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-- Overlook On Life --

By WARREN S. REEVE

The idea of "Overlook" is taken from the Overlooks provided for viewing panoramas along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

There is a book on the market entitled "Fires On The Plain", which is the translation of a best-seller in the Japanese language, by Shohei Oka. It was reported to be, literally, the best novel to come out of the war experiences of a Japanese; and, having read it, I agree that, though it is not a big book nor one that is going to be included among the classics of world literature, it is nevertheless in the artistry of its construction and in the originality of some of its observations not at all an insignificant piece of writing. It is a thriller; it evokes ones pity; and it is horrible. I would not recommend it to every reader of fiction. Some could "take it", and some could't.

It is the experience of a soldier in the Philippines in 1945 after Japan had surrendered when the remnant of Japanese troops were being chased by our American soldiers into the hills and jungles. There they wandered around foraging for food, of which there was practically none to be found, till finally, exhaus-

ted by starvation and disease, the most of them died. The book gives us the picture of the bestiality of men without any Christian faith when they are in the last extremities of a struggle for life.

The chief character of the story — Tamura is his name — survived the death march only for the reason that when he finally was at the end of strength and resources, he "blacked out", and while unconscious was picked up by American troops and nursed back to health in an American field hospital. In character and idealism, and in morality, this man is depicted as being "a notch" better than many of his comrades. But even they — many of them — when they were living in a peaceful and well ordered society at home were not the brutes that war turned them into, but were relatively decent, useful members of their community and nation. We would have considered them, could we have known them, as, on the whole deserving to be called civilized

people. But when taken out of peaceful, prosperous surroundings and thrust into the hideous maelstrom of combat and carnage, all the worst instincts within them were unleashed, and the vestiges of what goodness they had were drowned out, and they became fiendish, like animals at bay. I say, therefore, that the picture is gruesome, and not every one should read this book. But some people should.

This Tamura, the chief character in the book, is really the author himself, I judge. As a boy, he had evidently had contact with the Christian religion. Whether he had gone for a while to a protestant Sunday School, or whether he had been under the tutelage of Roman Catholic missionaries, is not stated. As he grew into adolescence and young manhood, he abandoned Christianity, telling himself that it was not consistent with modern scientific thought. For a substitute, he sought to construct for himself a philosophy of life more agreeable to his taste. Let me quote his own words about this:

(An agnostic education had separated me from what I then came to regard as childish delusions, and I had begun to evolve a 'system' that combined conformity to social demands and conventions, on the one hand, with a type of personal hedonism, on the other. "Hedonism. I may explain, is the name given to that view of life according to which one makes it his aim to get the most enjoyment out of life. The intelligent pursuit of happiness and pleasure describes the hedonist philosophy). In Japan, before the war, there were any number, of nice people for whom the combination of hedonism and social conformity were the basic principles of thought and conduct.

In his experience as described in "Fires On The Plain, the author finds that this was an inadequate philosophy of life. Under the awful stress of war, and when one was crawling day and night on the brink of annihilation, the "system" broke down, and many a man had nothing to put in its place.

Just a vestige of Christian influence stuck in Tamura's mind, and put him, as I suggested, "a notch" higher in morality and aspiration than most of his comrades. His views of God and of what we Christians believe to be the truth about life and salvation and eternity were pathetically inadequate, to be sure, and were vitiated by vagaries of thought and fancy. Yet there was enough validity in his outlook to save him from the worst offences against decency and purity. For one thing, he had a sense of guilt, and from the Christian point-of view, an honest awareness of guilt is the first step in direction of salvation. Tamura, had moreover, a faint and ill-defined aspiration, perhaps even a modicum of faith, that he might come at last to some kind of identification with the Supreme Being. After he had got back to Tokyo and was able to ponder the meaning of things, he put his feelings after faith in the form of conjectures:

"If I was beloved of God.
"If (when I 'blacked out') it was Christ who smote me (in order that I might be rescued by American troops and thus saved from myself)
"If (in this coma and in the new consciousness into which I awakened) this was a transfiguration of Christ Himself.

"If Christ had indeed for my sake alone been sent down to the Philippines.
"Then glory be to God."

With those words the book comes to a close.
After I had finished reading it, I too put questions to myself. Would Tamura (or Oka, the author) have proved himself a braver, nobler man during those fierce days in the Philippines if in his youth he had stuck by the Christian faith instead of rejecting it?

Would the story have been different if the men described had been Americans instead of Japanese? My answer to the latter query is that some among the Americans would have shown themselves noble; some would have given their lives for their mates. In the story as Oka narrates it, there was scarcely a man who was brave in the sense of being truly unselfish towards his companions. It seemed that

The Hermit Of Bald Mountain

By: J. B. King

Perhaps very few of us have ever heard of David Greer, the Hermit of Bald Mountain.

Of course this was a long time ago, early in 1800 to be exact when he came to Yancey from Buncombe county. He arrived in Buncombe county in 1798, from where no one knows, and found lodging in the home of Colonel David Vance, the first Clerk of Court for Buncombe county. While living in the Vance home Greer fell in love with one of the daughters of Colonel Vance who, according to reports, was a very lovely young lady.

However, Miss Vance could not return his affections and Greer, full of disappointments and irked by the turn of events, took himself and all his belongings to Bald Mountain, a lonely and rugged peak on the North Carolina-Tennessee boundary line not far from Burnsville. Here he set up his home in a cave close to a bold spring near the top of the mountain.

Greer was a well educated man and spent most of his time, when not hunting and fishing, reading and writing. Most of his writings was on the subject of religion and government. It was, perhaps, from his study and writings on government that caused him to set up his own laws for the rule of Bald Mountain, which he considered his own personal property. Any person who went on or near this mountain had to abide by the laws set up for his rugged domain.

One time the tax collector sent Greer word that he owed the county 75c pole tax and Greer sent him word that he would be in the next week to attend to the matter. Instead of paying the tax on his next trip to the county seat he attacked the courthouse with rocks and drove all the officials from the building. He then took his gun and went back to the mountain.

Not long after this event a man by the name of Holland Higgins, who lived in this section of the county, was hunting on the mountain and killed a deer. The fact that any man would invade his private domain and kill his game enraged Greer so much that he shot Higgins down in his tracks. For this crime he was arrested and tried for murder. However, the jury found that he was insane and acquitted him of the charge. Greer then went back to his mountain complaining of the injustice fate had always brought him.

A few months later Greer decided to abandon his cave; so he every one put his own escape ahead of saving the life of a "buddy". If the men described had been Americans — a cross-section of American soldiery — I expect that among them there might have been some who would have behaved no better than the Japanese. But I am confident that there would also have been some who would have let themselves die in sacrifice for a companion.

The tragedy of "Fires On The Plain" goes back ultimately to the fact that when these men were boys and young men, living in days of peace, they did not find a faith worthy of living and dying for. They either had not heard of Christianity at all, or if they had, they had been indifferent to it, perhaps even to hostile to it. If they were Buddhists or adherents of some Shinto cult, their moral collapse in the days of their suffering is a testimony of the inadequacy of such religious belief as they had. It emphasizes the terrifying urgency of seeking after the Lord while He may be found and calling upon Him while He is near. Perhaps we American Christians will some day have to answer to God for the apathy we have about taking Christ and His salvation to the people of other lands.

The conclusion of the book, which I have already quoted, is its brightest spot. I cannot think that the author could even tentatively say "Glory be to God" unless the statements of faith which he put in conjectural form were not the nucleus of a real faith springing from his inmost heart. I like to hope that they represent his faltering steps in the direction of a Savior who said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

went to the Tennessee side of the Bald and there he built for himself a small log cabin. Here he started his writings again. He wrote, had published and distributed a booklet in which he tried to justify himself for the killing of Higgins. However, this did not work because the friends of Higgins continued to show their displeasure in more ways than one. Some of his enemies found great pleasure in sending bullets crashing through his cabin at all times of the day or night.

It is said that Greer lived on Bald Mountain for 32 years and believed that it was given to each man to enact his own laws and live according to them.

One day Greer had an argument with a man from Tennessee by the name of Tompkins and as a result of this argument he made threats that he would shoot Tompkins on sight. Of course Tompkins, knowing the nature and violence of Greer, was very much concerned and alarmed about these threats. After consulting with his friends he decided to take the law into his own hands. He got his rifle and went out to meet Greer. The two met on a mountain trail and when they met Tompkins, without any hesitation shot Greer and killed him. Tompkins was never convicted for this killing because the people generally knew the violent nature of the Hermit of the Mountain and figured he got what he deserved.

Greer made a great impression on the country around Bald Mountain and many stories grew up about him, most of which were probably untrue.

CARD OF THANKS

We wish to express our thanks for the kindness and sympathy shown us during the illness and death of our beloved husband, father and grandfather.
Mrs. R. A. Bailey and family



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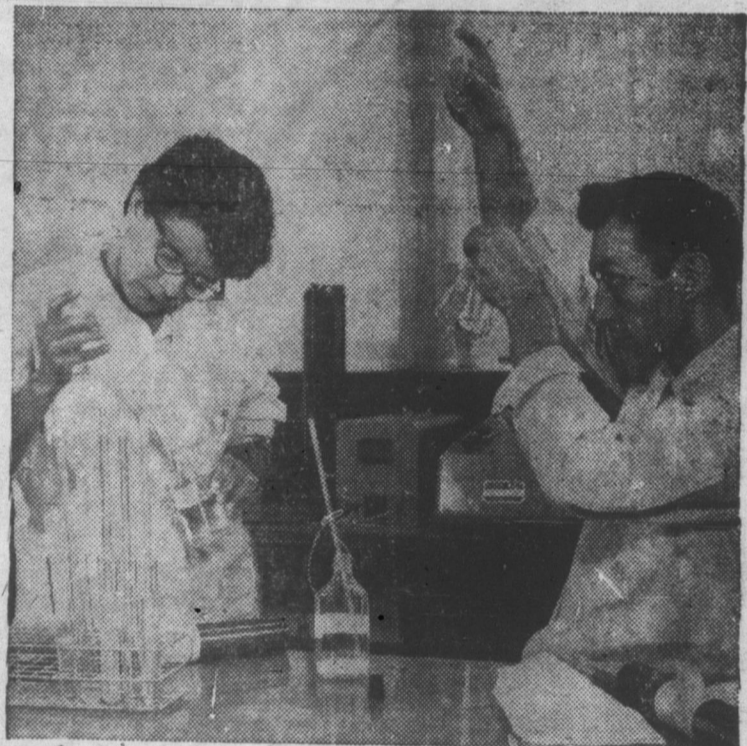
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March of Dimes Will Step-Up Virus Studies



PROBING FOR BREAK-THROUGH in virus research, Drs. Helen Van Vunakis, left, and James L. Barlow work in the Albany, N. Y., Laboratories of the New York State Department of Health. The doctors are separating a basic nucleic substance from the protein of the virus, working under a March of Dimes grant from the National Foundation. Expansion of virus studies is a major part of 1959 March of Dimes aimed toward greater victories in polio, arthritis, birth defects.

March of Dimes funds in 1959 will be used for breaking new medical scientific ground in the history-making virus research program of the National Foundation.

In fact, the virus research program of the National Foundation already is the largest of its kind in existence. Scientists under National Foundation grants have made some of the most creative medical advances of our time. They have blazed new trails not only in the fields of polio and polio prevention but also in the whole realm of medical knowledge.

Among these scientific milestones are: important breakthroughs in knowledge of encephalitis (sleeping sickness); important data on how insects transmit disease to man; the first successful method of growing polio virus in nonnervous tissue, without which the Salk vaccine could not have been created; discovery of a whole group of heretofore unknown viruses, called ECHO viruses, some of which are harmful to man; basic facts about the nature of viruses, normal and abnormal cells and nucleic acid, which has been called the "automatic pilot of life."

Some of these discoveries have an importance to medical science comparable to atomic energy's importance to physics. National Foundation research grants have received world recognition with Nobel prizes. Their explorations have pushed medical science ahead with giant strides. Over \$34,000,000 has been au-

thorized by the National Foundation for research since 1938. Current virus projects include exploring the damage inflicted on the unborn children of mothers attacked by newly discovered viruses; the possibility of viruses as a cause of arthritis; and effects of epidemics of the new viral agents that swept two states in 1957.

The theme for this January's March of Dimes is "Toward Greater Victories." The organization that made prevention of paralytic polio possible now is ready to begin attacks on other crippling diseases. Initial new goals are arthritis and birth defects. In these and other areas the role of the virus will be explored. At the same time scientists will attempt to find out about latent viruses that may be responsible for illness and disability many years after they first enter the body.

The National Foundation has reached a stage in virology where the chemical composition and structure of the virus is well enough known for the virus to be taken apart and for viruses to be used as tools to discover how cells act, grow and reproduce. Much of what science can do today in a virus laboratory is the result of research sponsored in the past by the March of Dimes.

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