

## A Striking First Novel

*THE LONG NIGHT.* By Andrew Lytle.  
Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co.  
1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

**M**R. LYTLE, one of the agrarian essayists who rally round the cultural standard of the late Confederacy, has offered as an exhibit in evidence for his argument one of the finest first novels of recent years. No doubt a good second novel is considerably rarer than a good first novel, but the qualities Mr. Lytle displays are not those that vanish in one skyrocket flare of autobio-



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graphical reminiscence. His story goes back to the South just before and during the Civil War, and he tells it with a somber intensity that carries the reader into the night and the woods along with his protagonist.

It is the story of Cameron McIvor, whose father was framed and murdered by rural gangsters in Alabama in 1859, and who devoted his life to the single-handed pursuit of vengeance. A boy not yet grown, morally supported by relatives who lived at a distance but fighting an underground organization that had terrorized a whole region, he had to live in the woods, work in the dark, strike with sudden stealth, and retreat to the caves and the cane brakes. In these chapters Mr. Lytle displays either superb woodcraft or, more probably, a superb imagination; there is still wild country in Tennessee and Alabama but there can hardly be enough of it to give a modern writer first-hand experience of the sort of country in which Cameron McIvor hid. This whole visualization of a dead-and-gone countryside and culture is vivid and powerful; and the more remarkable in that the author seems to have deliberately avoided the great plantations and lan-

guishing ladies that are the material of the conventional novel of the Old South.

Then came the war and Cameron McIvor went into the army—at first, to go on the more easily with his work of vengeance, since most of his victims were in the army too. But gradually the public crisis began to overshadow his private monomania, with an outcome which it would be unfair to disclose.

As for the quality of the chapters on army life, it need only be said that they reminded this reviewer of similar passages in "War and Peace." Nearly a fourth of the book is taken up with an account of the battle of Shiloh; and if Mr. Lytle has not learned from Tolstoy the technique of shifting interest from individuals to masses, from the small to the great, from Cameron McIvor to Albert Sidney Johnston and Pierre G. T. Beauregard and back again, then he has it by the gift of God. Purely as the story of a battle, Lytle's Shiloh seems as good as Kantor's Gettysburg; with the added merit that Kantor's protagonist seemed to this reviewer hardly more than a moving camera, while Lytle's hero is a living boy with his own personal interests. But there are excellent camp scenes, too—an account of the roasting of a pig by a camp fire which will make any reader get up restlessly to see what there is in the ice box; and the tale of a horse race in 1839, told by a Kentucky horse lover, that will stir you even if you care no more about horse racing than about tiddledy-winks.

Any novel of the ante-bellum South, this year, provokes comparison with "Gone With the Wind"; and in this case, as in some of Plutarch's comparisons of Greek and Roman worthies, both can come out with credit. Page by page, "The Long Night" is unquestionably better; it has consistently an intensity of feeling, and what Gilman Hall used to call a vivacity of visualization, to which Miss Mitchell rises only in a few big scenes. "Gone With the Wind," however, is three times as long; and it requires a remarkable talent to sustain so well a narrative of such length and complexity. Mr. Lytle has not yet mastered his proportions, even in a short book; the Shiloh episode, magnificent as it is and important in Cameron McIvor's development, takes up so much space that it throws the whole book out of plumb. On the other hand, he individualizes his characters much more convincingly; in "Gone With the Wind," as in most novels of the Old South, the gentlemen, barring one or two on whom the author's interest is concentrated, are as indistinguishable as chorus men. (The ladies too, but in their case history bears out fiction somewhat better; perhaps their peculiar culture did standardize them.) Most of Lytle's people are a cut below the gentry class, and it may be that among farmers there was more diversity; but his gentlemen as well as his farmers are live human beings, not mere figures in a historical tapestry.

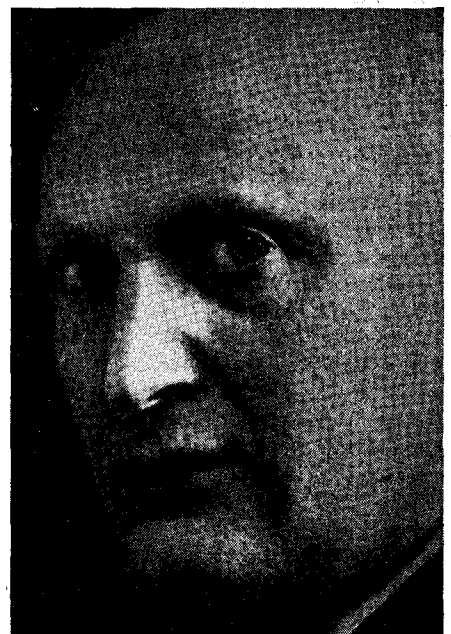
## The Saga of an Industrial City

*THE BROTHERS ASHKENAZI.* By I. J. Singer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1936. \$2.75.

Reviewed by LEON CRYSTAL

**F**ROM now on I. J. Singer will never again be classed with the so-called "racial" writers whose works are usually accorded the condescending blessings of the professional reviewers and are then turned over to students of obscure literature and folk-lore addicts. With his new novel "The Brothers Ashkenazi"—in an excellent translation from the Yiddish by Maurice Samuel—this Jewish author has arrived as a mature modern realist with a keen humor, an eager seriousness, and uncannily-retentive powers of observation for everything that is vital. His eloquence as a narrator, his artistic and intellectual range, as well as his very subject matter, make his present novel important reading.

The main action of "The Brothers Ashkenazi" takes place in the Polish city of Lodz, "The Manchester of Eastern Europe," with the twin-brothers Max and Yacob Ashkenazi as the central characters. Max, who is only one minute older than his brother and undistinguished in appearance, is brilliant, industrious, and unscrupulous, while Yacob is mediocre, easy-going, handsome, and extremely personable. The older brother climbs the ladder of success with a fanatical single-mindedness and attains the position of the uncrowned industrial king of Lodz, but it is the younger one who lives in regal splendor. Max marries the romantic Dinah, who has a distinct affinity for Yacob, but twenty years later Yacob marries his brother's daughter, who pos-



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sesses all the charms of her mother and is so many years younger. And in the end the mediocre Yacob dies brilliantly like a gallant hero while his brilliant brother wastes away in dark and dull agonies.

But "The Brothers Ashkenazi" is more than a story about individual human beings and their destinies. It is even far more than an epic of Jewish life, because many of its characters are non-Jewish—Germans, Poles, Russians—and the moving forces behind them are economic, industrial, and political. It is the saga of the birth, growth, and decay of a great industrial city as well as the story of the inception and upsurge of the class struggle that is now sweeping the world. "The Brothers Ashkenazi" is a vivid and arresting kaleidoscopic view of a century of progress and disaster, beginning with the industrial migration (of German weavers into Poland) after the Napoleonic wars and culminating in the economic collapse, revolution, and inflationary plague that descended upon most of the European countries in the wake of the last world-débâcle.

It is, indeed, a novel of far-reaching social significance. It is intrinsically so, but at no time does its author sacrifice any of his artistic veracity in order to make a point or project a message. He does not stoop, or stop, to sentimentalize over any of his characters. He does not lionize the enterprising resourceful industrialist or glorify the class-conscious proletarian, and his fellow-Jews do not fare with him any better than do the Russians, Poles, or Germans. And his gentle characters, whom he knows as intimately as his own kin, find themselves so involved in worldly affairs that they are not at all disposed to practise brotherly love and good will to men in accordance with the Christian teachings.

In the space of more than six hundred pages of this book, scores of characters come to life, real and unadorned. Here we meet Jews who combine piety with business acumen, peasant-like and astute German industrial pioneers, labor leaders, intellectual socialist propagandists, radicals and patriots, and a host of others.

The appearance of "The Brothers Ashkenazi" is a particularly exciting literary event, because I. J. Singer is still a young writer and a comparatively recent find. Having attracted considerable attention several years ago with a short story called "Pearls" and then with one entitled "Ye Olde Towne," he became one of the hopes of the Yiddish literary realm. With his novel "Yoshe Kalb" (published in an English translation as "The Sinner") he justified this hope to a great extent. A successful Yiddish stage version of "Yoshe Kalb" brought him popularity and acclaim, but only in "The Brothers Ashkenazi" has he revealed himself as an accomplished novelist.

Leon Crystal is a writer on the staff of the Jewish Daily Forward and the editor of its Sunday paper.

## A Scholar with Imagination

ESSAYS IN APPRECIATION. By John Livingston Lowes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHRISTIAN GAUSS

IN the annals of American scholarship a new work by John Livingston Lowes is an event. The essays here gathered were, in the first instance, addressed not to an audience of specialists, but to groups interested in the larger aspects of particular literary problems. Two of them, "The Noblest Monument of English Prose" and "The Pilgrim's Progress" stand out even in the work of Professor Lowes. They cover a wide range and raise the problem, "What is the secret of the important influence which Professor Lowes has exercised upon the teaching and study of English literature in America?"

He differs from many of the teachers



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and scholars of his generation in possessing a far higher degree of imaginative insight into the creative process. Many of our scholars, hypnotized by the scientific method, believed that they were reaching the essence of a work of art by sheer processes of dispassionate analysis. They took a poem apart and considered these parts in the dry light of reason. They would trace a reference or situation in the plot to its ultimate historical source. Lowes, too, has been a master of this method; indeed in source hunting no one has surpassed his analysis of the elements that went into the making of "Kubla Khan." But unlike so many of his contemporaries, Lowes was never satisfied with having laid out the *disjecta membra* of a poem. He knew that its esthetic effectiveness, its value as literature, was not to be found by the application of this

process alone. He himself remained fundamentally a romanticist in an age when anything that savored of the romantic was at a heavy discount. He was interested in those attitudes, emotions, and sentiments of the writer, which tended to give his works their life and rhythm and their esthetic quality. That is why his natural preferences seem to have run to Chaucer, to the English Bible, to Bunyan, to Coleridge; and it is in dealing with such work that he has been most successful. Whether he would have been equally happy in dealing with a Pope or Voltaire, must be left an open question. His own style, again unlike that of many contemporary scholars, was, therefore, never arid, or abstract.

"The Noblest Monument of English Prose" is, of course, the St. James Version of the English Bible, and Professor Lowes is interested in getting down to the problem of how this work of many collaborators achieved its unity of tone, how it happened to take the form it did, and why it has cast so powerful a spell over English literature, and, in the wider sense, over what we might call the English cultural consciousness. None of the briefer studies of this great monument is any more illuminating than his. He does not tell us,—with all that is implied in his essay, perhaps he did not need to,—that the world's most outstanding example of literary coöperation owed its unity as well as its poetry to the fires and forces of history that had welded and shaped it. It represents the most exalted moment in the Protestant consciousness of England, perhaps of Western Europe, and long before Santayana, critics have been conscious of the particularly intimate relation between religion and poetry. This gave it its consistently lofty rhythms and its unflinching poetic accent of ultimate conviction. That is also why, considering the Bible as literature, no group of scholars or men of letters today, no matter how much more competent as specialists in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, could give us a book of equal religious, or indeed literary, significance.

In dealing with Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress" Professor Lowes has been particularly happy. He is asking himself why this work by a tinker's unlettered son has retained its vitality, has kept its place as literature? Why do these stock allegorical characters, these seemingly commonplace incidents and landscapes still move the reader? Why do they remain real, vivid, and moving when thousands of allegories by seemingly abler hands have become weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable? The answer he finds, thanks to the discoveries of modern psychology, in Bunyan's experience. Bunyan's is a psychopathic case. In the years when his mind and soul were in