

A Philadelphia Story

ALONG THESE STREETS. By Struthers Burt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1941. 608 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

ACCORDING to the epigraph of O. Henry's famous "A Municipal Report" there are only three "story cities" in the United States—New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco. In the O. Henry generation, and, indeed, until recently, Philadelphia was content to bask in the waning sunlight of historical romance. S. Weir Mitchell was the last novelist to "do" Philadelphia, but he seldom got beyond the adoption of the constitution; and his successors were content with the Pennsylvania Dutch, patches of suburban elegance à la Hergesheimer, or the glossy splendors of *The Saturday Evening Post*. The phrase of the muckrakers for Philadelphia was "corrupt and contented," and novelists proposed neither to examine the corruption nor to disturb the contentment.

Comes now Mr. Struthers Burt with "Along These Streets," a long, loose, leisurely novel containing, among other things, a Philadelphia story. I say "among other things" because the slow pace and Victorian amplitude of the book have room for passages about men and monkeys (Mr. Burt seems a touch disturbed by the anthropological reflections of Professor Hooton), men and women, and men and nations. The

book begins in the Canal Zone and concludes with a motor trip around the United States. H. M. Pulham, Esq., was torn between two ladies; Felix MacAlister, hero of Mr. Burt's observations, seems for many chapters likely to be divided among three. The Bostonian, even with the aid of Marvin Myles, was unable to escape the moral earnestness and family pressure of Beacon Hill; Mr. MacAlister marries his New York goddess (after a good deal of aid from the author) largely because the lawyer in charge of his estate proves to be corrupt and because our hero is illegitimate at the time of his birth, even though his parents married later.

What constitutes a city? The Marquand library (Occidental division) equates Boston with what is numerically the tiniest fraction of its population. Mr. MacAlister's fortune is partially in Philadelphia slum real estate, and at honorable intervals Mr. Burt or his hero reminds the reader that the heart of old Philadelphia is an area of sociological degeneration. But the vast Negro population is represented only by a faithful colored servant; the vast "immigrant" population is represented scarcely at all; the vast working class, the enormous lower middle class, the whole Lumpenproletariat—these do not appear. One would not learn from "Along These Streets" that Philadelphia is a huge industrial city—the closest one comes

to commerce is to walk along the docks and to edit a magazine. In sum, Philadelphia, for purposes of this narrative, is synonymous with a tiny fraction of Anglo-Saxondom, the Philadelphia of old clubs, the Assemblies, good eating, and conservative investments.

On the foibles of this small group Mr. Burt is sometimes malicious and usually amusing. He sees through them and he sees around them, but he also loves them even when he berates them. But the "city novel" as written by Messrs. Marquand and Burt is scarcely a novel of the city at all. The people who count in "Along These Streets" are all within the magic circle of birth and breeding; we never look at Philadelphia or at them through the eyes of any representative of the majority of Philadelphia citizens.

Mr. Burt has, of course, the privilege of writing his novel any way he pleases. He has written a slow-paced, readable, sagacious book which amidst its ups and downs (and it is an uneven performance) is filled with an honorable and passionate desire to keep the American way of life for Americans. But his incessant desire to reflect, to wisecrack, to meditate, in his own person or in the person of Felix, about sex and the family, canalizes a large part of his pages in a direction away from Philadelphia and waters down his presentation of the Philadelphian (and the American) problem. We miss the sociological tensions, the racial antagonisms, the frank breakdown of municipal government which alarm deeply all those who know anything about the Quaker City. Mr. Burt, to be sure, hints at these things, but he never dramatizes them; and in the end he proves to be as essentially Philadelphian as his characters, since the impression he leaves is of the eternity of Anglo-Saxondom in Philadelphia.

It may be answered that to require Mr. Burt to deal with racial and sociological antagonisms would be to require him to write a different sort of novel, and to some extent the answer is just. But Mr. Burt himself raises the issue, not the reviewer. His pages are overshadowed by the threat of fascism, from the Italian cruise boat which gets the main characters before us, to the patriotic geography at the close. How shall America survive? is his question. Well, it will not survive by the easy device of having Felix MacAlister run away from Philadelphia. It will not survive by genially satirizing "nice" people. This Mr. Burt knows. But the line of his thesis takes him in one direction, the line of his story in another direction, and the result is a readable but radically defective book.

Your Literary I. Q.

MUTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

By Howard Collins

Listed below are pairs of literary figures, both real and imaginary, who have something in common. Can you remember what it is? Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 22.

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|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Pinocchio | 11. Edmond Dantes |
| Cyrano | Samuel Pickwick |
| 2. Rigoletto | 12. Hajji Baba |
| Yorick | Figaro |
| 3. Father Brown | 13. Phileas Fogg |
| Sarah Gamp | John Gilpin |
| 4. Silas Wegg | 14. Richard Cory |
| John Silver | Viscount Signolles |
| 5. John Bunyan | 15. Marjorie Daw |
| O. Henry | Mrs. Harris |
| 6. Jacob Marley | 16. Ellery Queen |
| Marion Kerby | Barnaby Ross |
| 7. William Tell | 17. Joe Bonaparte |
| Robin Hood | Midge Kelley |
| 8. Doll Tearsheet | 18. Haidee |
| Anna Christie | Calypso |
| 9. Drury Lane | 19. Ralph Hartsook |
| Duke of Bilgewater | Thorneycroft Huxtable |
| 10. Richard Halliburton | 20. Captain Hook |
| Ambrose Bierce | Captain Cuttle |

The Inferno Years

DRAGON'S TEETH. By Upton Sinclair. New York: The Viking Press. 1942. 631 pp. \$3.

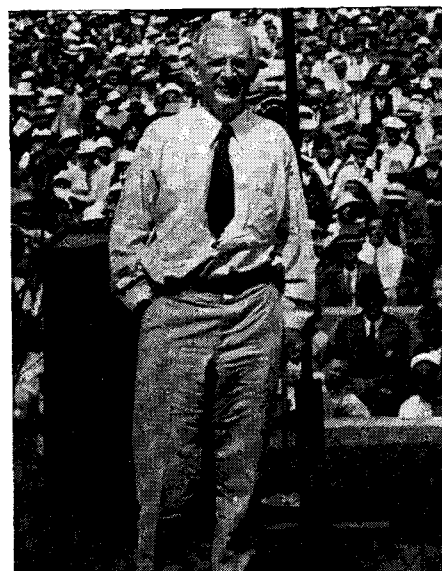
Reviewed by RICHARD R. PLANT

AS in the first two novels of his enormous cycle, "Between Two Worlds" and "Worlds End," Upton Sinclair, the indefatigable social crusader, the chronicler of 46 years of American economics, the zealous fighter for the betterment of the state of things, has turned historian. What he offers in more than 600 pages is an abbreviated world history from the Wall Street Crash of 1929 to the Nazi "Blood Purge" in 1934, with the accent on Germany. His novel, stripped of the fictional sections, could very well serve as a textbook for the study of contemporary history. As he unfolds slowly the events of these fateful years, he makes us forget how profoundly correct he is. For his extensive research—and he must have done quite a bit of it—is transformed into smooth narrative and there is no feeling that the author had constantly to fight against the temptation to add explanatory footnotes to every page.

Only a specialist could state whether Upton Sinclair has forgotten essential details: it seems to me he has not only not forgotten them, he has put in too many. His scrupulous study of Nazi Germany has led him perhaps into bypaths he needn't have entered, and made him touch on many themes he could not exhaust. But the picture of Nazi Germany is accurate. The chronicle of Europe downstream is complete. The atmosphere of impending doom is caught in a thousand facets, and with a masterly technique Sinclair makes the reader aware of the speed with which a continent is gliding towards the abyss. This technique is not new: his hero, Lanny Budd, neutral observer, rich and sensitive, travels over Europe and with him we realize slowly what is going to happen. When finally he finds himself alone in enemy territory, he fights back with all his strength, and when he is caught in the dragon's claws, we feel caught with him. From the comfortable seat of a spectator he is dragged onto the stage and must play his part in the nightmarish melodrama that Nazi Germany has made come true. The melodrama's managers and producers are portrayed with sober precision: Goering, Hitler and Goebbels emerge as if out of Shirer's diary. So vividly related are the details that one could imagine Upton Sinclair has had undisclosed interviews with the Super-Triumvirate.

At the beginning the novel is slow.

The activities of Lanny and his millionaire wife, Irma, occupy a great deal of space. Irma is a perfect foil for Lanny; there is not one stupid thing about nations, races, economics, or politics she forgets to say. Sinclair makes her a living example of the upper-class-women who refuse to believe what is happening in these years, who refuse to abandon their comfortable routine of bridges and dinner-parties. To do Sinclair justice it must be said that he does not make Irma entirely unsympathetic. He is too good a writer to proceed in this way. But there are long discussions between her and Lanny in which she invariably maintains opinions which the reader knows are wrong—in 1942. There are other discussions and dialogues which slow the pace of the narrative. The seances of the Polish medium, where a variety of spirits appear, as well as the controversies about these phenomena, occupy far too many pages. Interspersed with scenes of the utmost realism, in the midst of this almost scientific resume of current history, the descriptions of the spiritualistic world seem to be far out of place. Although the author of "Oil" and "100%" has become, we know, deeply engrossed in the supernatural, it is more than surprising that he takes it at face value and even employs it to further his plot. It is difficult to combine Zola and Conan Doyle.



This photograph of Upton Sinclair was taken during his campaign for the Governorship of California.

But the slow start, the lengthy passages in the initial chapters, the over-rich canvas of characters that make rather laborious going at first, do not condemn the book; in fact, they seem to make the final climax all the more exciting. In the cool, detached style of the historian the machinery of the totalitarian state appears the more terrifying. Because Sinclair is seldom given to emotional writing, he becomes the more effective when he suffers for the tortured and broken, and cries out in an agony of pity for the lost souls of Hitler's Inferno.

Retour à la Nature

CORN IN EGYPT. By Warwick Deeping. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1942. 290 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

THE Rousseauvian notion of the natural man and the noble savage in its phase of "Go back to the farm and forget politics" seems to have been late in reaching England, for books on this topic have been appearing in the United States from about 1930 to last fall. In fact, they have been so common that we have even had several on "Go back to the farm—and duck!", which is good advice, for the most part, to the accustomed city dweller, no matter what his derivations, as Arthur Pound suggests in one of his novels.

About the first half of Mr. Deeping's novel is given to a Robinson Crusoe tale about a young Englishman who leaves the superficialities of trade and the clangor of London to rebuild a little deserted farm. His struggles and achievements are reasonably interesting but quite old hat for readers on

this side of the Atlantic. Toward the middle of the book the natural man meets the not quite natural woman and breaks down her disinterest in the too, too natural male by accidentally sawing off four fingers in a buzz-saw—a silly performance for a natural man.

Here the war rears its head and the natural man, with cribs full of grain and potatoes, pens full of pigs and chickens, and a natural woman with a cellarful of beer and preserves, has his triumph over the city smarties. Even the disabling of his Eve by a bomb cannot seriously disturb a love sustained and nourished by the mutual passion for The Farm.

Critics are miles apart on the quality of Mr. Deeping's familiar style. At times it manages the warmth and disarming candor for which it strives. This writer must admit that at other times he is one of Mr. Deeping's "hard" and "superficially sophisticated" commentators—just a town boy—and finds the going a little bit sloppy.