

## Sex or Politics?

**U**PTON SINCLAIR, after a long period of pamphleteering, has made an impressive "come-back" as a novelist with *OIL!* (A. & C. Boni, \$2.50). It is a novel worthy of the author of *The Jungle*. It has not the youthful passion and poetic intensity of that famous novel, but it has a maturer breadth of vision. It tells, — in terms of fiction and not mere journalistic pamphleteering, — the whole story of oil: of the rugged men who seek it, dig for it, fight and bribe for it; of their softer sons and daughters who spend the fortunes their fathers have won, and of the workers who struggle desperately for life and happiness. It is a story that brings in the tinsel fairyland of Hollywood, the preposterous new religious cults which grow up like mushrooms in our swampy, emotional soil, and trips abroad to escape the embarrassments which sometimes follow bribery, as well as the expected strikes, riots, and the rumble of revolutionary beginnings. In fact, it is pretty much a fictional picture of our present times.

Since the book has been barred in Boston on the usual vague charges of obscenity, it is worth wondering what offended the ticklish censors. Perhaps those passages which deal with the youthful loves of Bunny, the hero, son of the oil king. They are love affairs in the younger-generation style, it is true. His first sweetheart is a high school girl who inducts him into the mysteries of illicit love-making in the calm, hard-boiled manner which those young hussies are said to exhibit nowadays. They graduate swiftly from the automobile to the overnight hotel, and when that becomes too troublesome, she simply keeps the young man in her bedroom all night, — no questions being asked by her parents, who have enough love affairs of their own to bother about. That is affair number one, and number two is with a beautiful moving-picture actress. Indeed, Bunny is the least saintlike, — and the most likable, — hero that Upton Sinclair has ever put in a book.

But these matters are the stock-in-trade of all novelists nowadays, and though they are written about quite frankly in *Oil!* the proprieties of expres-

sion are fully preserved. No young person is likely to have his or her morals corrupted by these every-day matters, — though people no longer young, such as the public officials in Boston and I, myself, are likely to be made to feel that we have missed something in being born a quarter of a century too soon, before these charming modern indulgences to the passions of youth were the custom! It is probable that the real trouble with the novel, from the censor's point of view, is not Sex but Socialism. I daresay Bunny could have continued his delightful fornications with complete impunity from the censorship, if he had not fallen under the influence of an ascetic young revolutionist named Paul, and taken to attending Socialist meetings and hearing about Bolshevik Russia!

FLOYD DELL

## A Unique Biography

**A**N old peddler selling kitchen utensils in the streets of Johannesburg. An intelligent and receptive young woman, who is also a novelist, sitting on her stoep, and buying a gridiron she does not want. This is the happy combination which has produced a book the like of which has not for a long time crossed the English reader's path, — *TRADER HORN*, being the Life and Works of Alfred Aloysius Horn, taken down and edited by Ethelreda Lewis (Simon & Schuster, \$4.00).

Persuaded to write down what incidents he remembers, and to talk about them when written, Trader Horn reveals himself bit by bit as wanderer, observer, philosopher, romancer, and humorist. Africa was the lure which drew him from an English school, and the West Coast was the field of his adventures. If the narrative is at times confused, it is never dull nor stale. If it repeats itself, the repetitions heighten its air of vraisemblance. A mildly Victorian sentiment blends pleasantly with the undisturbed composure of a man to whom bloodshed and violence have been matters of every-day occurrence. Horn has a truly British distaste for all Latin races, and a distrust of all Latin civilizations. He is as purely Nordic as any eugenist in America.

But the blacks! For them he has a gen-

crous liking; and for cannibals, — not heretofore in favor, — he expresses nothing but admiration. "The most moral race on earth. The women chaste and the men faithful. Aye, I've lived amongst 'em like a brother, a young lad clean and safe." Now and then some savage, — not necessarily cannibal, — custom disconcerts him a little; the drowning of old and useless women, for example, "just at the age when in Lancashire they would be right for a shawl and a good cup of tea." The sight of these poor creatures putting up a fight for their lives, and swimming feebly until swept down by the current, or nipped by a crocodile, is naturally upsetting to a boy of eighteen; but after all a custom is a custom, and he has the instinctive respect of his race for institutions.

Even the remedies of the medicine men meet with Horn's approval and respect. He sees great cures wrought by a bamboo needle driven between the ribs, and by the entrails of crickets laid on a fresh wound; and he tells us the sad story of an Irish engineer who died of "something in the throat" because he could not bring himself to feel confidence in such restoratives. "Aye, Peter Nolan put Catholicism above the wisdom of the savage, and he died of it. If that poor fellow had given himself like a child to the science provided by nature, he'd a' been living now as I am."

It would be invidious to inquire too closely as to what is truth and what is fiction in this delightful volume. Once or twice there are disgusting details; things one would infinitely prefer not knowing if they are true, and not imagining if they are false. But, in the main, the narrative is simple, clean, homely, and vigorous. Horn's exploits as a hunter, his unerring aim and mighty prowess, must be taken in good part. What would be the fun of writing a book of adventure if one could not always bring down an elephant or a gorilla at the first shot. The episode of Nina, priestess or "goddess" in a Josh House is the weakest strand in the story. She and the stolen ruby (what African yarn is complete without a stolen ruby?) are of pure Rider Haggard vintage, without Rider Haggard's lively fancy. But when did any rover and raconteur save Trader Horn (rescued from oblivion by

Ethelreda Lewis) write such a passage as this? — "An elephant is wonderfully choicely how he disposes his trunk in sleep. Likes to have it curled up on something for safety. His trunk is his living, and he's got to be as careful of it as a fiddler with his fingers."

It is an amazing book, full of recollections and imaginings, of plain truths and simple-hearted lies; but always vivid and entertaining.

AGNES REPPLIER

## Roosevelt as a Literary Man

**T**HEODORE ROOSEVELT was a man, take him for all in all, upon whose like it is not probable that we shall look again. Of late years it has become the fashion to be a little blind to his true greatness, — even to sneer a little. For Roosevelt belonged to his era, and we are past that era now, yet still so close to it we do not see, — what ten years hence will assuredly be evident, — that he is also a part of the authentic American tradition, — "not of an age but for all time." Perhaps his works (*THE WORKS OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT*, National Edition, edited by Hermann Hagedorn under the auspices of the Roosevelt Memorial Association, 20 vols., Scribner's, \$32.00) will help us to achieve this truer estimate of a great man a little more quickly.

In each of these twenty volumes, from the earliest historical writings to the journals of the war years, there is the impress of a great and sincere individuality, — which is not at all the same thing as an infallible judgment either of men, of letters, or of affairs. And where will you find such an array of writings upon such a range of subjects?

All the more credit, then, to the Memorial Association which has made the complete works available, competently edited, and with agreeable type, paper, and binding. Most of the books in the collection have introductory essays written by old friends, each speaking from special knowledge of the book he prefaces. Indeed, a fairly satisfactory book of essays could be made by simply binding up the various introductions. The new collected *Works* are a highly creditable bit of publishing.

J. B.