish sex, except where a Miss Western contour is unmistakable; for all wear stopshort breeches of extreme

truncation, and are grilled roast-fowl-color by sun. This is well: to be incessantly reminded of the disparities of gender is stimulating for poets but it is incompatible with philosophy. . . .

We lunched at a clean little eating-house in the pleasant town of Roscoe, served by a lady called Kathryn who makes good pie. The menu said "An American Restaurant with Scotch Prices," which alarmed me as I had no Scotch money with me. . . .

Now we began to see country of sweet charm. We followed young waters of the Delaware and Susquehanna Rivers, those magnificent streams of which the Province of Penn has made so much talk it is forgotten that their beauty begins in the Province of New York. (So is the true origin of reality often unremembered.) My host showed himself an imperfect citizen in that he turned off from the main ways and followed the lovely and unfrequented Road 79. This was at the bifurcation of Windsor where we paused at a replenishing station. These pumps of plenty, where Distance and Locomotion are miraculously distilled from tall bright-painted standpipes, are (as I have told you before) the true wayside shrines of the American folk; chapels of ease in their great religion of Let's Itinerate. In spite of modern mechanism and sanitation these places preserve some of the old kindness of the livery stable, the inn, the crossroads store. On a chair in this gasoline sanctuary at Windsor the check-board was laid out, ready for play when a pause should occur in service. Checkers (my host explained), like the overalls noted earlier, is a sign of the real country.

Road 79, beautiful and sparse, brought us all the way to Ithaca. I will write more later.

This, O Student of Truth, from him whose inward notions are ever at thy command,

THE OLD MANDARIN.

Interpreting the Orient

(Continued from page 4)

tant piece of evidence in Carthaginian religion on the authority of a history of science written by two natural scientists. Even among the Orientalists of recognized standing his choice of sources is often totally misleading, as when we find Maspero's writings of a generation ago adduced to prove so important a conclusion as the Sumerian origin of Egyptian writing. It is very doubtful whether in his best days Maspero could have read a single sentence in Sumerian, and since his time our knowledge of Sumerian has been so developed that it is totally transformed and no one any longer believes that it had the slightest connection with the origin of Egyptian hieroglyphics. On the authority of Maspero, De Morgan, and Hall as sources, we are told that the potter's wheel "was not known in Egypt before the Fourth Dynasty," although the researches of first hand investigators like Reisner have demonstrated that it is older.

The invention of "movable type cast of metal" by the Chinese is discussed on the authority of an outline history of China, the authors of which have quoted what they have to say on this subject from the librarian of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, who would not presumably desire to appear as an authority on Chinese archeology. In this discussion, as well as in that of the invention of rag paper by the Chinese early in the Christian era, the works of Bertold Laufer would have been final and decisive, but they are not even mentioned in the author's general bibliography.

Bulletins in the daily press are of course very useful, but they cannot be employed as a final presentation of fact until the archeologist or other scientist involved has published some authoritative statement. We find that Mr. Durant's

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

<i>Title and Author</i>	<i>Crime, Place, Sleuth</i>	<i>Summing Up</i>	<i>Verdict</i>
MURDER IN HASTE <i>Garnett Weston</i> (Stokes: \$2)	Rancho in Cal. scene of quartet of grisly killings solved by a lovable hobo who exits gracefully.	Author rings sinister changes on an old tune with plenitude of hair-raising measures, and nuptial chimes at end.	Excellent
THE HIDDEN DOOR <i>Arthur Gask</i> (Macaulay: \$2.)	Eerie old castle: sinister nobleman: slick art-thieves: strange vanishings: shrieks—and Gilbert Larose, the garate detective.	When the bloated bodies began bobbing around in the subterranean cistern your squeamish old judge passed right out.	Grisly Gothic
A QUESTION OF PROOF <i>Nicholas Blake</i> (Harpers: \$2.)	School pest strangled in haystack, with suspicion pointing at headmaster's wife and B. F. Nigel Stangeways drinks tea, solves crime.	The psychoanalysis in this begins to seem a bit dated, particularly in the denouement, but characters and writing are engaging.	Good