

Pagsanjan: At the End of a Perfect Road

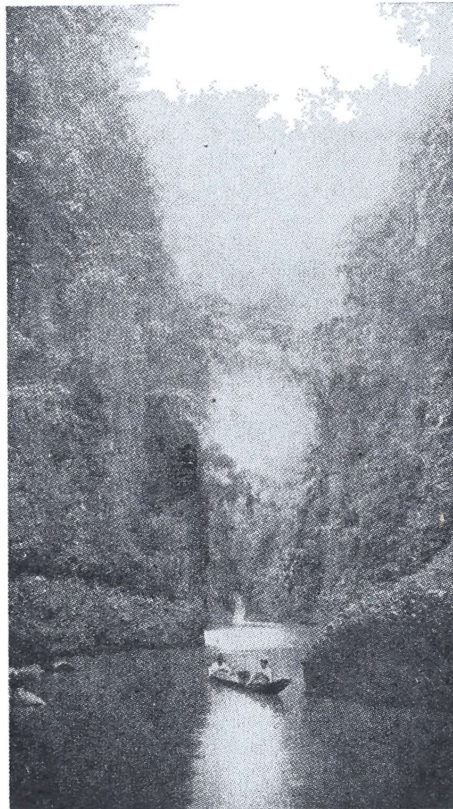
It seems in general to be the case in the Philippines that motor-car trips are made at too high speed. There seems too to be an obvious explanation of this circumstance in the fact that motor cars are imported, and along with them motoring customs: there are certainly many roads in parts of the United States—desert and not nearly so well adorned by nature as this part universally is—whose chief charm is in their terminals. Such roads have the great virtue of ending, and commonly in some attractive city; and the aim therefore of the motorist is to put the road behind him and the city around him—the city to obliterate haunting unpleasant impressions, and a good warm bath to remove the desert grime. Such dismal travel induces the motorist, quite naturally, to speed from the gaunt and repelling embrace of the outdoors into the comparatively genial atmosphere of crowded city traffic and conventional if artificial comforts common to urban communities.

Through Nebraska, across the wide Dakotas or the weltering California valleys... speed.

Perhaps such circumstances, kin to the excitement of actually passing through Peoria or Marshalltown, have largely contributed to the exotic phases of our insular motor habits. Motor-car manufacturers brag copiously of the speed per hour their machines can make, and drivers become either famous or notorious wearing huge-cushioned tires off the cars in speed contests. Owners almost unconsciously become amateur competitors; and anyway, it is almost definitely an attribute of the age... speed. When there is still reserve power under the hood, like mettle in a thoroughbred animal, the constant temptation is to bring it out and put it on exhibition... speed. When you have made the other chap eat your dust, you have demonstrated superiority over his lumbering old wagon. These motor necessities and conveniences of today, we must remember, were the rare and expensive luxuries of yesterday. In addition, speed itself is exhilarating.

The world speeds, and a motorino Philippines joins in the rout with all earnestness. The temptation (for it

is nothing less in this environment) is enhanced no doubt by the business men make of motoring from provincial points into Manila. At all the little towns and villages where one would naturally incline to linger and lend himself to the beauty all about him, people unfortunately live. As these matchless little places are their homes, they find them humdrum and flee from them frequently as fast as wheels will turn. The more prominent of these people, who therefore have the more powerful cars, have



Pagsanjan Gorge

Manila business errands awaiting them: they speed to appointments with bankers and business associates: in glum impatience they whirl along the hem of the green robe of Mount Makiling; and at a sign-posted point in the coco-broidered ruffle they are swished off and down into the valley.

The volcano, almost offended, fairly boots them away from its boundaries, and retires in a dudgeon behind walls of gray clouds. They have had, in fact, a ride through wonderland; but creatures of the

times they are, and they have thought busily through it all of far graver things than winsome landscapes and purling waterfalls tinkling in the rough jungle. The echo of their impatient motor horn answers the mood of the mountain. The enchantment never dares or deigns to cross the graveled roadside.

Quite all right all this; and assuredly the motor car more than the fountain pen and the pullman sleeper is the respectable servitor of commerce. It is no undignified world that is commercial, and all the world is commercial... at times. By perfecting commerce it is learning, too, to take leisure from commerce, by which deduction we begin to approach our particular objective. This objective is simply that our Philippine roads, save those of the Luzon valley in summer, when the stubble is parched, are quite too beautiful in themselves and too delightfully environed to be skimmed over in a maze of motor speed and machine rumble.

For instance, who would speed through Ireland? Yet even Ireland does not offer the traveler any natural beauty excelling that of the Philippines. This may explain something of what is meant. Still, too much loitering is as interperate as too great haste: as it was the intention in this paper to motor to Pagsanjan Falls and back to Manila for late supper, it were as well to get really underway.

The fifteen kilometers out through Malate, Pasay, Las Piñas and all the group of bayshore places will not be rich at all in appearance or quaintness—

*"The great road from the city
Goes sweeping on its way,
And there is traffic in it,
And many a horse and cart—"*

But at Las Piñas, at a challenging sign, "The Forks Hotel," the road leaves the shore and pushes toward the country—

*"... The little roads of Brefny
Are quiet all the day,
And the little roads of Brefny
Are dearer to my heart."*

If one will delve into the legends and folklore of the region we are now passing, on a gray smooth road

that leads into the mountains, he shall discover stories equal in fancy and fable to those the poet limned in Irish Brefsny.

Elevation increases rapidly; the driver shifts gears... up, up, steadily, and then around a turn and downward, quickly, brakes on, hand steady at the wheel, and very neatly pulling up at the plaza of San Pablo.

From San Pablo into Pagsanjan, San Pablo being halfway point, landscape, lake-view, mountain, valley and cloud and sky will be the same, only more so. And not so much will be seen and sensed going up as to eliminate all thrills coming down. Best of all, homeward, will be one of those sudden, apparently dreadful but really harmless moods of Philippine climate: a bank of clouds rolling up to hide the moon, baleful in shadow, and torrents of rain deluging grove and slope and ledge. Sit quietly back in the car (the Filipino is a trustworthy driver), and note the lightning flashes laying out piecemeal the silvery way ahead, between the storm-bent palms. It's downgrade too, mostly: "there's a long, long way a-winding into the land of... dreams."

The reason we went to Pagsanjan was to lunch at a quaint inn, enjoy fried chicken country style, bamboo-shoot salad, perhaps a Chinese dish or two, learn that the town has sent more young men and women to American universities than any other town in the Philippines outside of Manila, that it has always, for centuries, been a resort, and also to experience the reason for this—maneuver, that is, the rapids up to the falls—first or second at your choice and shoot them on the way down to the landing again. Pagsanjan Falls can be briefly defined as a bucolic poem. In these tumbling waters and in the gorge itself the utter wildness of nature in the tropics is succinct, but rather beyond ordinary description. The native name for the falls is prettier, revealing also their poetic perception. They call these falls *Talong Talahib*, because covering the prairies at the head of the falls, flanking the banks of the Pagsanjan river, are broad fields of pampas for which their name is *talahib*. In bloom each blade of this rank growth bears a wand-like flower silver in hue, or catching the gray of the nun-hooded mountains, perhaps. In the lightest breeze the bloom assumes an aspen motion. Upon a moonlit night a *talahib* field is nothing less than a troop of disciplined fairies executing silently a

constant hosanna. A storm bows every head very low, and the flood piles mean debris about the roots; but in the morning, once more all is bright, fresh, full of an unspoken, scarce hinted seduction.

A laughing herdboys plucks off a *talahib* wand as he trails his languid drove of *carabaos* off to the grazing plots, and cocks it into the band of his hat to give himself an air and follow some heroic endeavor of a herdboys imagination. A foot too ambitious at the gas deprives the traveler in the Philippines of a great deal of that of which, elsewhere in a land of like loveliness, he would not tolerate the sacrifice.

There are no mean unpleasant aspects to the Philippines outdoors, but every new prospect on every winding road is highly pleasing. The thatched hut sheltered by a bamboo clump, or in the midst of a coconut planting, simply belongs. Its neutral brown and weathered colors blend and harmonize with whatever makes up the whole scene. It is a great mistake for tourists or ordinary travelers to hasten their itineraries in these islands, which offer to the senses, to the soul, so much more than other places in the Far East. The thing to do is to determine upon a large leisure for any contemplated motor trip in the islands, and shorten the distances accordingly if necessary. Pleasure is enhanced immeasurably by contact with the people. This outline of the trip to Pagsanjan and the compensations of a perfect road is intended secondarily as a criterion for Philippine motor travel. Some invaluable reward, it is again em-

phasized, flows from every contact with the people, the hospitable peasantry. On the return trip our tire puncture happened at Biñan. Figures strolled up through the twilight and merged into men and children willing to be of assistance. This was not required, but they answered questions. It was learned that general contentment prevailed because an unusually large rice crop was assured, that this rice crop was customarily divided equally between landlord and tenant, that the riches of the landlords were depended upon by the tenants, who during off seasons borrowed on the credit of the coming crop. The landlords were very reasonable (such is the naiveté of the peasant folk!), only requiring a peso and a half at harvest time in return for a peso loaned as much as three or four months before.

The compensations of an old community with a settled culture kept young men from migrating to homestead regions... Now a new tire was on, and we drove on into town, thus ending a perfect day.

Station KZIB...

(Continued from page 56)

ist. Prof. Heinman discusses art in an informal and entertaining way, and, at the same time, gives short instructions to the radio audience in drawing a picture. Listeners draw as he talks, and send in their results to him for judging. The professor awards prizes to the best drawings.

"The Heacock Shopping Review," on the air every morning at 8:00 o'clock, gives timely hints to the busy housewife on gifts, fashions, and home needs.



This lady can still smile while shooting Pagsanjan rapids in a frail banca.