

## BOOKS

### Death's Forwarding Agent

JUSTICE IN JERUSALEM by Gideon Hausner. 528 pages. Harper & Row. \$12.50.

The wine flowed freely, and the old Nazi cronies, safe in Buenos Aires, reminisced about the great days under the Führer. "I am no longer being pursued," boasted one Ricardo Klement.

Klement was wrong, and fatally in-



DAVID RUBINGER

PROSECUTOR HAUSNER

"Klement" was wrong—fatally.

discreet. A tape recorder was taking it all down (the cronies wanted a record of their thoughts). A transcript fell into the hands of the Israeli secret service, and early in 1960 an Israeli agent arrived in Buenos Aires to look Klement over. Pretending to represent a British sewing-machine company that was seeking a factory site, the agent called on the Klements' neighbors. Yes, the lady there was interested in selling her property. The agent wondered if the people next door might also be interested. Unexpectedly, the woman jumped to the window and shouted, "Señora Klement, would you sell your house for a sewing-machine factory?"

When Klement heard about this from his wife, he grew suspicious, for the neighborhood was remote; why should anyone choose it for a factory? In the end, he put aside his doubts. The Israeli agent secretly photographed him, and from these pictures came convincing identification. In April 1960, other Israeli agents carried off the celebrated kidnaping that delivered Adolf Eichmann to Jerusalem.

**No Room for Morality.** Gideon Hausner was prosecutor for Israel in the Eichmann trial of 1961. In this powerful panorama of the courtroom scene, he prosecutes Eichmann still. The enormous Israeli effort that went into

the preparation of the case against him, the painstaking attention to legal detail and justification, the wrenching attempt to be fair while partisan in judging and convicting the man—all of it is replayed in Hausner's tautly written pages. He admits his purpose plainly: neither the Jews nor the rest of the world should rest easily as long as the Nazi impulse still festers among men. And it does fester. Hausner quotes letters in his files from people around the world, including the U.S., applauding the likes of Eichmann.

From the moment of his "arrest" in Argentina by the Israeli body snatchers until the gallows trap in Jerusalem was sprung on him, Eichmann displayed "no room for morality" in his makeup—at least none detectable to Hausner. "Might was right; power was virtue; the greatest sin was weakness." To obey had been Eichmann's highest object. Hausner's epitaph is that Eichmann died "as he lived—a pagan, a polished, finished and unalloyed product of the Nazi system."

**Something Soulless.** In Jerusalem he fought cunningly to minimize his role. He did not have the ideological courage to admit what he had once said to his friends in Argentina: that he had taken "uncommon joy" in catching these enemies and transporting them to their destination. "I lived in this stuff, otherwise I would have remained only an assistant, a cog, something soulless." Now he disclaimed responsibility, insisted that he had indeed been a cog, merely transmitting orders. But the evidence was crushing that he had acted, as witnesses put it, as "the great forwarding agent of death," the efficient zealot who directed the action phases of "the final solution."

He versed himself in Yiddish and Zionism to confuse Jewish spokesmen. He found the transport to ghettos and crematoriums. Nothing personal, he testified. He came from an ordinary Bible-reading Protestant family, and had had Jewish friends during his Austrian boyhood. In transmitting orders, he never persecuted "individuals"—"it was a matter of a political solution. For this I worked 100 percent."

It remained for a seemingly minor incident in Jerusalem to illuminate the quality about Eichmann that Historian Hannah Arendt has characterized "the banality of evil." One day after a court session, Eichmann was shown a film: here were Jewish victims packed like cattle into trains; here were Nazi execution squads shooting down rows of naked men, women and children, who fell writhing into trenches that they themselves had dug; here were literally thousands of corpses being bulldozed into mass graves. Suddenly, in the darkened room, Prosecutor Hausner heard Eichmann stir. Hausner wondered if the ice-cold technician of the final solution

was objecting to the evidence in the film—or was he showing remorse at last?

Not at all. Eichmann had just noticed that some journalists were sitting near by. Had he been told the press would be present, he complained, he would have worn his blue suit instead of his slacks and sweater.

### Food for the Suspicious

INQUEST: THE WARREN COMMISSION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUTH by Edward Jay Epstein. 224 pages. Viking. \$5.

Just as it is true that the mind can conceive unending webworks of intrigue, so it is that the Kennedy assassination will forever evoke suspicions, claims, counterclaims and new theories. He was shot with one bullet—no, two. He was killed by one man—no, two, or maybe three. The fatal bullet entered his neck—no, his back. Lee Harvey Oswald was a Communist—no, a right-winger. Kennedy ordered his own assassination—no, Lyndon Johnson did.

Despite the thoroughness of the 26-volume Warren Commission report, many people in the world prefer to ignore rational explanations when the irrational can be made to seem so much more melodramatic. Edward Jay Epstein's book will certainly help feed the grimly suspicious. *Inquest* is the enlargement of a master's thesis that he wrote at Cornell. It has much thesis, but little that is masterly.

After diligently scanning the public record, sifting through an accumulation of evidence in the National Archives, and interviewing five of the seven members of the Warren Commission and ten of its top staffers, Epstein concluded that the commission was "extremely superficial" in its investigation of the President's murder. He bases some of his criticism on the fact that the commission members actually heard little of the testimony in person, but he fails to mention that all members received a full



DAVID GARR

STUDENT EPSTEIN

The thesis was enlarged—unmasterly.

