

Reviews

Likhie gody

by Anatoli Krasnov-Levitin, YMCA Press, 1977, 456 pp. No price.

Levitin is a Russian Orthodox thinker of partly Jewish origin who emigrated from the USSR in 1974. Under the name A. Krasnov he has written many religious and philosophical works. His book *Likhie gody* is several different things at once. It is an autobiography which covers his life up to the start of the Second World War. It is also an exposition of Levitin's own philosophical and spiritual development, and includes as a supplement a number of his essays on Tolstoy. It contains a section on the history of theatrical life in Moscow in the 1920s, and describes Levitin's youthful passion for traditional ritualistic Russian Orthodoxy and his tireless pilgrimages to churches and monasteries. It provides important dates and statistics about the closure of churches, and includes a complete list of the Orthodox churches which were open in the early 1920s in Petrograd. The book also recounts Levitin's encounters with all kinds of famous personalities, who were chiefly, but by no means exclusively, churchmen.

So in Levitin's book there is a wealth of factual material for those interested in church life, church history and theatrical history in the 1920s and 1930s. Particularly valuable is Levitin's account of the "Renovationist" movement in the Russian Orthodox Church of the 1920s, a movement dedicated to building a new Church which would espouse socialism and co-operate with the young Soviet regime. We are given a personal view of the processes of "Renovation" and a personal assessment of the men involved, from parish priests to Vvedensky himself.

The unifying element in the book is of course Levitin, who appears as a prickly individualist. He loved honesty, and increasingly so as Stalinism and "Renovationism" gradually exposed themselves to him as hypocrisies. We see how his belief in honesty and tolerance led him towards the socialism, democracy and pluralism which he champions today. The story of Levitin's philosophical quest makes fascinating reading for anyone interested in the continuity of religious thought in Russia

from pre-Revolutionary times to the present day. The two philosophical influences on Levitin were Lev Tolstoy and Vladimir Solovyov, who helped develop different sides of Levitin's complex character. Tolstoy attracted him by his honesty and his anarchic view of the illusory nature of all phenomena save the ultimates: love, death and God. Solovyov, by contrast, showed Levitin that the material world can be saved from sin and redeemed by God as a result of man's efforts to improve it and himself as well. It was under the influence of Solovyov that Levitin became a Christian Socialist, and in the 1920s moved from his devotion to the ritualistic side of Orthodoxy to a commitment to politics and to "Renovation".

Levitin is opposed to political doctrines which are divisive and exclusive. He feels himself to be a cosmopolitan. He begins his book by imagining how his two great-grandfathers might in all ignorance have passed each other on a Moscow street in the 19th century – one an Orthodox bishop, riding in his regalia in a carriage, and the other a thin Jew, pausing in his search for a night's lodging to watch the carriage pass. Believing that men are essentially the same the world over, Levitin is explicitly opposed to nationalism: "National culture has value", he writes, "only when it opens the door to what is universally human". Levitin feels that he himself is neither fish nor fowl. However, this dualism is fruitful and enables him to be tolerant of human frailty.

Though diverse in content, the book is a pleasure to read largely because of Levitin's style which is clear and frequently witty. Dreadful events are related in a drily restrained manner which paradoxically increases the impression of enormity which they leave on the reader. This positive and invigorating book shows how an individual can survive and develop as a moral being in a climate of hypocrisy, self-seeking, and arbitrary exercise of power.

PHILIP WALTERS

Atheism and Religion in the Contemporary Struggle of Ideas

(*Ateizm i religiya v sovremennoi borbe idei*)

Kiev, 1975, 491 pp. No price.

The articles in this collection are basically revised versions of the reports given at a conference held in Kiev in 1973. The title of the conference was "Atheism and Religion and their Place in the Contemporary Struggle of Ideas". This book was not published, however, until 1975, by which time the policy of détente had been announced. This explains the duality in the book's basic ideological line, which is visible in the preface. The