

Fiction

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statements in the novel. When the reader is finished with it he is neither illuminated as to the moral issues of our times, nor entertained, but only mystified. "Midnight Patient" is, indeed, "a most unusual book."

Notes

TROUBLE IN PEKING: To his list of novels about lost causes Peter Bourne now adds a fictional account of the Boxer Uprising. In a cheerfully purple style, halfway between Sax Rohmer and Burton Holmes, Mr. Bourne dilates on the intricate charm of old Peking: "a fabulous and fantastic city of contrasts, a never-never land constructed by sybarites and slaves for potentates and poets; an incredible haven of Celestial peace and cruel poverty, of voluptuous langor and verminous lice; a legendary fairyland of color and culture, ceremony and customs. In other words . . ."

Mr. Bourne has plenty of other words left in "*Twilight of the Dragon*" (Putnam, \$3.95) with which to describe the chaotic summer of 1900, when the society of Righteous Harmony Fists stormed the foreign legation of Peking in an attempt to eradicate the Foreign Devils. Mr. Bourne's novel attributes the failure of the Boxers to attain their objective, partly to the efforts of one Wen Chin, a Christian Chinese who infiltrated the Forbidden City in search of an abducted lady friend. "*Twilight of the Dragon*" is at its best when it describes the exploits of Mr. Wen as he slithers perilously about the palace grounds, collecting military information and keeping a watchful eye on his beloved. Though his plot is almost as labyrinthine as the map of Peking itself, Mr. Bourne unravels his story with unflinching skill—shifting dexterously between the palace of the Dowager Empress and the legation compounds, and giving the reader a generous view of the complex hostilities.

—MARTIN LEVIN.

THE WORLD OF THE ENGINE ROOM: Stanley Wolpert's "*Aboard the Flying Swan*" (Scribner, \$3.75) is something refreshing: a first novel with a plot, and with a hero who does things with his hands as well as with his psyche. Bob Williams, a young marine engineer who has been on the beach for three years, ships out again as third assistant on the *Flying Swan*, an American freighter. Because he has impulsively run away from dull jobs and uncertain love, ashore, he finds



—Jacket design for "*Twilight of the Dragon*."
". . . the intricate charm of old Peking."

himself aboard ship a few hours before sailing time, scheduled to take the midwatch in her engine room, and utterly ignorant of the intricacies of throttles, valves, and gauges that he once knew so well. Gradually, with the help of an unschooled old Russian fourth engineer, he gets enough of a grip on the job to stand his watch capably. He soon realizes, though, that he is learning more than that from old Nicolai Karenkov; he is learning what it is to work with his hands, to use wrenches, lathes, and drills.

But a ship at sea is a microcosm, and the forces of evil are well represented on the *Flying Swan*. Fred Becker, the chief engineer, is an unctuous old bandit who never goes near the engine room except to man his emergency station. Becker steals ten thousand dollars' worth of the ship's generator spare parts to sell in Brazil, taking the reasonable chance that no breakdown will occur before he has a chance to buy new ones.

Much of the trip is occupied with Becker's Machiavellian maneuverings as he tries to pin the theft on various members of his department, and with Bob's discovery, of what it means to be devoted mind and soul to machinery for its own sake.

You find little of the sea itself in this novel, but that is as it should be. The engineers spend most of their time in the engine room, in the sack, or drunk ashore. Mr. Wolpert ably evokes the manic gaiety of their liberties in South American ports, and the heat, noise, and sweat of their life aboard ship. It is not often nowadays that such competent literary recognition is given to the men who tend the fire in the heart of a ship and lead its power into turbines and propellers. —THOMAS E. COONEY.

Facts, Assumptions

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no one asserts that there will be any liberty left in the wreckage of such a war. To what, then, do we look for survival? To a continuation of empty assumptions based on physical strength alone, strength that hypnotizes us more than it frightens the enemy? Or should we assert our sanity and look to a grand mobilization of human intelligence and the human spirit in creating the conditions of justice and enforceable law? A determined campaign of leadership behind a great idea can yet save the United Nations—the idea to federate it and to give it responsible powers which could not easily be thwarted or blocked.

The fact that Soviet Russia would oppose a better U.N. is relevant but not controlling. We are not obligated to advocate only those measures which we are certain the Soviet would approve. Our job is to identify ourselves with the ideas that make sense and that have a good chance of giving us moral and political leadership in the world. If that leadership is strong enough, Soviet Russia will have to oppose not only what we want but what most of the others want. And, right now, what we want doesn't seem to impress the rest of the world, largely because we don't seem too sure of it ourselves.

During the Second World War an American cruiser became engaged in a night battle against Japanese warships. When the action began the captain of the American cruiser had nothing but contempt for the new-fangled gadgets such as radar for locating the enemy. He ordered his crew to ignore the radar and turn on the searchlights. The captain's empty assumption of strength—an assumption that was correct only one war earlier—resulted in the short-order death of 105 men on that cruiser.

Treaties and coalitions are the world's old standbys that are as obsolete and dangerous as searchlights on cruisers for war purposes. To be up to date, which is to say, to be properly equipped for survival, we must understand that military might today is important only as part of a powerful policy seeking the fulfillment of a great idea. The moment armed force becomes the whole show or even dominates it it becomes a monstrous liability. The battle in the world today is not solely one between two antagonistic concepts. The battle primarily is to sustain life on earth and make it purposeful. This battle must be recognized and understood before it can be won.

—N. C.

Americana

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isn't sufficient. After reading these three hundred pages plus the sixty-six pages of notes and citations, it is hard to see how this vital and stimulating topic can be reduced to such pedestrian levels.

Facts, documentation, the radio in sport, the church in sport, industry and sport, the newspapers and sport, the government and recreation, race relations and sport, international sport—it's all detailed. Somehow there doesn't seem much behind it.

FOR one hardly needs three hundred pages of text at this date to realize that "colleges and universities, in the process of fostering intercollegiate athletics, have wittingly or unwittingly become engaged in the field of professional entertainment." Certainly, agreed. But how did we ever get there? Could it have been prevented? Why, for instance, are men's athletics commercialized and women's not? "America demands a winner." Granted; but why? The Turks don't; neither do the French or the Swedes; they all seem to be civilized peoples. Were we always this way? Doubtless Iddy-Biddy Basketball has its place in the body politic; but how about this whole athletic mess? Has our intense zeal for competition any correlation with our overcrowded mental hospitals?

What is the influence, good or bad, of high-school basketball upon Richmond, Indiana? How does our genius for organization express itself in sports, and is it different from the way we organize for war? What effect has our temperament had upon our leisure-time activities, what makes our athletes turn sour when they lose abroad as our Davis Cup team did recently in Australia? Why in our organized sport is so much done for the few, so little for the many?

Perhaps this is unfair. Maybe one shouldn't ask a book to contain deductions, implications, and conclusions which to the authors may seem trivial and unimportant. If so, my apologies. But in that event, there is still a vital and purposeful volume to be written on the place of sports and recreation in our national life. It would demand the genius with words of Jimmy Cannon, the historical touch of Samuel E. Morison, the sociological background of the late Edvard C. Lindeman, and the synthesizing talent of Stuart Chase. Plus the time, energy, and labor of a researcher for Time, Inc. No such person, alas, exists today. He will, however, sometime.

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