

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

in: "The Chicago Sun Book Week" vom 24.1.1943

Upton Sinclair's New Novel. Wide is the Gate.

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U P T O N S I N C L A I R ' S N E W N O V E L

Reviewed by K l a u s M a n n

Wide is the Gate, by Upton Sinclair (Viking Press. \$ 3.00)

"In tragic times like these, an elderly author has nothing to give but words. This collection of words is dedicated to the men and women in many parts of the world who are giving their lives in the cause of freedom and human decency."

This simple statement - the motto of Upton Sinclair's novel Dragon's Teeth (1941) - might as well be used in presenting his new work, Wide is the Gate. Both books are fragments, or instalments, of one epic scheme - a documentary saga of vast dimensions surveying the structure of modern civilization. The spirit of moral awareness and social responsibility - characteristic of Sinclair's work in its entirety - becomes particularly evident and impressive in these recent narrative contributions. Here the author renounces, deliberately and emphatically, all aesthetic subtelties and devices. He is plain, factual, almost crude. At once humble and inordinately ambitious, he almost ceases to be an artist - spurning the whole roster of literary ~~disguises~~ and contrivances; tackling life directly - the real thing, undisguised, shameless and colossal. Even Zola's naturalistic style seems artificial, compared with Sinclair's brutally sober approach. The great Frenchman - in many respects the model and master of the American - indulges lavishly in symbolist images and poetic allusions. There is, in Zola's work, a musical, not to say Wagnerian, element, in which Sinclair is utterly lacking. He is dry and didactic, not without a Puritan touch, for all his rebellious pathos and the liberality of his views.

Is Wide is the Gate a novel? ~~Yes and no~~ If so, it represents a new and rather hazardous experiment with this traditional genre. A novel deals,

as a rule, with imaginary characters and situations. In Sinclair's story, however, most persons and events are taken from the reality - not even the names are changed. Nazi chieftains and British politicians, Spanish rebels and international financiers, the profiteers and the victims of the great political game - they all appear without make-up, and are called Adolf Schicklgruber Hitler, Sir Basil Zaharoff, Hermann Goering, Sir John Simon, Putzi Hanfstaengl, General Francisco Franco, and so forth. The victims, of course, are introduced under fictitious names; yet they are as unmistakably authentic as ~~are~~ the famous tyrants and exploiters. I have known girls like Trudi Schultz, the brave and clever anti-Nazi fighter, ~~presented to us by Sinclair.~~ Raoul Palma, the Spanish Loyalist, looks familiar to me, and I am hardly surprised when he introduces the hero of the book to an excellent woman whose company I actually enjoyed in Barcelona - Constancia de la Mora, descended from one of the most illustrious Spanish families and ardently devoted to the cause of the Spanish people.

The young man who has as incongruous acquaintances as Herr Hitler and Senor ~~de~~ de la Mora, Trudi Schultz and Basil Zaharoff, is ^{an} ~~the~~ American, Lanny Budd, who certainly deserves to be called a hero, in the good old dashing sense of the word. The readers of Dragon's Teeth, and of the preceding parts of Upton Sinclair's novelistic cycle, are ~~also~~ long familiar with this engaging personage and his multimillionaire wife, Irma Barnes Budd. At this point of our chronicle, Lanny is thirty-four years but looks much younger - an indestructible juvenile. We first meet him again ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ the ^{South of} ~~General~~ in France, at the funeral of his old friend Freddi Robin, murdered in a Nazi concentration camp. Agile and generous, young Lanny tours the European continent - everywhere in contact with, and plotting against, the men of great power and evil will. We see him in Hitler's mountain retreat, near Berchtesgaden, conversing with the Fuhrer - a brilliant scene, by the way, although it may fall short of

the masterly Goering portrait presented in Dragon's Teeth. Lanny collaborates with the German underground opposition; rushes from Berlin to Cannes, from Salzburg to Paris, from London to Italy, then across the Atlantic, from New York back to France, from Paris to Barcelona, Valencia, and Madrid. He is smart and naive, unflaggingly enthusiastic - a fervent and efficient friend of all those who fight ~~against~~ Fascism and retrogression. His wife, quite naturally, is somewhat irritated by his socialist leanings and the increasing number of his Leftist friends. The heiress of fabulous wealth resents in particular her husband's comradeship with Trudi Schultz, who means obviously more to Lanny than comrades usually do. Irma has plenty of reason to be disturbed as he fashionable friends keep plying her with insidious questions: "Why on earth should you give your trust to this man? ... And what do you think will be our feelings when we are named as the mother, the wife, the mother-in-law, the friend, of this starry-eyed comrade of assassins? Have the rich no rights that a young pink is bound to respect?"

But the starry-eyed comrade continues with unabated élan his risky activities. He smuggles Trudi Schultz out of the Third Reich. He performs one stunning feat after the other, and altogether behaves like certain helpful and heroic characters popularized by the funny-papers - Tarzan or Superman. Thanks to Lanny, Upton Sinclair's grimly factual report assumes at times an almost fairytale-like character. The world in which the young hero lives is the fierce, merciless world we know - described by the chronicler with remarkable conscientiousness and quasi-scientific precision; a sordid, dangerous world full of struggle and treachery; the world of the German concentration camps, the Abyssinian war, the tragedy of Spain, the disgrace of Munich. But Lanny, the shrewd observer and spirited fighter, seems to anticipate, as a character and in his thoughts, a different and better world to come. And so so does his author - Upton Sinclair, the most assiduous crusader and story-teller in modern literature.