

That First Trip to the States . . .



WE DON'T know how it is going to be for you—or has been—but when we hit these shores a good many years ago to flirt with higher education in an American institution, we found that it wasn't the curriculum that baffled us but the customs.

Of course we had seen plenty of Hollywood movies, we had read books about this wide land, and we were pretty sure that Red (or American) Indians didn't raid trains any longer or scalp strangers. For that matter, we were reasonably certain that gangsters didn't habitually ride up and down the streets of most cities machine-gunning each other. We say "reasonably certain," for we were young but cautious.

We had come from one of the great cities of the world and were therefore not unfamiliar with public modes of transportation, crowds, elevators, pickpockets, confidence men who would try to sell you

By an Asian Student

spurious articles of great value for trifling sums, wild women and spirituous liquors. We were clad in the shining armor of youth, cynicism and knowledge—or so we thought.

The ship docked (this was before the days of trans-ocean airplanes) and we set out to view the sights of this new land. As we had not been provided with unlimited gold we thought it best to use public means of conveyance. We knew where we wished to go; we had made inquiries, and in due time we boarded a streetcar—or tram, if you wish. So far, so good.

CAME NOW the question of payment. Standing before us was an imposing gentleman in a blue coat with silver buttons. We inquired as to the price of the ride. The transportation official gave us a look indicat-

ing—we imagine—disdain, and said in a bored voice:

"A nickel, Bud, a nickel."

(This was a long time ago, you understand.)

Being familiar with this American expression for five cents, we fished out a coin and handed it to the man in blue. He brushed it aside, indicated a fiendish contraption attached to a pole and gestured.

"In the box. Put it in the box."

The "box" he referred to had a sort of regal crown consisting of a series of holes punched in a steel circle topping a cube of glass and steel that gave off clicking sounds as the custodian of this magic machine gave an attached lever a series of impatient whirls. We looked at this device, started to sweat, and finally asked:

"Which hole should I drop it in?"

"Any hole, Bud," said Mr. Blue in tones of exasperation. "Just drop it in and get inside."

We did just that, and have been doing so ever since, although we still don't understand how this invention of the devil is able to differentiate between the nickels, dimes and pennies that are dropped into its maw. (Of course, the price isn't a nickel anymore.)

Now, in Our City, things were done a little differently. You boarded a streetcar and

sat down, or stood up and hung onto straps. In due time a conductor came through the car and you bought a ticket. None of this pay-as-you-enter nonsense. Strips one of dignity, it does. Perhaps it is more efficient, though. Who knows. As our first experience with American customs, however, it has had a lasting trauma on our feelings toward public conveyances in this country.

BUT LET us move on to less painful experiences. Like our first experience in a restaurant—or a lunch counter. On the same day, after having disembarked from the nightmare streetcar and wandered here and there craning our neck at the buildings and the flora and fauna, we began to feel the pangs of hunger. We entered what we now understand is known as a short-order place. (You know, sandwiches and stuff.) We sat at the counter on a stool. The place was clean—a most aseptic—and we thought that mama would have approved of this. No danger of catching American cholera here. A waitress (quite pretty, too) dressed in a white uniform stood before us and handed us a menu. We studied it at some length until several dry coughs indicated that impatience had set in on the part of our serving lass. Being somewhat unnerved after our transportation

experience, we hurriedly indicated one of the "Specials" for the day.

"Whaddya want a drink?" asked the Lady in White.

"Milk," we said, reverting to the infantile. (Perhaps it was a cry for succor.)

"Mile high and ride the range!" the waitress called, turning her head in an indeterminate direction.

Not having the code book at the time, this alarming bit of information almost convinced us that the cowboys were again taking over the town, replete with six-guns and high spirits. Actually, it was simplicity itself, once you analyze it. Not that you have the time to do so during the years you spend here working on a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. In any case, what we finally received was a Denver Sandwich and a glass of milk.

"That'll be four bits—and two cents tax," our semantic scrambler announced.

"Beg your pardon?" we es-sayed, battered, bruised and confused.

"Pay me," she said. "Fifty two cents."

We did.

Now, really, we do these things so much better in Our City. Who would think of asking you to pay for bread and meat before you had eaten? Such an insult! Like the streetcar, though, efficient.

BEATEN, but undismayed, we made our way to the railway office so that we might determine how we were to reach our final destination. Across the counter from us was a young man with a sympathetic face. We explained that we had just arrived from Asia and were on our way to keep a rendezvous with the Muses at Weebhawken (quaint, these native names) College in Scrimscrage, Pennyslashington. Ah, yes, said our man, studying a map and timetables and other paraphernalia, he thought it could be arranged.

"Which 'rout' would you like to take?" he asked, ingenuously.

Now, while English may not have been (and still isn't obviously) our strong point, we had a vague idea that "rout" indicated a mob or a state of confused riot—an ignominious defeat, so to speak.

We had enough of American routs for the day. What we wanted was a quiet route (pronounced "root") back to our lodgings where we might ponder on the mores of this strange land in peace and wonder what our future might be among the savages.

Now, we trust that this will not be the sort of experience you will encounter on your first day here. Perhaps you will be much better oriented. We hope so. There are, however, a few

points that may make your path less rocky at the start. (We cannot pretend to cover more than a few basic matters here.)

It would be well to remember that in the United States you pay as you board a public conveyance. Ask the price. If you have the correct amount handy, drop it in the box. Ask how if you are confused. If you do not have the correct change, hand the driver a coin or a bill, but not over one dollar. He will give you some coins. Remember that he has simply given you small change. **He has not taken out the fare.** You must now put the exact amount of the fare in the box. (All this is designed to prevent petty theft on the part of the drivers.)

When you go to a restaurant—unless it is a better class place where you sit at tables and are served—or a cafeteria, it is generally customary to pay on being served. No harm will be done in any case if you try to do so. If this is not the custom at the establishment, you will be told something like: "Please pay the cashier on your way out."

WE NOW come to foods. Many of you will have dietary taboos. Let us first turn to sandwiches. The ubiquitous American hamburger is made of beef. It contains no pork. Ham and bacon are pork products,

although a beef bacon is available in some stores. Hot dogs, or frankfurters on a bun, are a form of sausage. In most cases American hot dogs are made from beef. Cheese is cheese anywhere in the world; there are many, many varieties in the United States, the most common of which is called American and is a mild yellow form.

Egg is used in sandwiches in various ways. Devilled egg is nothing more than mashed hard-boiled egg and mayonnaise (oil, egg and vinegar). It contains no meat. Ham and egg, bacon and egg, are exactly what the name implies. Hot cakes and waffles are variants of pancakes (**chappaties**, etc.) and are made from flour and milk. French fries are potatoes fried in deep fat and are the same as the British "chips."

A pot roast is beef; **chili con carne**—also known simply as chili—contains beef. It is a hot Mexican dish and should be a favorite of those south-east Asians who do not shun beef. A milk shake is made from ice cream and milk; a malted milk shake (malt) is a milk shake with the addition of a small amount of malted milk powder—the kind they give to babies. Both are generally flavored with the addition of chocolate or fruit syrups. They are nourishing and tasty.

Coffee is coffee (very good in America), tea is tea (very bad in America) and milk is milk (sanitary in America).

The above is not intended as a complete list of foods. In most fairly large cities a variety of foods is available. But in the vicinity of campuses we have found that students seem to consume more than the national average of hamburgers, milk shakes and various kinds of sandwich.

WE NOW come to a rather delicate problem. In the United States, differing from many Asian and European nations, there are very few public toilets in cities. These will be found in parks, but not in the business and shopping areas. The best way is to enter a large department store, if there is one in the area, and ask someone for the "washroom." This is one American Puritanical euphuism for the toilet. Others are "restroom," "comfort station," and in the case of women, "powder room." If a department store is not handy, all service stations (gasoline or petrol stands) have this convenience. You will find service stations all over the place. Just go to one and ask for the "washroom" or "rest room." The facilities are almost invariably excellent and sanitary.

Another question we are often asked is about living ar-

rangements. When you first arrive in San Francisco or New York or wherever it may be, it is likely that the city will have a YMCA and a YWCA. These establishments are probably the most reasonable and safe places where you can stay while proceeding to your destination. You do not have to be a Christian, nor do you have to worry that any missionary work will be attempted. After you arrive at your destination, consult your Foreign Student Adviser about permanent or semi-permanent arrangements. If you are in distress while travelling, ask for Traveler's Aid.

Which brings us to the last subject: money. We will assume that if you are carrying a goodly sum it will be in the form of traveler's checks. If not, go to the first bank and get your dollars changed into this safe and convenient form of exchange. Never carry more than twenty dollars in cash.

MORE ON money: America is the home of the tip. We understand this word originally came from the initials of "To Insure Promptness" but today it is a national curse. Everyone from the bellboy in the hotel to the barber expects a tip and if he doesn't get one, feels insulted. A good rule of thumb for the student is 15 per cent. (Then per cent went by the board many long years ago.)

Do tip: waiters and waitresses (except in self-service restaurants), taxi drivers, bellboys, Pullman porters. **Do not tip:** airline stewardesses, salesgirls and salesmen, hotel clerks.

So, armed with this knowledge, go forth bravely. And do not heed the maxim: "When in trouble or in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout!" — **The Asian Student**

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Animal Oddities

THERE are barking lobsters and ants that are living tanks of honey.

These curiosities of natural history have been reported from Australia in the journal *Nature*, organ of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

The honey-carrying ants are reported by a scientist of the University of Adelaide. They are found, he says, in many parts of Central Australia, usually in arid country or near groves of certain blossoming trees.

They are modified worker ants that are stuffed either with honey or nectar day after day by other workers. This honey is stored in the abdomens, which swell to a half inch in diameter. This evidently is to feed the rest of the ant community during scarce periods.

The honey-carriers are eaten avidly by natives. The scientists analyzed the honey. It differed from most honey, he found, in containing a larger percentage of the fruit sugar fructose than of the more common glucose.

The barking lobster, or crayfish, is reported from Northern Australia. It makes a harsh, grating noise with the stubby antennae before its eyes. This sound can be reproduced even after the animal is dead. What purposes it serves is unknown.

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