

anxiety to preserve the home she has, the latter foolishly ambitious for easy material success and town ways. Misfortune at last brings them some degree of peace and reconciliation, and ushers in their old age and a dubious future for the next generation.

That future is dubious because of the weakness of the young men. Peder, the most vigorous and wayward of them, marries under ominous circumstances only to succumb to tuberculosis. His is the bitterness of a soul ambitious to lead his clan out of its decline but frustrated by his own weakness. Ola, his flighty bachelor uncle, resembles him, but rises somewhat above his weakness through ability to see his situation objectively. The one strong man of the family, old Anders, the hero of the second volume, is here seen blind and helpless; and his death, symbolically chasing the ghost of old superstition, marks the disintegration of his tribe.

The volume, though complete in itself, looks back, and particularly forward. One may anticipate in later volumes a rounding out of the theme through a working adjustment of the primitive clan to the modern world. Such an adjustment may be in part the task of Mina and Arthur, a newly wedded couple who combine driving purpose in the wife with educated intelligence in the husband. Arthur has been to the agricultural college and aspires to teach the new knowledge to the community. Perhaps he may.

ALAN REYNOLDS THOMPSON

S.S. SAN PEDRO by *James Gould Cozzens*
(HARCOURT, BRACE. \$1.50)

THIS short novel, filling so well a need for that *genre* which English writers have failed to meet, is probably one of the finest pieces of graphic writing produced in this country for many years. Inspired no doubt by the facts

in the sinking of the *Vestris*, Mr. Cozzens has objectively set down a similar event with a conciseness and a detachment which would do credit to a Stephen Crane or a Joseph Conrad. As told through the eyes of Anthony Bradell, ship's officer, and developed in line with Doctor Percival's cryptic forebodings, there is something demonic in the tale.

Briefly, the facts are these. The *San Pedro* puts to sea with a number of passengers and a cargo of gold, automobiles, cash registers, and other products of American manufacture; develops a dangerous list; runs into a storm; founders and sinks. The handling of ship language, whether or not it is under slight suspicion in the minds of sailors, will give the average reader a fine sense of reality. The discipline of the crew, the illness and consequent incompetence of the captain, the amazement and docility of the passengers—all these are handled with great dexterity and precision. Over all there lies a mystery and a sense of impending disaster as definite as that in *Typhoon*.

It is a book to be read at a sitting, for it is a breathless, climactic tale of action and tenseness stripped of all sentimentalizing and movie heroics.

ALAN BURTON CLARKE

THE THREE BROTHERS by *Edwin Muir* (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. \$2.50)

THE three brothers live in sixteenth-century Scotland. The eldest is a Calvinist, predestined to be saved, but forced to wrestle with the Lord in prayer and overburdened with a sense of fate. The others are twins—one idealistic and shrinking, the other selfish and casual, and either doomed to be the other's enemy. The threads of their lives are so woven that all three find themselves living together in a drapery establishment in Edin-

burgh, where two women—a certain Anabaptist young lady and the eldest brother's wife—supply the interest, aggravate the circumstance, and lead in the catastrophe. But apart from such peculiarities of conflict and behaviour as the religions of that time impose upon them, all five might just as well have been inhabitants of twentieth-century Edinburgh; and I cannot help thinking that they would all have been better off there.

For there is something lifeless about them. Indeed, one might ask oneself, with perhaps too much passion, why on earth this novel was ever written; or whether Mr. Muir could possibly have been troubled by anything more than an academic emotion. Is it an essay on the distinction between Anabaptist and Calvinist? Or are we being read a homily on the sameness of human nature? Mr. Muir should have told us—for there might have been some warmth in the theory where there is only coldness in the novel.

We can have no quarrel with its construction; and the psychological study of a Calvinist in his struggle with a cruel religion and a wicked woman is well enough. But something is lacking, something explosive which might have set the whole story crackling in our minds. I am not sure that sixteenth-century Scotland and Mr. Muir's characters do not cancel each other out—the first making the second remote and the second making the first unnecessary. In any case, as a piece of historical fiction or a piece of psychological fiction, the book lacks colour.

GEORGE DANGERFIELD

GUESTS OF THE NATION by *Frank O'Connor* (MACMILLAN. \$2.00)

"I HAVEN'T discovered any writer so good as O'Connor since I found James Stephens"—this from *Æ* who has never identified

himself with those amiable gentlemen who discover a genius once a week. When we have read the book we may be a little disappointed, perhaps because no young writer can support such a weighty comparison; but we shall still be ready to believe that, one of these days, *Æ* will be found not to have spoken in vain. There is evidence enough for that.

Guests of the Nation is a collection of short stories about the Irish Rebellion and Civil War. They are realistic stories, but they have none of that Horatian *serpit humi tutus* with which our modern objective realists have begun to weary us. They are told with great restraint and decorated with great economy, but they are not afraid of poetry in the right place and sentiment in the right place. Each one is, of necessity, a little off the beaten track of human experience, for no character can be said to behave in a normal fashion or in normal circumstances. "Normal" of course is an elastic word, and what is normal to the Irishman is sometimes abnormal to us; but even the Irish admit that the Civil War was extraordinary and that nobody's behaviour then could be held against him now. The question we have to ask ourselves is this: how much human experience (universal or general or recognizable or whatever we choose to call it) has O'Connor brought into these very particular circumstances?

The title story is an admirable test. It is about two English soldiers who are held as hostages during the rebellion, and who become very good friends with their guards. They are condemned to death as retaliation for the execution of certain Irish prisoners, and their friends are detailed to kill them. Even up to that moment of horribly tragic irony when the two Britishers are at last persuaded that it is not some kind of practical joke, the story is something we can be almost