

The Silence of Conscience

"The Fall of a Titan," by Igor Gouzenko (translated by Merwyn Black. W. W. Norton. 629 pp. \$4.50), a novel by the code clerk of the Soviet Embassy at Ottawa who broke an international spy ring, tells the story of an idealistic young professor revolted by the brutality of the masters of Russian Communism.

By Ben Ray Redman

"THE FALL OF A TITAN" has a double claim upon our interest. It is an excellent novel in its own right, and its author is famous. While we are reading it we cannot forget for long that its author is Igor Gouzenko, the Soviet Embassy code clerk who broke with his masters, made off with more than a hundred secret documents, and thereby destroyed a Russian spy ring that was active in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain. While we are reading we are constantly aware that the fiction which is passing under our eyes is solidly grounded in fact.

Mr. Gouzenko is a child of the revolution—he was born two years after the ten days that shook the world—but, like many other Soviet novelists, he has modeled his work on the spacious patterns that so well served the great novelists of Czarist Russia. His book has a scope and a sweep and a vitality that are conspicuously lacking in much of today's English and American fiction, which now seems to be increasingly in the hands of self-conscious artists who are determined to write more and more about less and less.

It has, too, the virtue of being an authoritative revelation of the human elements that animate the totalitarian power which has declared war on the non-Communist world. We have met some of these characters before, but Mr. Gouzenko makes them live again, both as individuals and as types. And in Mikhail Gorin (read Maxim Gorky) he has added a figure of weight and

stature to the gallery of Russian literature.

THE titan of the title is Gorin. The instrument of the Soviet rulers who are determined to control Gorin, by means short of murder or by murder itself, is Feodor Novikov, a young professor of history in Rostov University, who is also an increasingly trusted and important agent of the NKVD. The time of the action is the middle 1930's, when "Stalin was imposing collectivization on the country . . . This period will remain everlastingly the darkest blot on the human conscience. For millions of wholly innocent persons this policy meant death from starvation, the firing squad, torture, and exile to concentration camps." It was a period calculated to give pause to Gorin, the great writer, the idol of the Russian masses, the champion of the people, "the stormy petrel of the revolution," the utopian idealist, the international spokesman for Bolshevism. It was a period calculated to make him search his soul, review his beliefs, and—however reluctantly—take some cognizance of the facts that surrounded him. It was a period in which Gorin found it impossible to speak with his old confidence of the blessings and glories of Communism. So he fell comparatively silent, and when he did so Stalin and the Politburo quickly decided that something must be done, and done quickly, about Mikhail Gorin. "The Fall of a Titan" is, centrally, the story of what was done—and of what the doing did to the doer, Feodor Novikov.

Feodor is a "hard-as-stone Bolshevik," a dedicated servant of the new order, a martyr-hero of a godless religion, from the bloody rites of which—despite violent gusts of secret disbelief—he finds it impossible to withdraw. He is also a hollow man; hollow because he drains himself of himself, by making every possible personal sacrifice for the sake of an impersonal, monstrous, monolithic state.

Absorbing and powerful, this remarkable "first novel" would also be an exceptionally horrifying novel, had we not grown so used to horrors. A note of hope is, indeed, voiced at the end; but its sound is faint in competition with the thunder of present reality. It is this thunder that we hear after the book has been put down.



THE AUTHOR: Igor Gouzenko began his career as a front-page disgrace to the Kremlin in September 1945, only a month after Hiroshima. Gouzenko, a twenty-six-year-old graduate of Moscow's Military Intelligence School, had spent two years as a code clerk in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa when he decided to walk out on the USSR with 109 secret documents stuffed under his shirt. Unwrapped, these reports and memorandums represented the first pieces of evidence of a Soviet atom spy ring in North America. They disclosed that Dr. Allan Nunn May, a physicist whose subsequent conviction led to Fuchs and the Rosenbergs, had tipped off the Russians about our A-bomb experiments and had even passed along a sample or two of uranium. As for Gouzenko, he, his wife, and their two children were promptly absorbed into Canada's day-to-day life under assumed names (his boy and girl don't even know they are little Gouzenkos). Someone from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is always within shouting distance, just in case. In his disguise as just another Iron Curtain refugee, Gouzenko became a writer and, "somewhere in Canada" the other day, he discussed how he'd gone from dabbling in short stories in his youth to "The Fall of a Titan." "When I was a pupil in Russia I wrote good compositions," he began proudly. "One about a boy becoming a famous violinist was particularly praised by my teachers. I was then in the fifth grade, about eleven years old." His memoirs, "The Iron Curtain," followed in 1948 when he was about twenty-nine. He spent four years on "The Titan"—one looking for a subject, three in the writing. It was turned down by a half-dozen American publishers before Norton accepted it last fall, unaware that Igor Gouzenko was the Igor Gouzenko. Not long afterwards the Jenner Committee went to Canada to discuss the espionage business with Gouzenko, and his picture appeared on the front pages. His head was in a hood.

—BERNARD KALB.



Plots from Belsen

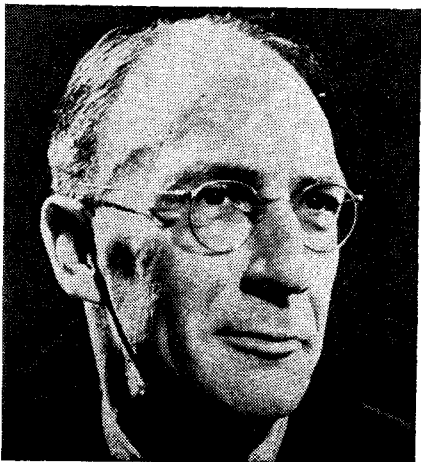
"The Nightmare," by C. S. Forester (Little, Brown, 242 pp. \$3.50), is a collection of ten short stories about the grisly world of Nazism, drawn directly from the archives of Nuremberg and Belsen.

By Frederic Morton

C. S. FORESTER's Horatio Hornblower, his frigates and fusillades, muskets and men-of-war, turned much of nineteenth-century history into heady and high-flying prose. Now he performs the opposite operation on our own era. He has taken the domestic consequences of Nazism and scoured away the Grausarkian patina they have acquired in the course of an all-too-forgetful decade. He has mined the grisly archives of Nuremberg and Belsen not for facile melodrama but for sadly memorable truths, to fashion out of them what is only in the technical sense fiction. In a volume entitled "The Nightmare" we find ten such tales, one of them, to the shame of mankind, tall.

All ten cover the same sordid subject matter, yet they exhibit a considerable variety of approach. "Evidence" and "Indecision," for example, are actually documentaries illuminating milestones in the amok career of Hitlerism. The first shows how, on the eve of the Führer's invasion of Poland, concentration-camp inmates were seduced—and murdered—to simulate a Polish attack on a German border station. The second relates the intrigues simmering around Berlin during the aborted attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944.

"The Bower of Roses" and "The Hostage" are suspense stories about the lives of men of power in the Nazi regime, each explosive with an end



C. S. Forester—"storyteller's sorcery."



Shirley Jackson—"like imps released."

twist. "The Head and the Feet" constitutes an exploration of the conscience of a concentration-camp doctor, while "To Be Given to God" follows the amazing mental processes of an S.S. chieftain after his capture. "Miriam's Miracle," also a psychological drama and to me the most moving piece in the book, addresses itself to a Jewish girl with a harelip, to her faith born of horror and to her vision beyond the threshold of a gas chamber. "The Unbelievable" takes place on a refugee-crammed tug fleeing the Baltic coast from the advancing Russian armies; Mr. Forester describes the setting with his old naval gusto, but he pictures a mob hysteria and a totalitarian corruption unknown in the darkest annals of Hornblower.

"The Nightmare" is not consistently successful. In "The Wandering Gentle" Mr. Forester undertakes a somewhat strained excursion into fantasy, and in several other pieces, notably "To Be Given to God" and "The Bower of Roses," he lets the white heat of his indignation short-circuit the story with editorials.

Furthermore it should be noted that Mr. Forester has neither the scope nor the ambition to explain just what twitches of the soul can turn a man into a political monster. I suppose we shall have to wait for a Dostoevskian talent capable of a new "Grand Inquisitor" to write an emotional etiology of Nazism. Meanwhile we have such men as Remarque, Plievier, and Wiechert to record in terms of art the results if not the causes of the disaster.

To these names the somewhat surprising one of C. S. Forester must now be added. He has the storyteller's sorcery of catapulting historical datum into dramatic detail. The forgotten newsreels and the filed-away headlines emerge as the living tension of dread. Thus these pages resensitize our conscience and refresh our responsibility toward one another.

Bedeviled Lady

"The Bird's Nest," by Shirley Jackson (Farrar, Straus & Young, 276 pp. \$3.50), is the story of a young "gentlewoman" tormented by four friends that represent phases of her psychoticism, and how she eventually wins over them.

By William Peden

SINCE the publication of her first startling collection of short stories ("The Lottery") a few years ago, Shirley Jackson has developed into a significant writer who is as versatile as she is entertaining and intelligent. "Hangsamen," for example, was a darkly disturbing picture of a college girl's descent into insanity; "Life Among the Savages," on the other hand, was a sunny personal account of family life. Miss Jackson's new book, "The Bird's Nest," indicates still further growth. This extremely unusual novel, centering around the struggle between various facets of a young woman's personality, is, I think, Miss Jackson's best book of fiction thus far.

When we first meet young "gentlewoman" Elizabeth Richmond, a typist employed in a small-town museum, she is tormented by tangled recollections of an adolescent traumatic experience and by confused memories of her mother and her mother's lover. She is without friends or associates. Her one conscious purpose in life is to "get by" with as little pain as possible.

After a series of dramatic crises, and under the often fantastic supervision of her brandy-drinking aunt (Morgen Jones) and her doctor, a Thackeray-loving refugee from nineteenth-century security, Miss Richmond is in turn dominated by four separate manifestations of her own sick personality: Elizabeth, tormented, bedeviled, inarticulate, a prisoner of the past; Beth, a sweet and trusting female straight from the pages of the novel of sensibility; Betsy, wild, independent, and wanton hoyden with a penchant for obscene repartee and appalling practical jokes; and, finally, Bess, the vulgar and arrogant emblem of all that is unwholesome in a completely materialistic society.

Like imps released from a sorcerer's bottle, these warring individuals emerge and threaten to make a shambles of Elizabeth Richmond's personality. Miss Jackson's reputation as a master of shock, surprise, and suspense is well-deserved; in presenting this warfare to the reader, she uses effectively a variety of fictional meth-