

tion is whether the reader is legitimately entitled to ask why he falls into it. We think so, but Caldwell himself has recently commented that the only function of the novelist is to show the reader what people actually do.

Well, people do think now and then; they even modify their impulses by reason. It is this realm of "doing" which is so markedly absent from "This Very Earth." It would be absurd, however, to defend this lack on the grounds that Caldwell is picturing simpletons. Far from it; Chism himself is as wily as any possum and has all the brainpower needed for craftily selling his daughters to the

highest bidder or for practising blackmail on their lovers.

So, as a novel, "This Very Earth" is basically unsatisfying. It will prompt instinctive admiration from any but the intellectual snobs, who ought to admit that as a craftsman Caldwell perfectly frames the exact pictures he wants to paint. But what he paints is not "this very earth"; it is the world of Erskine Caldwell. And that world is becoming increasingly artificial instead of deeply felt. It can hardly be more important to the reader than it is to the author. Can it be that Caldwell's experience on an international scale has made him impatient of provincialism?

Italy via Berlin. Hitler, who is only mad north north-west, still thinks that Lanny is working for *him*.

The job is to persuade the Italian military and financial circles to work with us, as Lanny has just finished doing with the French, via Admiral Darlan and Robert Murphy. Meanwhile, however, Lanny has to get his material for the trip, which he does through a gorgeous shindig at Evalyn Walsh McLean's, where his wife, who has just spent \$1,000 for new evening clothes, is wise enough to wear no jewels. Forthwith Lanny meets Signor Generoso Pope and embarks upon his voyage to Rome, Berlin, Stockholm, London, and Madrid.

The rest I leave to your imagination or your purse. The point is, of course, that after you have accepted the complete absurdity of Mr. Sinclair's narrative, as well as the incredible American dialect, you begin to enjoy it. As a matter of fact, the improbability of the Lanny Budd novels is one of their main virtues; the ordinary reader gets a vigorous adventure story in the best tradition of Superman along with a simple but encyclopedic history of the world today. But the main appeal of the series lies quite clearly in its nineteenth-century American point of view, well-informed, moral, and virtuous, but also large, careless, and generous to the point of extravagance.

Mr. Sinclair's familiar villains are all here, to be sure, including the international bankers, the Fascists, and the military. Yet there is very little sense of evil in this entire chronicle of modern corruption and decay. Even Hitler has sense enough to listen to Lanny Budd, who, if he only had had a little more time, might have helped to prevent both our world wars. And the Americans in general, although they have incredible wealth and a formidable technology, and can wipe out islands or continents in short order, remain also generous and decent people who want only to establish prosperity and peace.

This central view of life, which corresponds to our own earlier dreams of national destiny and to the Europeans' wildest fancy, seems to me the main element in the success of the Lanny Budd novels, including "One Clear Call." France and England in particular have always had rather distorted notions of our culture through such literary emissaries as Poe, Jack London, or Horace McCoy. Mr. Sinclair's present work may serve to balance this. If his world seems almost equally remote or exotic to us at the present time, I only hope it will not prove to be as far from the truth.

Lanny Budd on Another Secret Mission

ONE CLEAR CALL. By Upton Sinclair. New York: The Viking Press. 1948. 626 pp. \$3.50.

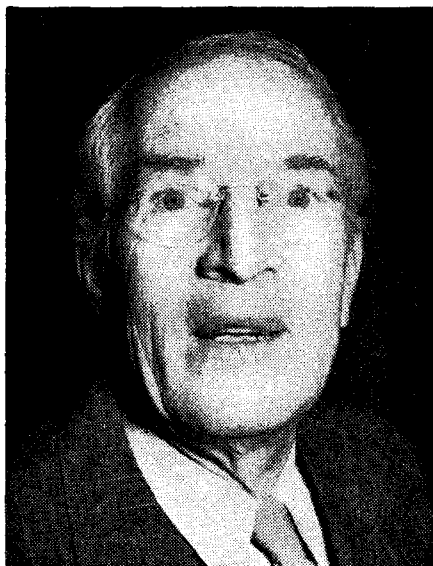
Reviewed by MAXWELL GEISMAR

THIS is the ninth volume of the fabulous Lanny Budd series. In spite of the Pulitzer Prize award for "Dragon's Teeth," the third volume, published in 1943, Mr. Sinclair's literary panorama of almost every important event and famous person in the contemporary historical scene has never won any clear-cut critical recognition, either as literature, history, folk lore, propaganda, or fantasy. It has been almost impossible to determine which of these categories really describes the series, in fact—just as Mr. Sinclair's own career has been a curious and sometimes alarming mixture of publicist, politician, reformer, moralist, faddist, and, incidentally, artist.

Mr. Sinclair, however, has kept on going. And the saga of Lanny Budd—the wealthy scion of Budd-Erling armaments; the playboy of international high society; the intimate of Otto Kahn, Hitler, Roosevelt, Churchill, and General Patton, to name only a few of the personages, dead or alive, who figure in the present volume, and the secret agent of democratic socialism, brotherhood, and freedom—this saga has become an extraordinary phenomenon of the contemporary literary scene. Some of the earlier volumes in the series have sold close to a million copies, and the average has been about 50,000 copies each, both in the United States and Great Britain, not to mention the other foreign countries from Argentina and Brazil to Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.S.S.R., which have already contracted for or published the series. And the author, at the age of seventy, after a life-

time of sensations, abuse, and, often enough, social ostracism or exile, finds himself in the position of being not only a national best seller but an international representative of American culture.

The secret of Upton Sinclair nobody yet knows—except to the degree that he still represents a flourishing of those provincial rebels, free-thinkers, and eccentrics who in the 1900's, from Robert Ingersoll to Veblen, marked the climax of our earlier agrarian and mercantile society. But what is the secret of the Lanny Budd series? In the opening sections of "One Clear Call," for instance, Lanny and his third wife, a "quiet little woman with a slow smile and soft brown eyes," are vacationing in Florida. The P.A. (Presidential Agent) is called to Washington by the Boss (F.D.R.) and sent on another secret mission to



—Wide World.

"The secret of Upton Sinclair nobody yet knows."

Land of Freedom?

LAST OF THE CONQUERORS. By William Gardner Smith. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., Inc. 1948. 262 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

THERE have been so many novels in the last two years that have stressed racial injustice in this country that it is difficult to imagine any new or startling approach to this depressing subject. Yet an American Negro, now only twenty-one years old, has managed, in "The Last of the Conquerors," to produce a controversial book that is guaranteed to shock any reader who is at all apprehensive of the results of our continued discrimination against Negro citizens on ourselves and on public opinion throughout the world. The author, William Gardner Smith, is nevertheless an example of what a Negro youth can achieve in a few short years if he has been born north of the Mason and Dixon line. A Philadelphian, raised and educated in the colored segment of that city, he has been a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier* for five years, except for a brief interlude toward the end of the war when he was drafted and sent to Germany with a Negro force as a part of our Army of Occupation. After V-J Day he remained in Germany for eight months as an observer for his newspaper, and is now a student in Temple University in his home city. This chronology is significant since it explains the reportorial talent apparent in his novel. His youth excuses, if any excuses are necessary, the ardor with which he proclaims his discovery that the German people behaved toward Negroes as if they were their equals.

The detachment of dark-skinned American conquerors who sailed across the Atlantic for occupation duty in Germany came from both the Jim-Crow South and the Negro slums of Northern cities. Two of them were friends; Hayes Dawkins, who tells the story, and his friend Randy, called "the Professor" because he was older, highly literate, and had been, oddly enough, a reporter on the author's own newspaper. All of them, from what they had heard, would have preferred France. Actually, they did not know how lucky they were going to be. How could they have imagined that the Germans, trained for so many years in Hitler's Nazi creed of purity of blood and race, would treat them simply as pleasant human beings, would take them into their homes, would permit their daughters and sis-

ters to go about with them, to sleep with them, or to marry them? According to Mr. Smith, that is exactly what happened. For the first time in the lives of any of them, they could look white men in the eyes and could associate with them and their women. It is the effect on these men of this sudden freedom, this overwhelming knowledge that there was a place on the earth where there was no discrimination against them, that gives a startling meaning to "The Last of the Conquerors," as well as the obvious contrast with their certain future back home where Jim Crow, in one form or another, must rule their lives.

There is a disturbing parallel between the attitude of these soldiers—who when they were abroad felt the breath of the only kind of freedom

they long for—and the people behind the Iron Curtain in Europe and Russia who see in the West political and intellectual emancipation. The policy of the Army in segregating colored from white troops enabled them to pursue the utopian fantasy of an idyllic life in Germany to which they would return after they had been shipped back to the States. In Berlin this particular group was well-housed, in a mess hall that looked like the first-class restaurants they had never been allowed to enter. The German girls who acted as secretaries and stenographers were more than amiable, and several of the men had the disconcerting experience of knowing that a blonde and blue-eyed fraulein had fallen in love with them. Most of them "shacked-up" with the sympathetic young ladies who came to the club and who could be bought for cigarettes or candy. Hayes Dawkins's

Late as This!

"Old Man on Nebo! Late as this
One Justice bleeds for thee!"

EMILY DICKINSON.

By Leonora Speyer

SAM, my friend on the corner
Who sells me the evening paper
(With its mortal headline, "Old Jerusalem Falls"—),
Weeps.
And I weep with him.

And he asks me, "How long?"
And I answer, "Not two thousand years!"

And he smiles—the patient smile of that ancient people.
We smile together,
And in his eyes and in my heart
Sound the measures of an ancient song:
*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth . . .*

(And mine, the singer's tongue,
Let it cleave to the roof of my mouth,
Let me never sing again,
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem!)

And we pray together,
Sam the Jew and I the Christian,
As we think of the two old Rabbis
In that far-away Holy City,
With their gray beards and their white flags of truce . . .

And Emily prays with us!
We pray for that bleeding Justice,
Each in his own way,
And we remember, each in his own way,
The old Man on Nebo,
And those pentateuchal robes
Which he will surely wear.