

display of bone-crushing in the manner of the old Boss himself. It also is a fact that the White House's conspicuous association with Pendergast in this operation gave the organization a giddy sense of power and security which it abused outrageously on election day. To that extent, the Milligan charge that Truman is responsible for a resurgence of Pendergastism in 1946 is a sound, true bill.

Truman's actual role in the 1946 episode illustrates his position in the organization throughout his career, which is that of a dues-paying member who ran with the pack, never struck a blow against bossism, and consistently threw his weight against reform although he seldom had to make an embarrassing public display of the boss tag. For a long time the man from Missouri baffled his opponents with his success in creating the illusion that his relationship with T. J. Pendergast was a private affair above the unrefined boss level. Prosecutor Milligan sets out to show that Harry Truman's loyalty to Pendergast includes devotion to the machine itself, and he arrays the evidence in convincing fashion. His final exhibit concerns the Truman Administration's handling of the Federal investigations of the 1946 vote fraud cases, a stalling act that provoked a Senate inquiry which finally was blocked by a Democratic filibuster threat in 1947.

For the rest, this book is a brief but well-rounded history of the Pendergast tragedy from the eighteen eighties to the death of Tom Pendergast in 1945. As one of the principal actors in the more spectacular phases of this fantastic American morality play, Maurice Milligan should have and does have a dramatic story to tell. He tells it well. The D. A. was as perfectly cast for his part as Boss Tom was for his, as the reader will discover in the stirring chapters on the crimes, investigations, and court battles of the final Pendergast years.

This book does not go extensively into the anatomy of the machine or explore its ramifications in the American complex. Although the author does not uncover the root causes of bossism, he turns a glaring light on the principal symptoms and effects of that blighting disease. With chilling effect, Mr. Milligan reviews the record, which demonstrates that corruption of the ballot is the most destructive of the machine evils. He performed a notable service for democracy in combating that evil in Kansas City, and he carries on the good fight in a challenging book.

William Reddig, formerly of the Kansas City Star, now with the Charlotte (N. C.) News-Observer, wrote "Tom's Town," published last year.

APRIL 24, 1948

Fiction. *The recurring lists of best-selling novels offer an entertaining subject for speculation. Why has Thornton Wilder's collection of fictional letters, memoranda, and odds and ends of Julius Caesar's later days, revealed in the scholarly "The Ides of March," so rapidly reached third place? Why has Ross Lockridge, Jr.'s immense and forbiddingly complex "Raintree County" climbed to second place? On the other hand, why does so charming and tranquilizing a novel as "Cry, the Beloved Country," by Alan Paton, stay in the sixteenth and last place, while Joshua Liebman's soothing "Peace of Mind" remains week after week glued to the first place of the non-fiction lists? Why does Truman Capote's highly publicized and controversial novel stay next to the last? Of the books reviewed this week Elizabeth Goudge's will offer forgetfulness; Lenard Kaufman's, alarm at juvenile murder; Allan Seager's, a revelation of small-town suppression; and George R. Stewart's, sudden excitement.*

The Ogre of a Small Town

THE INHERITANCE. By Allan Seager. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1948. 337 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD B. GEHMAN

ALLAN SEAGER belongs to that little group of college professor-writers which, perhaps to the discomfiture of the "professionals," has been making a distinct place for itself in American writing during the past decade. Robert Penn Warren, Wallace Stegner, Lionel Trilling, and I. J. Kapstein are a few of the better-known members of this set, from which we have come to expect fiction of a distinguished, if rather eclectic, order. In many respects, Seager is the best of the bunch: he is a far better storyteller than most, and he has a gift for sketching character in two or three lines that must be the envy of all.

It is this ability that tempers the main objection that can be aimed at this author's second novel (the first was "Equinox," which enjoyed considerable critical acclaim and a sale of some 25,000 copies). If Seager has a principal fault, it is his lack of restraint. He spells out his theme again and again, leaving nothing to the imagination, and the book might have been cut profitably by almost one-third. Yet when one looks back on some of the graphic, touching, and

shocking scenes, and realizes that the author has given us so many characters done so remarkably well, one is inclined to forgive him.

"The Inheritance" is set in a Michigan town big enough to have two movie theatres, two fairly good restaurants, and a brothel. It is the story of Walter Phelps, the son of a bank president, the last in a line of bankers. Shortly after the book opens, the boy Walter watches his father fight and lick the father of his best friend. The victory makes such an impression on him that he comes to think that his father can do no wrong.

After the death of both his parents in an automobile accident, Walter finds an astonishing collection of pornography in his father's room. A little later, he overhears some former business associates discussing his father in slanderous terms. He finds, in addition, that his inheritance, financially speaking, is not as large as he had imagined it would be. All these things do nothing to vitiate the image he has created. Walter's real inheritance—the mantle of his father—leads him into a series of defiant acts against the town: he gets in a drunken brawl in a hotel room; he takes a prostitute to a country-club-set party. Ultimately, he is committed for insanity.

This is only the barest outline of the story, and does not allow for the character of Eddie Burcham, Walter's best friend. Eddie serves as a sort of powerless conscience; he is a tuberculosis patient who gradually gives up fighting the disease. Toward the end, he says to Walter,

You and I are already too old to change this town much. We were born and brought up in it and it has tainted us. And there is nothing in the way we were brought up to suggest to us that anything is worth



doing except to repeat our fathers' lives. . . .

This recapitulation is not really necessary. Seager's gift for character creation is such that his message is made clear long before the book comes to an end. He draws his individuals with striking economy, achieving the diffi-

cult feat of making even minor people seem three-dimensional. Thus the reader is shown, not told, the terrifying effect of the small-town upon its residents. The book is an excellent second try, and one can only hope that Seager will not wait too long to give us a third.

From Little Sparks Mighty Fir Trees Go

FIRE. By George R. Stewart. New York: Random House. 1948. 336 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

SINCE anything burning briskly has a compelling attraction for city dwellers, one may safely predict that this book will enjoy a success in our urban centers. It is the story of a forest fire in California, done in the style with which readers of Mr. Stewart's "Storm" are already familiar and of which it is only necessary to say that it is the effect of a raid by journalism upon fiction. It is not the reviewer's habit to quote from blurbs, but he cannot refrain from remarking that the sentence which begins, "The hero of George R. Stewart's new novel is a spark that almost flickers out at birth, etc., etc." is, at least to anyone who has ever lived in California, about as virulent a misstatement as has appeared in print for a long time. If there is a hero in Mr. Stewart's novel, it is the collective effort of experienced fire-fighters; and if there is a villain, it is the inexperienced fire-fighter who gives way to panic. To do Mr. Stewart no more than justice, he does not himself take the fatal plunge into animism. Considering the temptations which his

theme has placed in his way, one can only applaud the infrequency with which he refers to his forest fire as a monster or a demiurge or a person. To him a fire is a fire, and from this point of view his book is a very honest piece of work.

The essence of Mr. Stewart's tale is that there is, on the one hand, a fire (set off by lightning) in a national forest; and, on the other hand, the U. S. Forest Service. The former, as it grows from a spark to a conflagration, allows Mr. Stewart to prove that he is on writing terms with meteorology, geology, and natural history; the latter permits him to show that it is a complex and efficient entity, and to suggest at the same time the ways in which it might be improved by further Government expenditures.

In short, Mr. Stewart in "Fire" is a reporter who believes that his work will be enhanced if he gives it the appearance of fiction. This works out very well, so long as he confines himself to rendering more palatable his extensive research into the habits of fires and the techniques of fire-fighting. Upon the evidence presented by "Fire," however, one might reasonably doubt if his talents are those of a novelist. His main plot—outside that of the growth and conquest of the fire—is one which has already been worn thin: the plot of the young Supervisor, whose methods are up to date but who is not quite sure of himself as a leader of men, and his mental contest with the old Ranger, who is a leader of men but whose methods have grown antiquated. Substitute Engineer for Supervisor and Foreman for Ranger and you can readily see that this is, to put it very mildly, a twice-told tale. On a lower plane of invention, Mr. Stewart introduces a tall, immensely nubile, and quite idiotic girl look-out who becomes romantically involved with a young meteorologist in a red jeep, and who belongs solely to the comic strips.

None the less, when Mr. Stewart writes about the conflagration itself he is direct and dramatic. Fortunately, his book is far more an animated and informed essay on fires and fire-fighting than it is a novel about

leadership and love. Indeed, his description of the ease with which a great fire can be started, the magnificence and terror which he is often able to impose upon its progress from ridge to ridge, and the dramatic perils to which he exposes (and, in two instances, sacrifices) the men who have to fight it, are all so exciting that one trembles at the thought of this book's falling into the hands of a pyromaniac. It will, however, certainly make any rational visitor to California think twice before he throws a lighted cigarette out of his automobile. It is effective popular education; and if it is called a novel, no great harm will be done.

Grown-up Fairy Tale

PILGRIM'S INN. By Elizabeth Goudge. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 1948. 346 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROSEMARY CARR BENÉT

IT IS seldom that we come across such a disarmingly honest statement by an author of purpose in writing a book as we find in "Pilgrim's Inn." Elizabeth Goudge says,

Like all my books, "Pilgrim's Inn" has a happy ending, for I love these people too much to let them be unhappy for long. I know that happy endings are sometimes inartistic, and certainly not always true to life, but I can't write any other kind. I am not a serious chronicler of the very terrible contemporary scene but just a storyteller, and there is so much tragedy about us everywhere today that we surely don't want it in the story books to which we turn when we are ill or unhappy, or can't go to sleep at night. We must escape somewhere. I had some hours of escape when I was writing this book, and I hope very much that perhaps a few readers may have them when they read it.

What can a poor reviewer do against such forthrightness? That statement may be held against her, but I for one cannot find it in my heart to do so, for it is entirely honest and accurate. The flaw in her book is the sweet side, the Pollyanna note, that fatal emphasis on the happy ending. On the other hand, she does provide popular reading for all ages and "some hours of escape" as she promises. Her public will like this pleasant picture with its country background and complete respite from both trouble and reality. Her book is really a grown-up fairy tale.

She takes a group of people, particularly the various generations of the Eliot family, shows them to us burdened with many stresses and strains, and lets them solve their prob-

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 253

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 253 will be found in the next issue.

NVV PZNP CB ZSFND FSBP

IRPIMXINUR CQ CP UMRB DMP

NUKNDAR.—R. XCYYMD.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 252

Let us all be happy, and live within our means, even if we have to borrow the money to do it.

ARTEMUS WARD