

# Tethered by Circumstance

THE IRON CHAIN. By Edward Newhouse. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1946. 228 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by STRUTHERS BURT

THE Iron Chain is circumstance; that thing that so often, in fact most of the time, like the rebellious body in ill health working against what we know is ourself, our mind, our spirit, our essential being, shackles us when we would be about the important business of life. The phrase comes from a sentence of General Grant's, "tethered as we are by the iron chain of circumstance," and no one, in peace or war, or in his death, knew better what he was talking about than the great and tragic man who coined the sentence.

The author of these twenty-one short stories, seventeen of which have appeared in *The New Yorker*, knows what he is talking about, too; knows poignantly, bitterly, and most of the time with a tenderness as rare as it is gratifying. A tenderness left out of American writing for the past decade, if it was ever there. We're a nice people, a kind people, except when we are violent and cruel, which is a good deal of the time; we're a brilliant people, except when we're damned fools. But only the greatest of Americans, someone like the late President, for instance, whatever else you may say about him, have ever exhibited that tenderness, that concern for the individual and mankind in general, that over-all realization, classic in its tradition, which has marked all great writing, and for that matter, all great art. Irony and pity is the ancient definition. Laugh it off! But if you do, you'll die artistically. And you'll also die privately and publicly, although in all three instances you may be dead for years before you know this.

The Iron Chain in all but four of these stories is the iron chain of war, as it would be with imaginative men young enough, as Mr. Newhouse is—he started as a private in the Air Forces and ended up as a major—to have been in the recent war, and as it still is, especially in their dreams, with a number of imaginative men old enough to have been in the previous war. The iron chain of war which nowadays takes the civilian, deliberately trained to peace and supposed gentleness, and, overnight, seeks, and rightly for the purpose, to turn him into a bloody psychopath.

It doesn't work. Napoleon started something he shouldn't. He merely added another opportunity for universal split personality to a world already filled with schizophrenics. The

man of good will probably makes the most deadly combat soldier in existence because he is bored and enraged, but you can't make a first-class military man out of him. That's a calling and a profession; a longing, and a point of view, just as much as landscape painting or the ministry. And so long as you can't perform successfully this Procrustean operation, there is still hope, I suppose, for a badly battered species. It is this worm's eye rebellion, this cool, yet desperate glance, this perspective that interests Mr. Newhouse. It is best expressed in two magnificent stories, "The Four Freedoms" and "Time Out." The latter consists of the reflections and reactions of a medical colonel; a neuro-pathologist, confronted by what all knowledge tells him is bedlam.

These, then, are war stories? Yes. And the theme, so far as you (that means, I) have expressed it, has been done before an infinite number of times, and will be done again increasingly. Once again, yes. But I haven't as yet half expressed what I want to say. In fact, I want to express, and emphasize, this so much, that I have been impatient to get to it, for, so far as I am concerned, these are not mere war stories, however good, nor merely adequate or good, or even brilliant stories of any kind. They are brilliant, and they are good, but they are a whole lot more than that. So far as I am concerned, they are by long odds the best American short stories I have read in a long while. And that from an ill-wisher, as it were; an ill-wisher toward the average American short story, however great the habitual brilliance of the performance. The reading of this volume was an event in my life. I hope a great many other people will feel as I do.

Brilliance is not enough. Technique is not enough. Wit is not enough. Even a complete mastery of the incident and subject is not enough; nor an eerie exactitude of reporting. Nor infallibility of character, nor inevitability. All those should be there, and other things as well. But they are the house, and the house should be inhabited by a spirit. It should have a view from its windows. I think this means that in all art there must be interpretation, however implicit this may be in the texture of the work of art; however unobtrusive. Otherwise it's merely an excitement, a sensation, like a visit to a house of prostitution or getting drunk. Afterwards there's an inevitable sense of loss, of fraud.

With one or two exceptions, you have no sense of fraud or loss after reading the stories in "The Iron Chain" despite their irony, their sad sharpness. Instead, like the author, you feel that, terrible as are the usual manifestations of the human race, there is something there, quite obviously, that deserves better, both of itself and fate. The door is not closed. There is a tiny crack with the light beyond. There is a possibility. And that is as it should be. These are truly fine stories. I could use bigger adjectives, but I won't. And yet they are as modern as modern can be. They meet the other boys and girls on their own grounds, and then proceed to go them one better. Perhaps they portend an advance for the future when brilliance of technique will find itself wedded to profundity of vision and feeling. Or can this happen to Americans with their passion for craftsmanship and their morbid fear of emotions that often ends in atrophy?

At all events, it is a little disconcerting to find that the author, however completely American he now is in his idiom, his viewpoint, and his conclusions, was a Hungarian until he was eleven years old.

---

## Kurnos

Theognis, Carmina 237

By S. L. M. B.

BELOVED, I can render none sublime  
Nor deathless with my verses nor reduce  
Oblivion by a second, yet my rhyme  
Remembered in your heart may have this use:  
That, though the Sirens sing, behind their song  
Some note of mine shall pierce and sharply tingle  
Ears, deep-beguiled, with accents which belong  
To me; that when your lips with others' mingle  
One kiss may be withheld because my word  
Has touched the fringe of your felicity,  
Lighter than feather, swifter than any bird;  
An unction to your dying when you die;—  
Not for some immortality conferred  
But that you lived happier because of me.

# Has Roxas Betrayed America?

YES—

Reviewed by JOHN COLLIER

**U**NLESS they are willing to be painfully disturbed, Americans should not read this book. But Americans ought to be painfully disturbed about the situation in the Philippine Islands, and the book should have a very wide public.

Across forty years, the United States moved the Philippines toward complete political independence. We moved them not at all toward economic independence, and we did nothing of moment to help them move out from agricultural feudalism. But brilliantly, at the political level, through word and deed we made Philippine emancipation a beacon to the nations. Then Japan took the Philippines, and the present quasi-serfs offered a resistance paralleled nowhere in the dependencies overrun by Japan.

But there were thousands in the Philippines who did not resist. They included many politicians, to the very top levels of Philippine life, and business men, and owners of great estates, and pre-World-War fascist adorers of General Franco. They included the man who is now president of the Philippines, Manuel Roxas. The collaborators became quislings in many instances; they entered the puppet government which Japan set up. Manuel Roxas was one of these.

Then the United States retook the Philippines; the Allies crushed Japan. Some of the collaborators were thrown into jail, pending trial by the restored Commonwealth. But General MacArthur set Roxas free; he appointed him to active duty at the MacArthur headquarters; he then released him to inactive duty; and Roxas became the Strong Man around whom collaboration, Philippine big business, American big business, agricultural feudalism, and Franco-slanted fascism organized themselves to dominate the Commonwealth. These facts and events, and their consequences, are the theme of Hernando Abaya's 272-page book. Harold L. Ickes introduces the book with carefully weighed words out of his direct, responsible experience. Readers will fall into three classes.

There will be a minority who already have experienced enough and read enough behind the "Philippine iron curtain" to know that Abaya's total effect, and much of his detail, is the rather ghastly truth. There will be others who will wonder: Can this total indictment, can these ignoble details be true? Is it possible that General MacArthur desired and acted

## BETRAYAL IN THE PHILIPPINES.

By Hernando Abaya. Foreword by Harold L. Ickes. New York: A. A. Wyn. 1946. 272 pp. \$3.

to throw the Philippines toward fascist and colonial economic bondage? Why, in the Philippine presidential election, when the dominant issue was that of casting out the collaborationists or not casting them out, did High Commissioner Paul McNutt notify the Philippine public that the United States was indifferent to the electoral outcome? Why is the Department of Justice at Washington continuing to refuse to make public the report of Walter Hutchinson, its investigator into Philippine collaborationism? Is there some factual other side to that factually replete narrative which Abaya gives? These readers will hope that Abaya's book may force the detailed divulgement of that other side.

The third reader-group will be the "realists." Philippine independence, they will remark, could not have become other than a corrupt political form; economic colonialism is in the nature of things for the Philippines; the choice was between a "strong man" and a revolution starting as agrarian but perhaps winding up as communistic; perhaps the ends justified the deplorable means.

The reviewer belongs to the first-named reader-group. All that he knows, directly and by analogy, forces him to accept "Betrayal in the Philippines" as essentially accurate, essentially just. It is an alarming, a deeply depressing realization. How high the hope of the Filipinos and the world, which we Americans have helped to dim and to postpone to an uncertain time beyond bitter and probably bloody civil strife in the Philippines! To such an end, our long-prepared, sincerely intended emancipation, our beacon to the dependencies of the world!

The situation is not irredeemable, and the United States is not done with the Philippines. Abaya's book not only is painful reading; it is difficult reading because its torrent of facts roars too insistently; there is too much angry passion in it. But the book is "must" reading, because the Philippines are with us yet.

*John Collier, director of Ethnic Affairs in Washington, D. C., has been commissioner of Indian Affairs, director of National Indian Institute, U.S.A., founder and secretary of the National Board of Review for Motion Pictures, and editor of American Indian Life.*

NO—

Reviewed by COL. WENDELL W. FERTIG

**B**ETRAYAL in the Philippines," written by Hernando Abaya, member of the Free Philippines Group. Good! At last there should be some light on the problem of collaboration and betrayal in the islands that I loved. Avidly I read, but soon wondered who had betrayed the Philippines. Here were Roxas and MacArthur, Osmena and Valdez, all lumped together with Laurel, Aquino, Duran, and Osias. Betrayed the Philippines to whom? The question arose as I read further. Gradually the pattern emerged; the only true patriots were members of the Democratic Alliance, and of these the Hukbalajaps were the chosen people. Betrayal was a catch word, for it meant, to me at least, that the newly elected government of the Philippines had betrayed the forces of the left.

Could Roxas be a traitor to his own country, and to the sovereign United States of America? It did not seem possible, and I reviewed the long period of darkness; that period when the shadow of the Jap Kempei Tai (Military Police—Gestapo style) covered the land. No, I doubted that Roxas was a traitor to his country. Laurel? Yes, for he had sold out to the Jap before the war. He owed his wealth to the Ota Development Company (Jap hemp colossus) that he had served as chief attorney. He had sent his son to Japan to learn the wisdom of his Japanese friends. The son learned well, for after a faked capture in Batangas, he appeared in Manila to be married with pomp and with his Japanese friends in attendance. Finally, he headed the Pacification Campaign that exterminated his former USAFFE comrades who persisted in remaining loyal to the United States.

As April 1942 died in agony, the Japs landed on the south coast of Mindanao, and I stepped from the Catalina seaplane that had brought me from Corregidor. Viewed from that bomb-torn islet, Mindanao appeared to be heaven. But when I landed there at Lake Lanao, the Japs were already pressing north from their beachhead.

Brigadier General Manuel Roxas, appointed executive secretary to the President when Quezon left Mindanao, moved to Del Monte with General Sharpe. No one can doubt Quezon's faith in Roxas when he designated him as executive secretary, and invested him with blanket powers to act in the name of the President under the full terms of the War Emergency