

Philippine Freedom*

By LEONARD CASPER

Part I

WITH THE scruple of a man customarily responsible to his experience of things—for seven years he was *N.Y. Times* staff correspondent in the Philippines and *Manila Daily Bulletin* news editor—Robert Aura Smith has defined the separate natures of independence (the relationship of one sovereign state to others) and freedom (the relationship between an individual and his society); and has proceeded to trace the recent history of both among Filipinos.

One of the book's few limitations is that, by recording background events only since the Spanish-American war, Smith unwittingly preserves the absurd though well-worn implication that freedom had no advocates in the Philippines until imported from the States. The naked names of Rizal and Bonifacio are dropped on occasion; but the oversight which neglects their part in making present history possible is strange, coming from an Officer of the Philippine Legion of Honor.

The book's other faults are more easily understood and forgiven. So many major events have occurred in postwar Philippines that often Smith finds his space spent on following long-range changes in their climate, rather than the daily weathering of circumstance. What he gains by this necessary aloofness is a kind of impersonality as reporter (he is more desk man than leg man), an objectivity in the relating of fact to fact, preferable by far to the self-magnification at the

* Robert Aura Smith, *Philippine Freedom: 1946-1958* (Columbia University Press: N.Y., 1958).

expense of whole truth on which, for example, Romulo's "historical" books have sometimes depended. But this same over-view, because it seldom rubs off the sweat of the crowd, has the misfortune of implying again that freedom is largely achieved by imposition and legislation: if not by big-brother America, then by big-brother Elected Home Administration.

Democracy is not an invitation to let inferiors elect their superiors to office; and the life of Magsaysay is so very important because it proved that either self-government rests on a belief in equality among men or it becomes mere participation in the choice of which tyrant will rule. However, it must be observed that unless Smith had written his work in several volumes, he could hardly have maneuvered his perspective from panorama to local incident without losing proportion or control. He has done no worse, in this matter, than most historians so intent on the Big Picture that the average man, without whom so much of history would not be viable, is reduced to ciphers.

IN THE short section on the Japanese Occupation, Smith specifically acknowledges that other accounts have treated the brutalities and turncoating more adequately than he is about to do. The same could be said of different sections. But what the reader sees demonstrated here is how history texts are constructed, by omission and selection, with the more responsible ones hoping against hope not to distort the general truth, in spite of what is edited out. Smith's is a kind of summing-up of many accounts, fictional and otherwise, not all already written, of twelve important years in the human endeavor. As a chronicle by epitome, it succeeds far far better than usual.

The crush and competition of material for space allows Smith to ignore not only the common *tao* but also major Filipino business men and even many of the political hierarchy's second echelon. There is room for Sycip's aid to Liberty Wells but not for the free enterprise of Marcelo or the Delgado Brothers; for Taruc and Pomeroy but not for Gov. Lacson or Mayor Lacson of Manila; for Aglipayans on the ballot but not for Fathers Hogan or Delaney or the Catholic Action Groups. . . These and a multitude of others whose ways threatened or rescued freedom are left to Filipino writers, as are also more durable estimates of many international figures treated.

Smith is too diplomatic in his kindly, nearly indiscriminate comments on Quirino, Romulo, Jose Laurel Jr., President Garcia and Recto; but his full biographical treatment of Mag-saysay whom he clearly admired perhaps subtly provides an elevation against which the lower contours of others can be measured.

Fortunately, Smith has as carefully chosen what to write about as what not to. If he has left to sociologists the full explication of the dangers to freedom in the Filipino, and to some as-yet-unborn prophet denunciation of equal threats from an educational system both monolithic and bureaucratic, nevertheless he has written substantially about the growth of political freedom in the archipelago. The evidence which he presents sufficiently justifies his conclusions that "the Filipinos are living under the most stable free government in Asia."

This is not, as too many dockside speeches have been, mere flattery from a friend who has to repay many parties in his honor; nor is it the effort of a man to vindicate years invested from his own fund of effort and devotion. Smith's material is so factual, and therefore consequential, that **Philippine Freedom: 1946-1958** might well seem designed as a textbook for political science or international relations (various Fil-American treaters, for example, are offered in valuable appendices) and undoubtedly will be used as such in the Asian Studies programs of many American universities. Filipinos, as well, perhaps living too close to the events described to possess them otherwise as a continuum, will appreciate this attempt to summarize the life of a nation, young in independence, old in the knowledge of human rights.

(To be concluded)

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Too Little

A suspicious wife made a surprise call at her husband's office. Encountering his pretty secretary, she introduced herself and added:

"I'm so glad to meet you, Miss Shapely. My husband has told me so little about you."

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