

does not quite explain why a successful lawyer should take the hazards involved in uninhibited action.

But his is not an explanatory book. It is rather an autobiographical fragment written with ebullience, candor, and a brash, saucy reference to such sources of insight as law, sociology, anthropology, economics, psychiatry, and philosophy. He expresses attitudes and convictions regarding illegitimacy, divorce, abortion, communication, family life, and of course civil rights. All is grist to his mill and his thoughts pour forth in conversational prose, which reads as

though it came fresh from a dictaphone cylinder.

And, finally, he believes in escape, and the Freudians cannot frighten him here either. His summer home at Nantucket is his escape from New York. There he sails and works with his hands and there he indulges himself with speculations which at times seem to border on the mystical. But the innate defiance follows him even in these quiet places. Speaking of sailing on the Penobscot leads him to insert the old theme: "The older I get, the less I am able to understand the timid and the unadventurous."

the sham trappings of the Mussolini regime with such complacency. Virtually everyone in the government or outside the regime who benefited from it, Mr. Ascoli says, was a "half-Fascist, a Fascist with his tongue in cheek." The commentator elaborates: "Italian realism made the half-Fascist keep a running account of the discrepancies between bombastic declarations and the actual state of things. This condition of double conscience, half good faith and half mental reservations, made life prosperous and easy for many people as long as things went well."

In Mussolini, Mr. Ascoli sees a great "ham," in the theatrical sense; a demagogue and a dangerous political improviser. He notes how the dictator was consistent only to the extent that he would adopt any policy which was expedient and promised success.

With today's hindsight we know what a stunted, although dangerous, man Mussolini really was. Il Duce's own words in this volume bolster this knowledge as he venomously denounces his former henchmen, glows over the heroism of his German rescuers, prates emptily of future Fascist glories, and flamboyantly likens himself to Napoleon, who had his hard knocks too.

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Twentieth-Century Caesar

THE FALL OF MUSSOLINI: His Own Story. By Benito Mussolini. Edited by Max Ascoli. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 1948. 212 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by SEYMOUR S. KLINE

BENITO MUSSOLINI'S masquerade as a twentieth-century Caesar ended abruptly on July 25, 1943. Military disaster faced Italy, Rome had been bombed, the sycophantic Fascist Grand Council at last had turned against Il Duce, the war-battered people hated his very name. So, after twenty-one strutting years, Mussolini meekly accepted dismissal from power by King Victor Emmanuel III. But the ex-dictator's highly adventurous career still had twenty-one months to run before Partisans were to shoot him to death and hang his corpse, head down, in Milan's Piazza Loreto for all to scorn. In the period in which he headed the Republican Fascist regime in North Italy as a puppet of the Germans, Mussolini wrote "The Story of a Year," a personalized version of his ouster and attendant events. This work, with an excellent explanatory preface by Max Ascoli, now is available in English under the title of "The Fall of Mussolini." It merits wide readership both as an historic document and for its intrinsic interest.

Mussolini's narrative begins with the "plot" by "Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik" France to open the Mediterranean to the American invasion. It carries through the invasion of Italian soil, describes in detail the dramatic twenty-four hours which culminated in his dismissal by the King, tells of his confinement and subsequent rescue by Nazi paratroopers, discusses the dual role of the monarchy and the Fascist hierarchy, and lists the initial edicts setting up the Republican Fascist state.

Mussolini devotes individual chapters to the perfidies of Dino Grandi

and Pietro Badoglio, the leaders of the turncoats, and he goes to great lengths to explode the "rumor" that Badoglio opposed the luckless war against Greece. Others, not I, says Mussolini throughout, were to blame for everything that went wrong; I was responsible for the triumphs.

In his intriguing seventy-one-page preface, Mr. Ascoli punctures the dictator's major lies, and goes on to analyze the psychology of the Italian people, the characters of Mussolini and the King, and the tragic mistakes made by the Allies in their dealings with Italy in the war years.

Of particular interest was Mr. Ascoli's explanation of why a people so worldly wise as the Italians accepted



Detail of Peter Blume's "Eternal City"—"twenty-one strutting years."

—Courtesy, Museum of Modern Art.

Fiction. In "The Romantic Route to Divorce," SRL's leading article this week, the Swiss novelist Denis de Rougemont asserts that the chief theme of most fiction popular in Western democracies is romance—"love fever," inflamed by obstruction and frustration. The quartet of novels reviewed below offers somewhat ironic commentary on M. de Rougemont's thesis. Ruth Moore's picture of life on the Maine Coast, "The Fire Balloon," presents the conventional yearning adolescent; Hubert Creekmore's "The Welcome" reports the frustrations of two homosexuals; Lau Shaw's novel of China, "The Quest for Love of Lao Lee," shows the unhappy modern Oriental being tempted by the supposed surcease of divorce. Only in "The Meek Shall Inherit," from Poland, a land little touched by Western democracy, is the romantic theme minimized.

Corruption in Peking

THE QUEST FOR LOVE OF LAO LEE. By Lau Shaw. Translated by Helena Kuo. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1948. 306 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

IT is an odd fact that most of the American writers who have been able to interpret China to the West have been women novelists. Beginning with "The Good Earth," for which she received the Nobel Prize, Pearl Buck has written a series of novels that have made the complex family life of the Chinese and the tragedy of almost universal poverty comprehensible. Alice Tisdale Hobart, two years after "The Good Earth," brought out her popular "Oil for the Lamps of China," which revealed the conflict and stress of the white man engaged in business in a country emerging from medievalism. Grace Zaring Stone's graceful "The Bitter Tea of General Yen" gave a glimpse of the formal traditions of the upper class. In more recent years Robert Payne has presented decoratively landscaped romances that gave the illusion of reality. But however faithfully and sympathetically the Chinese people were described in these and other books they were still viewed through American eyes.

In the meantime, while revolution and wars have swept away centuries of tradition, China has developed native writers who have broken with tradition and who are writing of the common people with realism and frankness. Fortunately for us, they have found translators capable of interpreting the idioms of city streets and villages into our own familiar languages.

In "The Quest for Love of Lao Lee," Lau Shaw tells the story of an honest and simple-minded minor



Chinese official who works in one of the rabbit warrens in Peking which house government workers. To the Westerner the novel is a perfect explanation of why a vast nation remains in such confusion and revolution that it has become a menace to world peace. Lao Lee, bred in the country, brings his family to Peking, his awkward, ignorant village wife and their small children, a boy and a girl, appropriately named Ying and Ling. There is slowly revealed to his shocked and bewildered mind the laziness, the corruption, and inefficiency under the weight of which China is sinking. The big chief of the Department of Finance was half politician, half robber. The underlings who were Lao's friends were swindlers, conspirators, marriage brokers, boxers, everything but workers. One of them, as a sideline, bought beautiful young girls for pleasure and then sold them for profit. All of them eyed each other's gestures and glances with suspicion and fear.

Lao Lee found the acquisition of a family difficult and embarrassing. He began to love his children, and indeed who would not love little Ying

and Ling as Mr. Shaw writes of them? But his wife was peasant to the core; with her clumsy body and feet crippled by early binding, she was about as graceful as a cow. His male pride suffered the tortures of the damned whenever she went out with him. Then he met a shy young woman who lived across the courtyard. He began to contemplate divorce, a new and terrifying idea to an honest Chinese. But Mrs. Lee's peasant instinct for self-preservation had forced her to pick up some information about city life from the wives of his corrupt colleagues. Mrs. Wu, for example, took all her husband's money, and he found the door locked when he came home after ten o'clock. Mrs. Chiu, who had the shoulders of a tiger and the general shape of a buffalo, had a simpler idea. She bit him with her ferocious teeth when she thought he was deceiving her, no matter how peacefully he was smiling at her.

Between this stalwart and stout-hearted woman and his own genuine good nature, Lao Lee escapes the pitfalls that should have destroyed him. He always arrives at the office close to dawn and works hard all day, so that every plot of his malicious and dangerous friends fails to uproot him. Ministries fall, and he still keeps his job. He does not even suffer when he tries to get the office to help him get Big Brother Chang's worthless son out of jail, a dangerous undertaking since Celestial Truth is charged with being a Communist. In the end, he decides to take Ying and Ling and their mother back to the village, and along with them Second Master Ting, who has to run away because he has murdered the worst and most complicated devil among all of Lao's office friends for trying to seduce and then sell a girl called Miss Beautiful Truth.

The central plot of Mr. Shaw's novel is actually as simple as any Sunday school story. A virtuous and kind young man comes from the country to make his fortune in the great city. His honesty baffles all of the attempts to ruin him, and he goes back to his ancestral village, where he will devote his life to the cause of the poor peasants. Nevertheless, the story is told with such a wealth of detail and with such good humor that the book is a delight to the reader. The author watches even the most wicked of his characters with the smile of a benignant Buddha. When it is ended, the reader feels that he knows more about the complexities and warmth of Chinese character than he could have discovered in a dozen Western interpretations of the same scene.