

Diary of Some Months in Hell

HONG KONG AFTERMATH. By Wenzell Brown. New York: Smith & Durrell. 1943. 283 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by GWEN DEW

WENZELL BROWN was a professor at Lingnan University in Hong Kong when the city was attacked. During the siege he worked on British transport trucks, and thus was in the heart of actual fighting. The days of surrender when the Japs took possession of the city paint a picture of terror and cruelty. The early period spent in a small Chinese hotel, in squalor and filth, and crowded into cubicle-like rooms, starts the revelations of what it means to be a prisoner of the Japs.

The scene when the British soldiers are marched to jail for the duration, their uniforms covered with filth, many wounded and sick, brings realization of the indomitable spirit of Britain's soldiers. "Down they marched, down to imprisonment and sickness and, in many cases, death. But they sang as they marched. And cheer after cheer raked the struggling lines. 'Thumbs up for Victory.'"

Later 3500 British, Dutch, and American prisoners, with a scattering of Russians, Eurasians, Chinese, and other nationalities, who were mostly wives or children of the interned men, were moved to Camp Stanley. They were unceremoniously dumped into the quarters surrounding a jail, and left to their own devices. The chairman of the American community took advantage of his situation, Professor Brown indicates, and lived on food that should have gone to the camp, as well as on things smuggled to him through his friendship with the puppet

Chinese and Japanese leaders in the camp. With a small group of friends he lived on excellent fare, while the rest of the camp lived on two meals a day, one of rice and gravy, one of rice and stew, all made of dirty and often diseased materials. All names in the book are fictitious, but any person who was interned in Hong Kong will recognize the characters.

The author's struggle to get a place to live, his illness, his relations to the camp form the bulk of the story. Included are the authenticized stories of the days of rape, terror, murder, and horror that seized Hong Kong upon the entry of the Japs, including the incidents involving the Maryknoll Mission Fathers, the raped and murdered nurses, and the bayoneting of wounded soldiers. "Hong Kong Aftermath" is not pleasant reading, but it is a story that must be told and read so that those who are left behind will be delivered from the hands of the Japs before it is too late.



Wenzell Brown

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Old Palm Beach

THE BAREFOOT MAILMAN. By Theodore Pratt. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1943. 215 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

WITH a great deal of love and nostalgia, Mr. Pratt has fictionalized the pioneering years of Florida history, particularly the history of Palm Beach before it was called that, when it was a great, wild, dangerous waste of beach to cross. Alligators were the mildest hazard, for there were uncharted bogs of quicksand, sudden storms that blew everything alive or on sticks into the water, wilderness to get lost in unless you knew the exact routes, and beachcombers. These were not the romantic remittance men we have read about in the short stories, but the escaped or uncaught criminals of the bordering civilization, who gathered on this wide expanse of uninhabited beach and lived like a more dangerous and brutal version of Robin Hood's men. There were some whose business it was to cross this country regularly from Miami to the Palm Beach colony, to carry the mail. They were the barefooted mailmen. That was the best and only sensible way to walk the beaches, and you wouldn't last the trip on shoes. It took three days to make the route. The mail carrier

lived on his wits all the way, finding food in that lush region where berries and fruits grew freely, or cooking what he carried with him on the barren stretches. It took endurance, bravery, and a kind of frontier integrity we have associated with the eighteenth century backwoodsmen. Florida had its frontier, too, breasting the sea.

All of this is here described in profuse detail, not over-written, for Mr. Pratt seems a very restrained historian, putting down in matter-of-fact verbiage what he might in fact have gushed over. The local material in all its colors, plants, seasons, elements, customs, speech, seems all the more clearly recorded for the almost dry journalistic style of its telling. The background is rich, and it dwarfs the little fiction that moves across it. This is not fatal. It is merely that the scene is so original and fresh, the story so patently made, about the young mailman, "girl-shy," and the boy passenger he takes across with him, who turns out, of course, a girl in cap and pants. Then there is the loud, guileful, and ambitious "boomer" who comes to steal both land and girl—the conflicts, the denouement, and so on. Some of it is real, the best romance, nothing really interfering with the vivid picture of the Florida coast. A light story like this doesn't hurt, while we're watching the sky, and the water on the beach.

The Book of Tao

THE OLD FELLOW. By Herrymon Maurer. New York: John Day Co. 1943. 296 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PRESTON SCHoyer

ANY really courageous reviewer, caught in the full tide of Laotze's philosophy, would toss his pen and paper out the window and join "the Old Fellow" in a simpler freer life. That Mr. Maurer arouses this temptation is very much to his credit. He has done an extremely interesting and competent job in presenting the Chinese Taoist philosophy in the form of a colorful commentary on the life of Laotze.

Mr. Maurer's chief contribution is that he brings Laotze's little classic, the "Book of Tao," within the grasp of everyday people, clothing and furnishing with story and allegory the abstract, oblique utterances of that little book, which more than Confucian ethics is so deep an expression of Chinese nature and perhaps even Chinese wisdom. There are those who dislike having their pills coated, but few people know Laotze for this very reason. His language is too oblique. The reception accorded his philosophy too easily degenerates into indifference.

Paradoxically, Mr. Maurer's interpretation makes it plain that to write a biography of Laotze is in a sense to deny him, while those historians who dispute his very existence acclaim him. For Laotze hated names and position, wealth and ceremony, and the fuss of civilization. He desired for himself and all men the humility of anonymity, the happiness of not striving, the merging of the individual with nature, the universe, with God.

That Laotze lived close to his desire for anonymity is evident in the meagre knowledge we have of him. About all we know is that he probably lived at the time of Confucius, that he became a voluntary exile from the Empire of Chan, the civilization of his day, and that he wrote the "Book of Tao." Whether he or someone else wrote it, or whether he's merely the personification of the wisdom of many men gathered into one writing is unimportant. And in Mr. Maurer's fanciful account of his life that fact stands out. It's the wisdom of the little Chinese classic that puts salt and substance into Mr. Maurer's story. But Mr. Maurer is to be most gratefully thanked, not only for bringing Laotze down to the grasp of ordinary people, but for presenting to ordinary people a philosophy that is needed today if it was ever needed, certainly more than in the time of the Empire of Chan.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

CHAPTER HEADINGS

From well-known novels the following distinctive chapter headings are taken. How many of the sources of these headings can you name? Allowing five points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 21.

1. Afternoon at Timothy's.
2. A Further Account of Glubbduribb—Ancient and Modern History Corrected.
3. Casa da Bonnyfeather.
4. How to Live Well on Nothing a Year.
5. How, Under the Most Adverse Circumstances, Love Came to Big Joe Portagee.
6. I Corroborate Mr. Dick and Choose a Profession.
7. Little Sisters Have Big Ears.
8. Men of the Robe and Men of the Sword.
9. Showing Off in Sunday School.
10. Slaughter in the Marshes.
11. Spelling Down the Master.
12. The Corn Cob Club.
13. The Goblin Monk.
14. The History of Cunegonde.
15. The Pursuit of a Father to Reclaim a Lost Child to Virtue.
16. The Spouter-Inn.
17. The Thornes of Ullathorne.
18. Treating of a Novel Style of Dwelling House.
19. What I Heard in the Cracker Barrel.
20. Wool and Water.