

sense of pleasure to self-indulgence. He was slow to accept public and professional opinion of himself as a genius; and at the height of his fame his modesty, his common sense, and, most of all, his humanity prevailed.

I. C. Chertok, a Russian émigré and scholar, and Jean Gardner, a British émigré and Mr. Chertok's student, have translated seven stories that span Chekhov's twenty-five-year writing career. All but one of them, "Big Volodya and Little Volodya," are difficult to find in English. And the entire seven, as the introduction points out, deal with "the motif of love, with all its subtlest and most secret manifestations."

The title piece—more a novella than a story—was published when Chekhov was twenty-two. It puts to exquisite use themes that recur throughout his later work. A declining aristocratic family—father dead, mother snobbish and foolish, son useless and stupid, daughter soft and yearning and uncor-

rupted—discover possible salvation in one Dr. Toporkov, the son of their father's former valet. Toporkov is a new Russian man. By dint of intelligence and industry, and nearly at the cost of his humanity, he is now on his way to wealth and fame. His proposal of marriage is presented to the daughter. Mother and son swallow their pride at the prospect of restored riches, only to find that Toporkov had sent his marriage broker indiscriminately into the field to obtain not so much a wife as a dowry. There is a passage, at the close, describing Toporkov's emotional reclamation that will blind your eyes with tears.

This excellent volume, probably guaranteed of commercial success (the title story was published in the January *Ladies Home Journal*), should be a reminder to publishers that Chekhov wrote over 500 stories. Only a fraction have been adequately translated, and only a smaller fraction are in print.

toady to the *Presidente*, turns out inexplicably naïve in his efforts to save the general and his daughter Camila, an endeavor that ultimately carries him to destruction. Camila herself, with her idyllic and cloistered life suddenly torn apart by violence, remains quite unrevealed as a woman.

ALTHOUGH the characters appear incomplete and almost lacking in motivation, Asturias has succeeded in endowing them with a subjective world paralleling conscious reality through his skilful use of imagery and surrealist techniques, coupled with an alliterative and rhythmic prose. In the Spanish edition the precision of expression links this subjective realism with the outer world of action. In the English version the phrases are there, but the visions evoked are rarely supported verbally, as in the original. At times the unconscious world verges on chaos and its language on incoherence.

Although the translation conveys to a great extent the author's portrayal of misery, violence, and degradation, it unfortunately has a decidedly British flavor; it seems a bit odd, at least to me, to find a Guatemalan author writing like an Oxford don. Poet, novelist, and diplomat, Asturias is one of those Latin American writers who have paid dearly for their artistic integrity. After more than three decades of literary activity, he now lives in Argentina as an exile from his native land.

El Señor Presidente is certainly prescribed reading for anyone genuinely concerned with the present Latin American scene.

Pans Across the Sea: Kingsley Amis is at it again, and this time we are his victims: it is the American Affluent Society which he probes in *One Fat Englishman* (Harcourt, Brace & World, \$3.95), a trenchant if somewhat perfunctorily titled novel of a British publisher's adventures in America. It should be pointed out at the start, however, that the British themselves come off as badly as we do, because Amis is fully as interested in his fat, lecherous, greedy English hero as he is in us and our faults. (I see how the title works in, but still think he could have done better.)

The book is funny, but not overwhelmingly so. Its best spots have a curiously elusive fragrance. After considerable thought I am ready to identify Roger Micheldene, the book's hero, as the source of its comic uncertainties. It is he, I have already said, who is the focal point of the novel, and not America.

Amis is apparently still intent upon the soft life in England and its "I'm-All-Right-Jack" morality. Unfortunately-

Subject to Trial by Terror

El Señor Presidente, by Miguel Angel Asturias, translated from the Spanish by Frances Partridge (Atheneum, 287 pp. \$4.50), recasts into fictional form the author's experiences with the totalitarian Cabrera regime in Guatemala. Leonardo C. de Morelos, an associate professor of Spanish at Columbia University, wrote "Luís Gonzales Obregón, Chronicler of Mexico City."

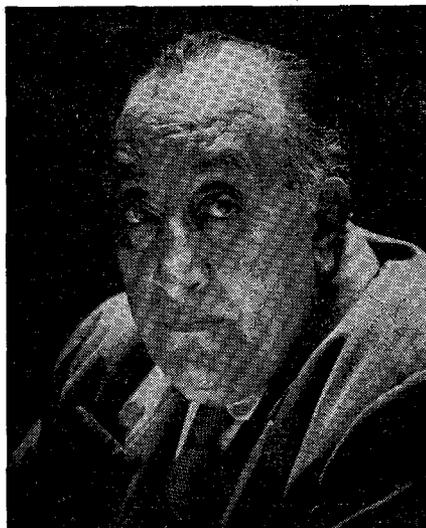
By LEONARDO C. DE MORELOS

WRITTEN in 1932 and first published in Spanish in 1946, *El Señor Presidente* depicts the asphyxiating and brutalizing atmosphere of the totalitarian state, where every man is governed by terror, intrigue, and violence. At the center of this repulsive web sits the puny but vindictive *Presidente*, himself ridden by fear, yet adroitly using for his purposes a loathsome congeries of venal judges, barbarous generals, prostitutes, double-crossing spies, and drunken soldiery. Under these circumstances all human values vanish, and nothing counts except the favor of the *Presidente*.

This book is a social and political document in fictional form rather than a conventional novel. What Miguel Angel Asturias has done is to recast artistically his own experiences with the Cabrera

regime in Guatemala. The plot is quite sparse: a crippled idiot has unwittingly killed a favorite officer of the *Presidente*, and the latter immediately seizes this opportunity to eliminate a supposedly rival general whom he considers dangerous, thus precipitating a series of catastrophes that envelop everyone connected even distantly with the general.

Since the purpose of the author is to depict a social and political milieu, his characters lack full development. They are used as props and devices to introduce human elements into the scene. Angel Face, the main character and a



Miguel Angel Asturias—surrealistic.

ly, America is not the best place to find the affluent British, nor perhaps the best place to put them; they don't make us look particularly bad, and we don't make them look good. The resulting plague-o'-both-your-houses tone that the book frequently sounds is not unsatisfactory *per se*; satirists often strike just such an attitude. There is, however, the danger specified by James Thurber in his fable *The Tiger Who Understood People*: "A draw is a very dull thing to watch, particularly when fought by fighters who are both big palookas."

To come back to Micheldene, he is very well turned out, a figure almost too fascinating to be funny. There is a decidedly nasty streak in him, and a bit of the pathetic, too: I should expect that readers will be more interested in psychoanalyzing him than in laughing at him. His aggressions and defenses are classically constructed: he has a thousand and one gambits for putting down impertinence, for demonstrating superior knowledge of tobacco, for getting the lion's share at dinner. His is no post-war breed; setting aside his overt interest in and pursuit of women, he might be the Grand Cham, Samuel Johnson himself.

As for our side of it, these are the set pieces on American life: the throughways, cocktail parties, sick novels, swimming pools. Amis even goes after American speech, but doesn't quite get it. Our women, for example, do not generally address their admirers as "old thing"; still less do our children request to go out to play in "the wood." Still, the British have descended considerably from the heights of Shaw and Chesterton, where we are made to punctuate every second phrase with "I guess." Ronald Firbank once had a Negro retainer speak of a pair of pants as "trews." We have risen, my friends.

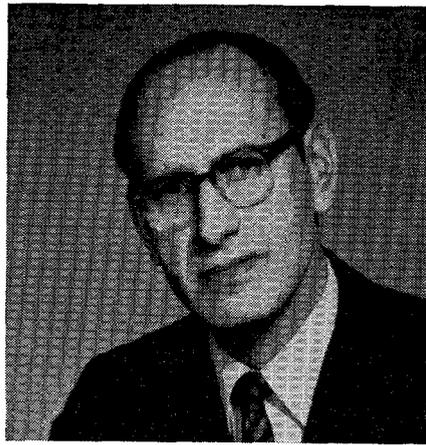
—CHARLES ALVA HOYT.

Coming March 14

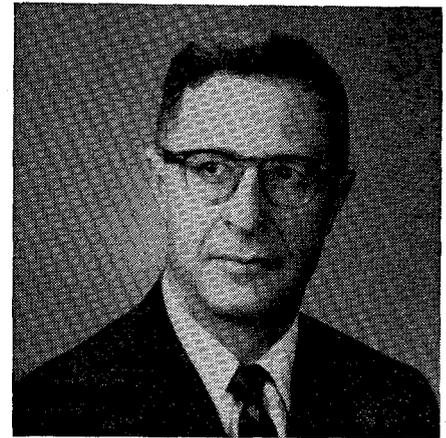
Spring
and the
Traveler

SR's Seasonal Survey
for Wanderers

Changing Dimensions of Faith



W. Gunther Plaut—a record.



Ben Zion Bokser—a survey.

Judaism: Profile of a Faith, by Ben Zion Bokser (Knopf, 294 pp. \$5); **The Emergence of Conservative Judaism**, by Moshe Davis (Jewish Publication Society, 527 pp. \$5.50); **The Rise of Reform Judaism**, by W. Gunther Plaut (World Union for Progressive Judaism, 288 pp. \$6), and **Philosophies of Judaism**, by Julius Guttmann (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 464 pp. \$7.50), all widely different in approach, show a common effort to treat their subject with objectivity. Roland B. Gittelsohn, rabbi of Temple Israel in Boston, wrote "Man's Best Hope."

By ROLAND B. GITTELSON

AS RECENTLY as the middle years of the nineteenth century it was possible for Immanuel Wolf to complain that Jewish scholars had neglected the scientific study of Judaism, while Christian scholars had treated it only as a prelude to Christianity. The second half of his criticism is still too largely true; but the four volumes under review provide convincing evidence that the scientific study of Judaism by Jews themselves has reached encouraging maturity. Though greatly different from each other in purpose and approach, all four have been written by men who are both intellectually and emotionally committed to Judaism, yet attempt to view it with respectable objectivity.

Only Ben Zion Bokser's book purports to give a survey of Judaism in general. It offers a solid, readable, at-

tractive overview of Jewish theological and ethical emphases. Perhaps its most notable contribution consists of dispelling two popular fallacies: that all religions after all teach pretty much the same values; and that Judaism—in contradistinction to Christianity—stresses the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

The uniqueness and spirituality of Judaism are spelled out specifically. Special attention is devoted to the teachings of the Jewish faith on the nature of man, on immortality, and on ethical responsibility. Rabbi Bokser makes it eloquently clear that for Judaism the doctrine of the messiah symbolizes a massive hope for the perfection of the world through human cooperation with the divine. For Christianity the messiah Jesus "offers men a way of escaping from the world." The difference is not blurred by preoccupation with apologetics: "The claim that salvation depends on the belief that Jesus himself is the messiah, is, from the point of view of Judaism, idolatrous and a digression from the larger goals to which the messianic hope summons us."

Similarly, the very real difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sabbath is expounded with clarity. The former is meant to symbolize and celebrate the divine origin of the universe; the latter concentrates instead on the resurrection of Jesus. In these days of so much empty eloquence about the similarities between Judaism and Christianity, it is refreshing, even stimulating, to discover an honest, respectful confrontation. The careful reader of Bokser's commendable volume will appreciate the fact that, though Christianity in fact derives from Juda-