

Mortal Priest

"Don Gastone and the Ladies," by **Goffredo Parise** (translated by Stuart Hood, Alfred A. Knopf, 257 pp. \$3.50), is the story of a dashing village priest in prewar Italy, the work of a new writer of whom much is expected.

By Thomas G. Bergin

IN A little town in the Veneto, near Padua—could it be Vicenza?—which is yet large enough to contain a slum and its quota of the poor, there once stood a tenement (let us hope it has been demolished in the bombings) whose denizens are the principal characters in this half mischievous and half melancholy *tranche de vie*. The time is the era of Fascist triumph between the glorious victories in Africa and Spain and the inglorious intervention in World War II. The tale, as it is given in Goffredo Parise's "Don Gastone and the Ladies," ostensibly concerns the affairs of the handsome priest Don Gastone, more Fascist than clerical (he has served in the Spanish war and is given to wearing his medals and regalia) and more promoter than either. How he makes a good living out of the fluttering adoration of a group of old maids is the basis of the rather flickering plot. Taking advantage of his priestly authority, his soldierly glamour, and his teasing virility, Don Gastone manages to get pretty much all his enigmatic heart desires, even including a fine new car and a post of honor in the climactic reception of Il Duce. But, alas, he too is mortal and his obsession with



Goffredo Parise—"great gifts."

the sweet and seductive Fedora is his downfall.

Such is the outline of the "plot" of this rather ambiguous work, but the plot must be called such only tentatively. For the tale of Don Gastone is unrolled for us by a boy whom, if he were not obviously meant to enlist our sympathy, we should have to call a juvenile delinquent; and since his attention wanders, as a boy's will, it is as much the tale of the whole tenement, which includes some very odd types indeed, as it is the account of the exploits of Don Gastone. This gives the work a certain "documentary value" but perhaps at some cost to the character of the priest himself, whose personality never becomes quite clear to the reader.

This is the second novel of the twenty-six-year-old Parise and, like the first, it has been highly acclaimed in Italy. Not without reason, for the young author has great gifts; notably the ability to depict sights and scenes (in all senses of the word) and to evoke smells (he has certainly the most sensitive of noses) in his own original, somewhat off-center fashion. His tone between roguery and despair, which seems to have a certain appeal for the Italian reader of today, is again a combination truly his own. Some readers may find his milieu not entirely prepossessing and for that matter not entirely new; the *mise en scene* of this novel recalls at once the sordidness of Gorki and the cheerful raffishness of Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch. There is much talk in Italy today of the "new realism"; perhaps, on the record so far, we may see in Parise an exponent of the new naturalism. However he may be classified, this young Vicentino, as precocious as his own juveniles, is well worth watching.

Saga of a Kansas Kid

"The Fabulous Train," by **Frederic Wakeman** (Rinehart, 275 pp. \$3.50), recalls the many pains and the few pleasures of the Depression era as they are experienced by a promising physicist named Hal Sample.

By James Kelly

THOSE who remember the wry sensationalism of "The Hucksters" and "The Saxon Charm" or the feature writer's sixth sense exhibited in three other novels will find few surprises in Frederic Wakeman's latest, "The Fabulous Train." Leaving Madison Avenue as far behind as possible, we now journey back to Kansas in 1933 and a ghost mining town named Carbon City whose inhabitants have been knocked around by Depression, New Deal, and all sorts of incipient social forces. It is Americana with a Dos Passos beat. It is a different, significant era which gave birth to stresses and strains we feel today. It is a novel derivative of so many things: "Only Yesterday," the Depression dilemma of marriage without job, politics without patriotism, the frame of mind of almost everybody who was around and kicking during the early Thirties. Even though "The Fabulous Train" is too jerry-built to hold the mental weight of an average adult reader, few onlookers will deny the kinetic nostalgia of Model-T Ford, ten-cent beer, and the buyer's market.

Mr. Wakeman is more concerned with historical period than with people or plot, even though he obviously likes his people. No doubt he intended Hal Sample, just-graduated physics major, to help explain some of today's bright young middle-aged scientists whose pictures get into the newspapers because of brilliant achievement or muddled political behavior. Yet Hal seems an oddly muted figure as he tries to sell Fords or corresponds with a secret wife or takes part in village affairs or resists the blandishments of a city gal who would talk him into Communism. Will Hal accept the offer of a fellowship at Princeton University or will he land a job which will let him set up a home with his missing wife? "The Fabulous Train" may be the only novel ever written where the climactic decision is based solely on the fact that the hero discovers he has contracted venereal disease from his spouse.

A sub-plot which serves to involve Carbon City's Steinbeckian poolroom eccentrics in much activity and sus-

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 639

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 639 will be found in the next issue.

GA BCHL DEP E BDCG

QH CMQF.

QKCXLM DLMHQMO.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 638
Women are getting dumber as they grow smarter.

—MARY GARDEN.

pense involves beautiful Babe Coy, whose pregnancy strikes terror practically everywhere except in the heart of Hal Sample. Another side incident involves two Swedes, one of whom tricks the other into participation in the bankruptcy of the local hardware store. But the biggest byplay of all concerns efforts of a Communist group to enlist Hal as a teaching organizer. Considerable eloquence is expended in dialectic on both sides until Hal himself resolves things on very simple grounds: "So I am trying to tell you why I cannot possibly join the Party. Precisely, because I am a Kansas kid . . . There are just too many Kansas kids, and Ohio kids, and Oregon and Maine kids . . . You can't turn a Kansas kid into a Commie. He won't trade in his dusty old Kansas freedom to any other kind of state; he doesn't trust states. He's not looking for a federal papa to support him, he's trying to get away from the rheumy old despot."

When a fancy transcontinental train stops briefly for repairs Hal is reminded in time of the beautiful people and places in the world. He thinks of the ambitions his parents have for him (Hal's relationship with his proud, struggling mother and father provides the novel's most moving element) and gets on an upbeat. For all its gamy themes, "The Fabulous Train" is not written to excite or arouse. One guesses that the author approached these materials respectfully. If his shorthand, elliptical style and quick blend of Depression attitudes do not quite rise to the occasion, perhaps the sprightly entertainment of Carbon City's passing show will help to disguise the fact.

Spring Morning

By Charles Norman

OUT of the woods of night,
A brook flows in its shroud;
Birdsong falls like light,
Making the light aloud.

Mist whispers willows thin
As ferns, the woodland grows;
All through the silver din
Of birds the bright brook flows.

Trees thrust east and west
And thatch the empty sky
To one enormous nest
From which small birds will fly.

The mist proclaims a hill,
The woods draw near and old,
With winding brooks bird-shrill,
And willows weeping gold.

Dockers' Dilemma

"Waterfront," by Budd Schulberg (Random House. 320 pp. \$3.95), is a novel dealing with the same characters and situation as the prize-winning film "On the Waterfront," although it was written after completion of the latter.

By W. R. Burnett

IT IS very difficult for me to write a fair review of Budd Schulberg's new novel, "Waterfront." Like millions of other Americans, I saw the movie version, and so I find it impossible to read the book freshly and judge it merely on its merits as prose fiction. Owing to an excellent screen play by Schulberg, top direction by Elia Kazan, and superb acting by Marlon Brando, Eva Marie Saint, and Karl Malden, "Waterfront" was to me one of the finest movies of this generation. It had everything: suspense, heart, pity, and terror. I'm sorry that I can't quite say the same for the novel. Maybe if I'd read it before seeing the movie version my feelings might have been different.

There is no use for me to rehearse the whole plot here. It is too well known. The story deals with what can happen to the workers when racketeers slug their way to control over a union: in this case the dockworkers union of the Port of New York. And the story is told in terms of the group of people most deeply involved: an unworldly young girl, her father, a young ex-fighter and his chiseling racketeer brother, a Catholic priest, a few Irish longshoremen, and assorted, subhuman hoodlums.

I had the feeling at times in reading the book that Mr. Schulberg's heart is not in it, as it was in "What Makes Sammy Run?"; that it is just the result of research in a district and in a milieu completely unfamiliar to him. And then he has difficulties with his style. Some books are written in one style, some in another; but Mr. Schulberg switches from style to style. Sometimes it is just plain tough, when the characters are talking and the action is moving of itself; at other times, when the author is explaining a character or a scene, the reader comes upon words like "dichotomy," which do not belong in a story like this.

And then Mr. Schulberg never seems quite at home with his leading



—Bob Smallman.

Budd Schulberg—"hard-hitting."

character, the young Irish ex-fighter, Terry Malloy. Terry is shown in conversation with a "nice" girl. "Terry paused, shaken by her frankness, by her—the word eluded him—purity." The word would have eluded him entirely. And again: "She had a lovely skin, smooth and fresh, like a—his clumsy mind groped—like a pink rose." You can hear the adroit mind of the author groping—and in vain.

On the other hand he hits Terry off to life further along in the story. Terry has just found his brother, a dressed-up hoodlum—murdered by gangsters—hanging from a docker's hook in an alley. Says Terry: "Look at the way the sonsabitches got his coat all dirty." This speech has the anguished irrelevance of life itself.

AND so it seems to me that this very fine novel goes by fits and starts. Budd Schulberg is one of the most competent novelists now writing and this is a very interesting and hard-hitting book, make no mistake about that; but I think that it was a task he set himself to perform and that it was not a book that just begged to be written. However, there is at least one respect in which it is superior to the movie version. It is more honest at the end. What happens to Terry Malloy in the novel is exactly what would have happened to him in actuality.