

Red Ran the Tide of the Volga

The Battle for Stalingrad, by Marshal V. I. Chuikov, translated from the Russian by Harold Silver (Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 364 pp. \$5.95), and *Paulus and Stalingrad*, by Walter Goerlitz, translated from the German by Colonel R. H. Stevens (Citation. 301 pp. \$5.95), criticize both Russian and German high commands for their handling of the bloody five-month struggle. Alexander Werth, who was a foreign correspondent in Russia throughout the war, is author of "Leningrad," "The Year of Stalingrad," and the forthcoming "Russia at War, 1941-45."

By ALEXANDER WERTH

THE BATTLE of Stalingrad lasted for over five months, between September 1942 and the following February, ending in the Red Army's most spectacular victory and in so fearful a defeat for the Nazis that Hitler ordered three days of national mourning in Germany for the 300,000 crack troops that had been lost in the "Stalingrad Cauldron." For three days the German radio played the *Siegfried* Funeral March and other lugubrious tunes.

Encouraged by the success of his *blitzkrieg* in the south in July 1942, Hitler had become overconfident. Instead of sticking to his original plan of first capturing Stalingrad, thus cutting Moscow's last lifeline to the south, and then overrunning the Caucasus with its oil cities of Maikop, Grozny, and Baku, he divided his forces in southern Russia in two, believing that they could capture Stalingrad and the Caucasus simultaneously. In Marshal Chuikov's view, this was a fatal error, aggravated still further by Hitler's maniacal determination to capture Stalingrad at any price. While the German Sixth Army continued to batter hopelessly at the Russian lines in the Caucasus and at the last three little bridgeheads on the Volga that were still being held by Chuikov's 62nd Army, the Russian troops under Vatutin and Rokossovsky to the north of the Stalingrad salient and those of Yeremenko to the south of it struck out on November 19 and 20. Three days later they made their juncture, and



Marshal V. I. Chuikov
—"boundless courage."

General Paulus's mighty army at Stalingrad was trapped.

At that stage it could still have broken out, but Hitler would not hear of it. Even when, in December, Field-Marshal von Manstein tried to break through to Stalingrad and was within thirty miles of the "cauldron," Hitler still refused to order Paulus's troops to break out; and, with the Russians throwing in fresh forces, Manstein had to abandon his attempt. Soon after, threatened with an even bigger "Stalingrad," with the Russians advancing towards Rostov and the Sea of Azov, the Germans hastened to pull out of the Caucasus. Thus Hitler's 1942 campaign ended in a gigantic fiasco which prepared the ground for a further series of defeats in 1943. In the winter fighting west of Stalingrad the Russians had routed Hitler's Rumanian, Hungarian, and Italian allies, besides destroying or capturing the Sixth Army marooned at Stalingrad.

General Chuikov has written one of the most remarkable books on the war in Russia. I had the privilege of meeting him at Stalingrad on the day following the German capitulation on February 2, when the frozen ruins of the city were still strewn with dead Germans and others were still dying by the hundreds of hunger and frostbite. He personally was a man of boundless

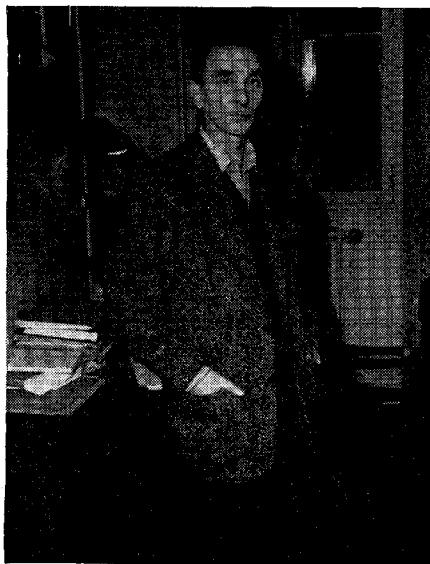
courage, and the 62nd Army, which had fought for every inch of Stalingrad since the previous September, had an immense admiration for him. The affection between him and his troops was mutual; and his story is, above all, a day-to-day account of the battle that was fought, first in central Stalingrad (which the Germans captured by the end of September), then in the great industrial area in the northern part of the city, and, finally, for those three remaining beachheads on the Volga—in some places these were only a couple of hundred yards deep—which the Russians held to the end. The Russian losses were terrible: the Rodintsev Division, which saved Stalingrad in September, was virtually wiped out, while some other famous divisions later lost as many as 75 per cent of their troops in a few days' fighting in the north of the city, and the men had to be continuously replaced.

But if Chuikov's story had been merely one of human bravery this would still be a rather routine book; what distinguishes it from so many other Russian accounts of the war is its great candor. Thus, in the first chapters he describes the near-catastrophic state of affairs among the Russians in the pre-Stalingrad fighting on the Don; avoiding the heroic clichés so common in Soviet books, Chuikov not only shows that the quality of the Russian troops retreating to Stalingrad was uneven (some fighting to the last man, others panicking); he is also extremely critical and sarcastic about some of his fellow generals. Many of them were plainly defeatist, did not think that Stalingrad could be held, and even obtained medical certificates to get away from it all. The 62nd Army bore the brunt of the Stalingrad fighting, and Chuikov clearly implies that the Supreme Command took an excessive risk in leaving it to its own devices. There are some acid comments in the story on the repeated failures of Yeremenko's and Rokossovsky's troops, separated from Stalingrad in the north by only a five-mile German salient running to the Volga, to break through it and relieve the pressure of the 62nd Army. Certain of Chuikov's 1959 comments were so sharp that they were toned down in the second (1961) edition, from which this English version is translated. (Also, all mention of Stalin was deleted.)

Chuikov tends to attribute his success in holding Stalingrad almost solely to the extreme toughness of the troops under him, and says very little about the tremendous concentration of Russian artillery and *katyusha* mortars on the other side of the Volga, which pounded the Germans morning, noon, and night. Yet, as Russian soldiers told

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The Sad Way to Salvation



Luc Estang—a bitter demonstration.

The Better Song, by Luc Estang, translated from the French by Denise Folliot (Pantheon, 282 pp. \$4.95), postulates a dichotomy between happiness and salvation. Laurent LeSage's most recent book is "The French New Novel."

By LAURENT LESAGE

"IT HAS never been given to a man to attain at once his happiness and his salvation." Quoting this text from Charles Péguy, Luc Estang, one of the prominent Catholic writers of France, proposes that this novel—his first to appear in America—should be its bitter demonstration. But works of art cannot always be counted on to do what they are supposed to; the book, entitled originally *Le Bonheur et le Salut*, may demonstrate something quite different or nothing at all.

Who is this "professor of happiness" whose street-preaching catches Octave Coltenceau's ear on his way home from the office one night—the Devil himself, a prophet sent to exorcise the demons of foolish guilt that plague the pious, or just a crackpot? Who is this man Octave—a martyred soul whose salvation will rest on sin and torment, or just a pipsqueak whose stab at happiness fails because of a weak wrist? His wife, paragon of wifely and motherly virtue—

could she be just a spiritless and frigid woman? The seductress—is she an innocent child of nature or a daughter of Babylon who must expiate most horribly her sinfulness? Might she be Octave's redeemer? Or just an empty-headed female, too silly for the tragic part she is forced to play? If to some readers the characters may seem inadequate to their exalted roles, the plot may likewise appear too humdrum to demonstrate anything of significance. A middle-aged man, heretofore a model husband and father, runs off with a pretty girl young enough to be his daughter. The perfectly sustained tragic mood, the structure—elegant and austere as French classical drama—may seem ill-suited to a tale so often told in farce or soap opera.

Obviously, to those insensitive to the problem besetting a Catholic conscience, this novel can mean nothing at all. To others, for whom the problem

itself raises a patently trite story and unheroic characters to tragic grandeur, the meaning of *The Better Song* is profound but ambiguous.

One may muse over Octave's concept of happiness and wonder if that might not be his tragic error. Or the author's as well, if he has assumed an antithesis on the basis of a false notion of happiness. One may also ponder the word salvation. It could not be the road to salvation—even the narrow road—that Octave left when he abandoned his life of pious conformity. He had scarcely been alive, one would say, and a Christian only in the name. Must he come to life only to cause suffering all about him and obtain his ransom only through total bereavement and remorse? Then his God is indeed a cruel God and one that explains the text from Nietzsche which gives the English title: "Better songs would they have to sing, for me to believe in their Saviour: more like saved ones would his disciples have to appear to me!" I doubt that the author intended to conclude in anything so close to blasphemy. But as a novelist he knows that his work, once published, depends no longer on him alone for its meaning. And a novelist who plays the devil's advocate as well as Luc Estang does could not really wish otherwise.

Coming of Age in Wales

The Rising of the Lark, by Ann Moray (Morrow, 374 pp. \$4.95), romantically peoples the daydreams of an unhappy adolescent in rural Wales. Hope Hale Davis often comments on current fiction.

By HOPE HALE DAVIS

ANY GIRL sensitive enough to become a writer—and Ann Moray became a very good one—is sure to suffer a sort of martyrdom between the ages of eleven and seventeen. She feels imprisoned by the adults in charge of her life. In their philistine blindness they fail to understand her craving for freedom; their suspicions soil the beauty of her relationships with others. But she bears her persecution with quiet, gentle dignity.

This is not quite the way one's girlhood really was, as a woman begins to suspect when she has a daughter of her own. But this is the way it is in Ann Moray's novel, *The Rising of the Lark*, based on her memories of growing up in

a rugged region of North Wales. Every element of the pattern is present, is indeed pushed to an extreme of poetic fantasy.

Instead of merely feeling like an orphan, Catriona is one, her young parents having drowned in a mountain lake of India. She does not just feel caged; her governess *in loco parentis* shuts her up for a week as punishment for breaking into the library to read long poems about witches and man-sized fairies and old Welsh kings. Girls often feel starved; but Catriona's prison rations result in the kind of mystical experience usually reserved for fasting saints. All girls long to join the raggle-taggle Gypsies O; but Catriona steals away to Nant Gwynant on the slope of Moel Hebog to visit the shining clean *vardo* of old Eldorai, who calls her by her Romany name of Kishli ("little thin one") and reads the future for her. Even the ordinary villagers—Dylan, Penry, Merfyn, Idris, and Myfanwy—are faithful, adoring, and wonderful dancers.

The tutor, Bernard Morgan, who de-

SR/March 14, 1964