

Atkins...

HOLY SUBURB. By Elizabeth Atkins. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1941. 348 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD A. CORDELL

HERE is "Life with Father" in a suburb of Lincoln, Nebraska during the first four years of this century. For her first novel Elizabeth Atkins has drawn liberally on her own family for portraiture, and on memories of childhood in Nebraska for her locale. Income from farms enabled Father to move his family to the holy suburb of Lincoln where flourished a sound Methodist college and where he had delightful opportunities to exercise his powers of leadership and subject his children to a Christian education. It is a novel of character and a number of unrelated incidents of varying importance (giving a sort of jumpy gait to the narrative), all bound together into a loose pattern by the progress of the two oldest children through Epworth College.

The best section of the book has to do with a daffy-downdilly young instructor from Harvard who loathes the uncouth Nebraska and is tortured mercilessly by his Methodist students. His exquisite taste and gentleness they interpret as effeminacy, the rustics' heartiness and general lack of refinement and finesse are barbarism to the Easterner. He is finally discharged when he is discovered smoking cigarettes and gratefully returns to Harvard for advanced study. Another section deals with the local Elmer Gantry, whose amatory intrigues and brassy effrontery shake the community. Ironically enough the resulting publicity does no harm to the college, which gains at once in enrollment.

The story is told from the points of view of the various Admire females—the dun, ineffectual mother and the three daughters. Unfortunately the youngest child does much of the "interpreting"; she is often an obnoxious brat and can tire the reader as well as those around her. The novel suffers somewhat by too much attention to the whimsicalities and cute sayings of the children; whenever scene and incident are turned over to the adults the book becomes more pithy and interesting. As a period piece it successfully recreates the denominational college community of forty years ago, with its gossip, its revivals, its evangelical approach to all problems, the clerical strategies and politics. The humor is rich and not at all patronizing, for the gaiety in the Admire family equals its piety. It is not a momentous novel, but it is fresh and cheerful.

Engle...

ALWAYS THE LAND. By Paul Engle. New York: Random House. 1941. 326 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by A. C. RICHARDS

SEVEN years ago we first knew Paul Engle as a strangely tormented protestant, a confused young poet tub-thumping for America, but bitter, disillusioned, and anti-pioneer at the same time. Soon, however, there was less tumult and shouting in his verse, which became more powerfully calm and assured.

Now, in "Always the Land" the young Mr. Engle gives us his first novel, and we note with gratification that this talented newcomer is still moving forward. He has sloughed off the pretentious mannerisms of his early work and shows himself master of a prose that is muscular and quietly beautiful.

"Always the Land" is a simple account of an Iowa farm family whose great love for horses makes their



Paul Engle

Louise Dahl Wolfe
Carson McCullers

house a sort of appendage to the stables, and their rich fields of corn and alfalfa a necessary evil in the economy of horse-breeding. Iowa, too, has its Horse Society, although its members seem to love horses better than society.

These horsemen, who wear no red coats and whose hunt breakfasts are served long before noon, show and race their animals at county and state fairs. They like the smell of the stable; in it they move, and live, and have their being. Old Henry, the virulent misogynist, sums it up very neatly:

"This is the life, Joe. When there ain't no more horses I wanta die. It won't be a live world then."

The characters are earthy and alive, and their speech is pungent and credible. The book is charged with animosities and minor clashes, which with the gusto and robustness of the talk compensate for the slight plot interest.

McCullers...

REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE. By Carson McCullers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1941. 183 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

THE new book by Carson McCullers is a sad disappointment, not only after her remarkable first novel, "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter," but after its own opening pages. It is instantly plain that the book is by some one who can write, with a haunting power and a suggestiveness that can be felt at once; but it all too soon becomes clear that the story is a vipers'-knot of neurasthenic relationships among characters whom the author seems hardly to comprehend, and of whose perversions she can create nothing. On the first page she promises us a murder on an army post, involving "two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse"; and it is no joke, but the simple truth, to say of this cast, the horse is the only one for whom one can feel comprehension of his character and pity for his tragedy (he is ruined when one of the officers uses him as a scapegoat for his own emotions). The others are grouped round a double triangle, a rhombus made of two triangles with one side in common. One is composed of Captain Penderton, who "had a sad penchant for becoming enamoured of his wife's lovers;" his wife Leonora, and her current lover, Major Langdon. There is also a less overt triangle involving the captain and Leonora, of which third point is Private Ellgee Williams, who has been brought up with a morbid horror of women. Situated oddly on the periphery of this situation are Major Langdon's wife, who mutilates herself horribly when she learns of his unfaithfulness, and her Filipino boy, who has for her an unpleasantly lapdog affection.

Such a collection of sick and unnatural souls could become the stuff of tragedy only if handled with the greatest comprehension, and woven into a pattern which gave some logical conclusion to the bent of each character. Neither of these conditions is here fulfilled. The murder which we have been promised comes as an anticlimax, not because the preceding emotions are too great, but because so many of the narrative threads do not lead to it, and because it is no resolution even of those which do: the book does not culminate in tragedy, it trails off into futility. And to Miss McCullers her characters' vagaries seem merely something to be cold-bloodedly chosen for their bizarrerie, contemplated, and set down, without pity or comment or any sort of use.

Dreiser to the Rescue

AMERICA IS WORTH SAVING. By Theodore Dreiser. New York: Modern Age Books. 1941. 292 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GRANVILLE HICKS

MR. DREISER is not the kind of writer for whose least word one waits eagerly, for his minor works are very minor indeed. "America Is Worth Saving" does, however, break a ten years' silence, and if it adds nothing to Dreiser's stature, if there is nothing in it to suggest that it is the work of a man who has written novels of importance, it gives us some insight into the curiously involved workings of Dreiser's mind.

With much of the book many persons will agree. Dreiser maintains that capitalism has demonstrated its inefficiency, that poverty in an age of abundance is ridiculous and criminal, that democracy must solve the problem of full production and equitable distribution. This has all been said before, but it can do no harm to have it said again.

Dreiser dislikes capitalism, but there is something he hates even more—England. England is "this black widow of the nations," "an imperialist monster," and "our worst enemy." Of the British upper class he says: "At this date and to my positive personal knowledge—I have traveled in England a number of times and followed its structure and history with the greatest of care—there is nowhere on earth a greater foe to the development, mental and physical, of the masses of the earth, than the present ruling class of England." And for the lower class he has contempt: "There is no sense of democracy among the people by and large." He devotes one whole chapter to criticisms of England by the English themselves, from Jonathan Swift to Harold Laski. From the exploitation of India to the obsequiousness of servants he canvasses the sins of the British, and there is no charge too trivial or too far-fetched for him to raise: "They have an outright contempt for our architecture which the rest of the world recognizes as the most progressive and characteristic of our epoch, and scorn to erect any high buildings in England and so give us credit for any original achievement."

As even these brief sentences suggest, Mr. Dreiser has not lost his old fondness for using ten words where one would do as well. Nor is the book free from the confusions we expect of him. If the Civil War is on page 37 an example of our "save-the-world" complex, it is on page 155 part of our struggle for democracy. There is an

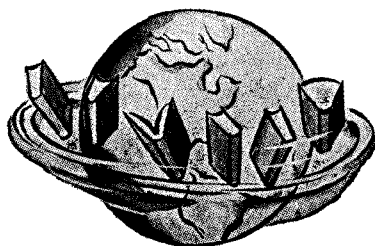
entire chapter devoted to "that strange arrangement which according to our modern psychologists holds in nature . . . and that is that three per cent of the people born in the world, and only three per cent, have the amazing ability to do what we call 'Think.'" The possessors of this amazing ability turn out to be the industrial and financial leaders. Almost as extraordinary is Mr. Dreiser's veneration for the Constitution.

In spite, however, of the wordiness and the occasional Menckenisms, the book drives ahead, and in spite of contradictions and all too characteristic nonsense, it has a position. That position is simply that British imperialism is even worse than Hitler fascism and therefore we must not take sides in the war.

Underlying this there is a more complicated argument, which is in part only implied but can be made explicit. Mr. Dreiser holds, first, that if we keep out of war, we may be able to make democracy work. But, second, if that hope fails, there is always the Soviet Union, of which he thinks well. And, third, even if Stalin can't save us, maybe fascism wouldn't be too bad.

Those who disagree with Mr. Dreiser's conclusions would be foolish to under-estimate the strength of some of his arguments. Though certain of the charges he brings against the British are ridiculous, and though his statistics are often open to question, much of what he says is undeniably true. Moreover, his account of the role of British—and American—capitalism in contributing to the rise of fascism is substantially accurate. No one serves democracy by ignoring these facts.

Yet the counter argument is perfectly clear. If England is defeated, there is not much to hope from either the Soviet Union or the United States. The former, even if it is not overrun by German armies, will yield to its own fascist tendencies. The latter will be faced with the task of building a gigantic military machine at a time when democratic morale is at its lowest and fascist prestige at its highest. Democracy is imperfect in both England and the United States, but recent history scarcely teaches us that the way to get more democracy is to abandon what we have.



The Germans in U. S.

THE TRAGEDY OF GERMAN-AMERICA. By John A. Hawgood. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1940. 334 pp., with index. \$3.

Reviewed by OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

PROFESSOR HAWGOOD has put an enormous amount of research and labor into this book, and yet it is a disappointing one. In the first place, his study of the German immigrant in the United States is limited to the nineteenth century and after, and therefore a most important chapter is omitted. Again, he is particularly interested in the efforts to establish new Germanys on American soil and studies these experiments with considerable detail, notably in the states of Texas, Missouri, and Wisconsin. This is the backbone of the book, and he shows conclusively the complete failure of the plans to transplant parts of the old Germany to this continent. Whether he considers this failure the tragedy of German-America or something else, I confess I cannot say. But I do feel that he is unduly kind and optimistic in his chapter called the "Dissolution of the Hyphen" in which he says: "By 1930 the German-American era appeared definitely over and hardly likely to return."

The truth is that the hyphen has not disappeared; that there is still a surprising amount of divided loyalty and a determination among many German-Americans to hold to Germany right or wrong even though they have had their American citizenship papers for many years. If Professor Hawgood were to come over from England and to frequent the German and American movie houses on 86th Street, in New York, he would, I think, alter his opinions. At least he would be shocked like many others by the success of the German war propaganda films and by the open hissing of American films, as recently when there was shown a film depicting the West Point cadets. It is true that because of the conviction (not for his alleged wrongdoings but, I fear, because he was a Bundist leader) of Fritz Kuhn, the Bund has waned greatly; but the discouraging thing is that there were twelve thousand sympathizers with Hitler in the famous Madison Square Garden meeting, and sometimes I wonder if there is no more sympathy with Germany today among this group than there was with the Kaiser's Reich.

The truth is that multitudes of Ger-