THESE DAYS

By GEORGE E. SOKOLSKY

CONFESSION, contrition, penance, personal responsibility for personal conduct, are of the essence of our way of life. We teach our children that if they lie they will be punished but if they confess to the truth, while they remain responsible, they may be forgiven.

In a better American era, the story of George Washington and the cherry tree was told to every child and it made an excellent impression upon him. At any rate, the father of his country could not lie to his sire.

Whittaker Chambers was a spy, a courier for spies; he has been a liar, a perjurer, a cheat, a fraud. We know that only because he told us so. No one caught Whittaker Chambers at anything.

He exposed himself. He begged, caioled, prayed those whom he told his story that they would believe him. So far as is known, he told his story first to Isaac Don Levine and to Adolf A. Berle jr. in 1939.

TRUE, he did not tell the whole truth, of which fact Lloyd Stryker, Alger Hiss's lawyer, makes much in court. That issing over his failure to produce the documents in 1939 may be excellent courtroom tics and may even impress ge Kaufman before whom Hiss case is being tried.

ut no man of common e can fail to grasp why mbers withheld the documents. It was all that he needed to prove the truth of his long. Without the documents in his possession, he could establish the fact that he not a madman making wild ations.

en first he told his story, countered such hostility had he not retained his he would have found f, in wartime, held for while his accomplices, r they were, would remain high official position, basking in the sun of glamorous events.

ANY man with a modicum of common sense, having raised the curtain upon the greatest known treachery of our times, would have retained his proofs in his own possession until he found a less hostile, an unprejudiced tribunal to which to give them.

Even then, he risked much, as now appears in the courtroom where Mr. Stryker has sought to give the impression, seconded by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, that it is not Hiss but Chambers who is on trial.

He also risked, as is always true in such instances, being accused of madness, in the hope that such a diversion would so change the issue as to vitiate the accusation.

BUT the facts are clear and no amount of legalisms and obiter dicta can alter the facts, which I here set down:

Whittaker Chambers, a spy-courier for Soviet Russia, came into possession of a vast quantity of important, secret documents from the files of the State department.

The greatest significance of these papers is that, in possession of a foreign power, they provide a key to our secret code and therefore imperil the means of communication between our government and its agents.

Chambers says that Alger Hiss and four others, whom he has named, gave him the documents.

This Hiss denied in such a manner before the grand jury that he is on trial for perjury.

MANY, if not most of the documents came from Hiss's office; some bear his initials; some are in his handwriting.

If Hiss did not give the documents to Chambers, he may have given them to someone else who gave them to Chambers, or they may have been stolen from Hiss's desk.

If Hiss gave them to someone else, it would be just as serious an infraction as though he gave them to Chambers.

IF they were stolen, how does it happen that Hiss never noted that such a vast quantity of important material, particularly his own notes in his own handwriting, was missing?

When Chambers told Berle about it in 1939, Berle discussed it with others in the State department, of which Hiss was an official even then and became more important subsequently. What steps did Hiss take, in wartime, to protect his country from such leaks?

These are the issues, so far as the public is concerned, even though in a court of law the problem appears to be different.

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