

R. P. Smith . . .

SO IT DOESN'T WHISTLE. By Robert Paul Smith. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1941. 234 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

THIS book contains about equal parts of Joyce, Saroyan, and Budd Schulberg; liquor, love, jazz music, and stream-of-consciousness reflections on death and such items are all inextricably mixed in a combination that is somewhat dizzying. The book is extremely funny in its more lucid passages. It is tougher, perhaps, than the recent "What Makes Sammy Run" in its exteriors because in addition to the fact that *all* of the men and women described are "loose," the scenes include one homosexual carnival and one masochistic love scene. Aside from these details the book is suitable for the *Christian Science Monitor* since the philosophies are not especially heterodox.

The story is almost indistinguishable. Four eccentric young Jews room together when they are not rooming with their mistresses who are, to a considerable extent, communal. Three of them choose the least bad of the coöperative harem and marry them, leaving "Dutch," the most voluble philosopher, alone. "Dutch" doesn't like it so he kicks a hole in a good but magnificently obscene painting and breaks his favorite phonograph record.

This bald synopsis hardly does justice to a book which is brilliant in the writing in some places and is deliberately and cunningly "screwball" in most. Perhaps the Yiddish legend from which the title is taken illustrates the manner of the book better than any attempted description.

The Old Jew attempts a riddle for the Young Jew. "What is it that is green and hangs on a wall and whistles?"

The young man gives up.

"A red herring."

"But it isn't green."

"So you paint it green."

"But it doesn't hang on a wall!"

"There is some law you shouldn't hang it on the wall?"

"But it doesn't whistle."

"Nu," says the old man sadly. "It doesn't whistle."

Anyone who enjoys a "screwball" story—and anyone with a sufficiently exquisite sense for the incongruous does—will probably enjoy "So It Doesn't Whistle."

Phil Stong, a frequent contributor to these pages, is the author of "The Princess."

C. P. Smith . . .



Chard Powers Smith

LADIES DAY. By Chard Powers Smith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. 491 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by R. L. NATHAN

MR. C. P. SMITH has written a lengthy and vigorous historical piece about the 1880's when America was growing and kicking right out of its breeches. It is a novel quite sumptuously "furnished." Every brick, bow, and bustle is there, every prancing horse, croquet stick, flowery syllable. Byzantium, N. Y., the immediate scene, lives here like a well-preserved tinted print of the period. The protagonists, on the other hand, seem a little dusty. Chief among them is one Race Kirkwood, who can best be described as three parts Rhett Butler, and one Clark Gable. It is difficult not to feel him leering and twisting his mustache at us, as he shoulders his way about, bad and masculine and irresistible. Worse than that is his inspired second-guessing at history. When he cries out, "There's a young fella I know in Cleveland has already made the oil business into something about as big as the Roman Empire . . . young Scotchman in Pittsburgh is aimin' to do the same thing with steel . . ." we want to expostulate, "See here, Kirkwood, Mr. Smith told you all that!" Aside from high jinks and finance, there is the up-and-down love affair between Kirkwood and Sally Lathrop, a gentle lady, no Scarlett she but a dewy Melanie. They pursue their attachment to its bitter end, neatly achieving recognition of their difference without actual tragedy.

Wilson . . .

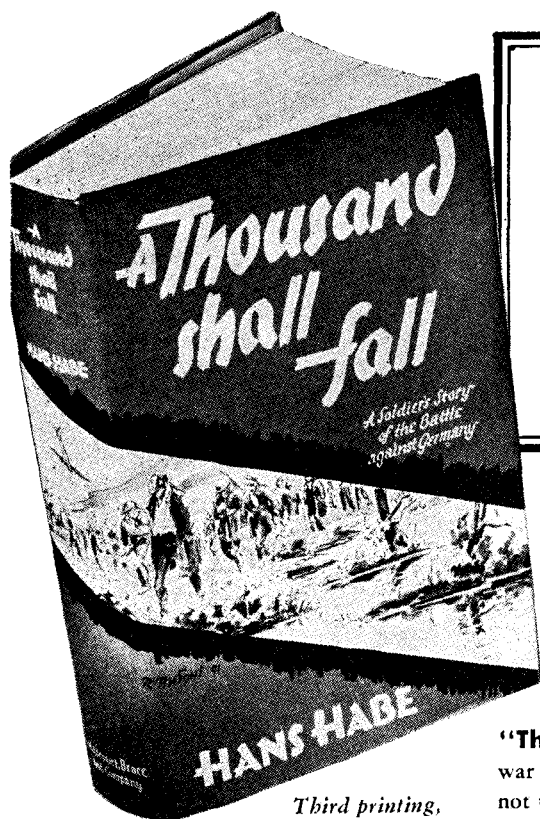
YESTERDAY'S SON. By William E. Wilson. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1941. 307 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD A. CORDELL

THE Author of "The Wabash," one of the most readable of the Rivers of America series, now tries his hand at fiction and has ample reason to view his first novel with satisfaction. "Yesterday's Son" with admirable economy (it is an excellent single-sitting novel) tells the story of three adults and a youth who learn through harrowing experience that the dead past does not always bury its dead, and that what's done is not always done. A professor of English in a New England college is jolted out of his comfortable academic routine when he discovers that a sprawling, sullen freshman in his Survey class is his illegitimate son; then the mother learns of her son's knowledge of his parentage, and finally confesses to her husband her infidelity of eighteen years before. The situation is powerfully dramatic—in fact, "Yesterday's Son," like a short story, is concerned with a situation rather than with a march of events; but it is by no means merely a blown-up short story, for it achieves adequate fullness and expansiveness.

The excellence of this first novel lies not in its style, which rarely rises above the commonplace, but in its shrewd characterization. Wisely limiting his characters to a few, the novelist succeeds in making each plausible and—unusual in serious modern fiction—likable. His is a "Strange Interlude" about normal men and women, who entangle their lives and yet escape neuroticism and empty frustration. The author is fair to his characters. The husband, a New England Brahmin, is seemingly aloof and passionless, prim and meticulous; but we finally see him as shy and timid, still frightened by an ignominious childhood poverty, and yearning for affection. The boy is puzzling, for he is bewildered and stunned. The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and sometimes length is their only dimension; but when Larry begins to understand himself and others, incongruities and paradoxes in his own thinking and conduct begin to disappear.

The backgrounds—rural New England and the college—are carefully done but not overdone. There is little humor except in some of the academic portraits and possibly in the many tiny jabs at Harvard, but there is little occasion for humor in this tense study of four people in a trap from which it is impossible to escape without wounds and suffering.



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