

Class, L. A.

THE BEACH HOUSE. By Stephen Longstreet. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 366 pp. \$3.50.

By W. R. BURNETT

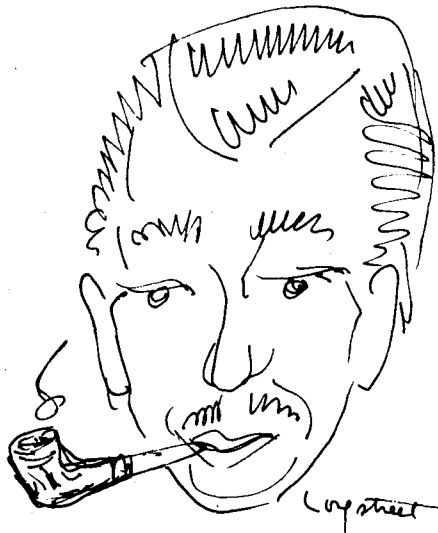
HUNDREDS, perhaps thousands, of stories, novels, and plays have been written about Hollywood since Carroll and Garrett Graham's "Queer People" appeared some time in the Twenties. None of these works amounted to much, with the exceptions of Nathanael West's "The Day of the Locust," and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Pat Hobby" stories. (I am heretical in regard to "The Last Tycoon," which, to me, is over-romantic and Fitzgeraldish in the worst sense.) Most of these works, aside from the unevenness of the talents represented, were spoiled by wrong approaches: ferocious satire, slapstick, phoney superiority to material, realistic detachment, a heavy leaning on "real people," and so forth; but the realistic approach has been used the most and is the least likely to succeed. How can one write realistically about a mythical land?

West and Fitzgerald made no such error. "The Day of the Locust," dealing with a sort of Hollywood lunatic fringe, is one long, accelerating nightmare, and in my opinion a work of genius. The Pat Hobby stories, rough and brutal on the surface, are actually subjective pieces written out of fear and despair by a wrecked Fitzgerald. They are, one might say, epitaphs to a career of folly.

Stephen Longstreet, in "The Beach House," has tried to combine the normal realistic approach of the Hollywood novel with the nightmarish surrealism of Fitzgerald and West, and in some respects he has succeeded in writing one of the best novels ever done on the subject.

"The Beach House" might well have been called "The Decline and Fall of Mike Zellsmith." At one time Mike was on top of the heap in Hollywood: a prosperous and respected independent producer; an "artist," in a sense, whose values were not the stark commercial values of the rest of the town; a self-educated man sincerely interested in music, literature, and painting; an over-emotional man with a tendency to escape harsh reality at times with the aid of the bottle. On the downgrade now, we watch his humiliating turns and twists as he tries to

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—By Stephen Longstreet.

Stephen Longstreet—"markedly superior."

promote enough money to produce a quickie and so stage a come-back. We meet his strong-minded, managing wife, his neurotic girl friend, his episcene assistant, his bewildered, high-brow writer, and the sordid drama of his downfall unrolls before us in a series of well-imagined scenes, written out of a true knowledge of the town.

There is more than a touch of West in the scene at a beach house where a drunken revel is interrupted and spoiled by the painful death of a pet dog; in the awesome funeral of a film magnate, staged by his studio publicity department; in the birthday party given for a group of French poodles owned by various members of the film colony; and in the mysterious, elusive figure of Harry Kamp Matt, comic strip promoter, who moves, as Longstreet says, like a Kafka character through the streamlined Hollywood jungle.

The book has its flaws. At times the writing is so garbled as to make me suspect the printer and proof-reader of sabotage. What are we to make of: "They gave the tow-car man five dollars who spit tobacco juice on the roadway." Or: "But they didn't run it [the bank], except as stooges in well-pressed tailoring using six per cent in as deadly a war as machine-guns." ? At times, too, the writing is over-elaborate and pretentious, and the book could stand expert cutting and editing. The neat ending—Mike's reconciliation with his wife—is grossly out of key with the rest of the story.

But aside from all this, "The Beach House" is an engrossing book, and markedly superior to what literary people quickly, and I think rightly, dismiss as "just another Hollywood novel."

Standing Secrets

THE PAPER PALACE. By Robert Harling. New York: Harper & Bros. 248 pp. \$3.

By CHARLES LEE

ROBERT HARLING'S first novel, a tale of suspense built against an authentic English newspaper background, is a slick performance. Told in the first person, smooth as plastic and bright with razor-edge ironies, it's a sure-fire guarantee against the spring slumbers. It won't win prizes but it definitely will win friends.

What starts things going is the whimsical decision of the newspaper publisher, "the Baron," to write an obituary for the narrator-columnist's regular feature, "Objects and Subjects." Why the Baron should elect to perform this curious gesture teases the minds of both the columnist (who goes unnamed) and his editorial boss, David Wensley. Their curiosity deepens when the subject of the Baron's funereal inspiration turns out to be a notorious and eccentric English Red whose poverty of spirit is paradoxically balanced by an excess of wealth.

The Baron, tall, bald, jowly, and imperious, is a lesser Caesar in an Oxford gray suit. He has a file-edge voice, eyes the color of stainless Sheffield steel, and a manner that "made you feel the way a Christian in the Colosseum must have felt with the lion padding steadily in his direction across the wide arena."

This is the man whose past David Wensley decides to investigate. How come, he asks, did the Baron, an ordinary reporter at forty, arrive at his millions? What connection, if any, was there between his tycoon boss and an enigmatic Red killed in a jeep accident in Yugoslavia?

Wensley's erudite columnist is given the assignment to work out between paragraphs. He does, of course, with very surprising results that take him along Fleet Street, into the company of the deceased Red's eighty-five-year-old mother and twenty-five-year-old mistress, back into the bloody history of the Black and Tan troubles in Ireland, and at last to a kind of sardonic exile in America. The fact that he was once a professional researcher makes his detective work easier; it also makes him so conscious of the trees that he fails to see the forest until it is too late.

Mr. Harling's "shop talk" is journalistically alive. His story is diverting and absorbing, and what he has to say about the ugliness of certain kinds of power has many points of reference outside the pages of his book.

Sometime Innocence of Love

THE HIDDEN FLOWER. By Pearl S. Buck. New York: John Day Co. 307 pp. \$3.50.

By HARRISON SMITH

FOR many years Pearl Buck has drawn on her knowledge of the people of the Far East, and especially of China, for a long series of novels, short stories, polemical works, translations from the Chinese, as well as books for children. Since that country is now more remote from Western influence than it was in the eighteenth century, it is not surprising that Mrs. Buck has turned to the Japan of the American occupation for her latest novel, and also to the theme of miscegenation. "The Hidden Flower" is a love story which in almost any other writer's hands would have culminated in irretrievable tragedy. Through Miss Buck's conviction that the salvation of mankind depends on a union between the East and the West, however, it terminates in a surprising and somewhat mystic consummation.

Josui Sakai, a beautiful Japanese girl of good family, was born in California. On the outbreak of World War II she returned with her father

and mother to Kyoto. When the Americans arrived, she was engaged to a suitable young man after the delicate negotiations through which for centuries Japanese families have been united through the marriage of their children. It was unfortunate that she had not forgotten the freedom of the American girls she had known, for one day, as she was entering the university, she met a blonde and blue-eyed lieutenant. For both of them it was what is known as love at first sight.

Alan Kennedy, the only child of an old Virginia family, had been in the army long enough to know that he should not attempt to seduce an aristocratic Japanese girl, or failing that, marry her; and he certainly should not have forgotten that his mother was a domestic tyrant who would never accept as her daughter-in-law any member of a "colored race." After Josui had broken her engagement, and incidentally her father's heart, the enamored couple were married by a Buddhist priest. Alan's indulgent colonel sent him home, and poor Josui after a few breathless nights of love followed him to Virginia.

She was refused permission to enter the ancestral mansion. After discover-

ing that he could not marry her in Virginia and that a Buddhist ceremony was not binding in the United States, Alan took her to New York. In his eyes she had suffered a sea change in crossing the Pacific. In Kyoto she had represented an ancient culture he vaguely comprehended. In a small city apartment she was merely pathetic and embarrassingly unlike a Virginia girl he had once thought of marrying. When he drifted back home, he was so obtuse that he did not know that in a few months he was destined to be the father of an illegitimate child. Josui fled to the kind of refuge in San Francisco where girls who had fallen in love with the American army were delivered of their babies and who after a week never saw them again. She abandoned her son to a childless obstetrician who had sensed that there was something strange in this determined young woman who was returning to her family in Japan and something still stranger in the miraculous child.

Mrs. Buck is eloquent about the conception of the baby, "the world child." She writes, "When was the mortal life of the child begun—somewhere in the glorious months, at some place of love in the chain of days and nights of love the world child was living. They were not thinking of him but of themselves." It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that she is announcing the creation of a new Savior of mankind, born of a Virginia gentleman in the U. S. Army and a Kyoto girl of good family who fell in love with him at first sight. All this is slightly confusing since Mrs. Buck's subject has appeared to be the unfortunate result of the mating of a most admirable young Japanese with an American who in sterner days might have been called a scoundrel, and who after he had abandoned Josui was dismissed by his home-town girl when he asked her to marry him because he did not know the meaning of love. But for the purposes of this fascinating and often moving novel it was doubtless unnecessary to analyze the quality of the love that was offered, or Mrs. Buck's motive for proclaiming the child that was born of it a Savior.

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

"A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE"

Mary Brobston, of Bessemer, Alabama, offers fifteen quotations about roses. Can you identify either poet or poem in each case? Eight correct is par, ten is very good, and twelve or better is excellent. Answers on page 31.

1. Plant thou no roses at my head, nor shady cypress tree.
2. One sad, ungathered rose on my ancestral tree.
3. Any nose may ravage with impunity a rose.
4. Out of his mouth a red, red rose!
Out of his heart, a white!
5. He wears the rose of youth upon him.
6. The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she.
7. The rainbow comes and goes, and lovely is the rose.
8. I sometimes think that never blows so red
The rose as where some buried Caesar bled.
9. Flowers of all hue and without thorn the rose.
10. The tear down Childhood's cheek that flows
Is like the dewdrop on the rose.
11. O my love's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June.
12. That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.
13. Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow.
14. Strew on her roses, roses,
And never a spray of yew.
15. There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass.

Fiction Notes

THE STRANGE BRIGADE. By John Jennings. Little, Brown. \$3.50. John Jennings is a veteran historical novelist, a glib tale-teller, and once again he offers us a sound product with no disappointments and no surprises. His strange brigade is composed of a group of Scottish families, left desti-

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