

place where Christianity takes form—the real world, where the laity stands with both feet planted in material reality, the world of pneumatic hammer and the roar of traffic.” Turning the pages of *God’s People on the March*, one hopes that the late Bishop’s philosophy reaches far beyond the boundaries of his diocese in Holland. Confession, sacraments, daily work, authority in the church, and the priest of tomorrow are favorite topics.

He reminds his colleagues that the priest no longer lives in a no man’s land between altar and alley, the pulpit and the precinct: “He has to be able to appreciate the mixed odor of incense, oil, and gasoline.” Bishop Bekkers warns that the priest who participates in the world will be powerless “if he finds himself unable to speak the world’s language, if he has taken no notice of secular events, has no awareness of man in our times, and still thinks that he is dealing with ‘souls’ instead of human beings.”

Bishop Bekkers died in 1966 at the age of fifty-eight. His style of life and encouragement to young leadership—lay and clerical—should give us genuine hope for the future. In another decade perhaps the spiritual skylines of New York and Los Angeles will light up with the radiance of God’s people on a march, for they have found a bishop to follow.

*Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, edited by Ian T. Ramsey, is a collection of essays and papers mostly by British scholars. The book struggles for 400 pages to shore up Christian morality and rehabilitate the theme of natural law. In spite of some good exchanges, especially those between P. H. Nowell-Smith and his critics, A. Boyce Gibson and J. R. Lucas, it just doesn’t come off. The volume is heavy going, and the writers seem lost in the “bewilderment of Christian morality,” which they hoped to clarify.

The dialogue between the church and the world, the secular and the sacred, is treated at length in *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, edited by John C. Bennett.

His is one of the surprise books of the year. Prepared for the World Council of Churches meeting in Geneva this summer, it has a range and vitality that should generate all-night discussions. Adeolu Adegbola of Nigeria discusses “From Tribalism to Nationhood,” J. M. Lochman writes of “The Service of the Church in a Socialist Society” (in this instance Czechoslovakia), Richard Shaull talks about the revolutions in South America, and Roger L. Shinn provides a road map for the Christian pilgrim in an affluent society. For those who want to be abreast of the new morality and natural law, Joseph Fletcher has a fine, precise chapter that defines the ground rules for many secular saints.

## Grandfather Was a Czarist

***The Birds Fall Down*, by Rebecca West (Viking, 435 pp. \$5.95), a tale of espionage in the Edwardian era, depicts a young English girl caught up in the plots and intrigues of her grandfather, an exile from Czarist Russia. David Hales was for many years associated with the University of California Press.**

By DAVID HALES

**T**HIS fascinating novel opens slowly, and with sureness prepares the scene for the ever-deepening revelations and intricacies of plot that follow. One needs to be well prepared, because this is a tour de force and the pace becomes very heady indeed. As the tension and suspense mount one is tempted to turn the pages quickly, but is held back by the profound insight and sharp humor with which the characters are shown. Summoning up all the diverse talents of her previous books, Dame Rebecca West has brought them all together to raise the espionage novel to the rank of literature and to provide a wonderful delineation of the Russian character.

When Laura Rowan arrives in Paris with her Russian mother she leaves behind in Edwardian London a father who enjoys both a distinguished career in the House of Commons and a mistress. Of the latter fact the girl has a budding realization because of her father’s detachment and her mother’s sadness. The visit to her mother’s parents, intended to be a respite, becomes anything but that. Count Diakonov, her grandfather, is a former Minister of Justice upon whom suspicion fell. Exiled and disgraced, he is a towering, Lear-like figure who fervently lives and breathes his devotion to God’s Anointed, the Czar. But his best friends in Holy Russia dare not contact him when they travel. He has a handful of faithful servants and a friend and assistant, Kamensky. Although one presumes everyone with him is loyal, his very presence in the French capital provides a vortex around which swirl all the intrigues of the secret police (whom he used to command) and the plots of the terrorists.

The Count is delighted to find that his granddaughter is familiar with the Orthodox liturgy in spite of having been brought up in “pagan England.” He laments the lack of intensity in English



“Dame Rebecca has created characters who delight us.”

affairs—no assassination attempts, no dark troubles at Windsor Castle. (But, of course, he is overlooking the fact that the Tower of London was not always a tourist landmark, and that terror and intrigue did once exist there as men invoked God and sought the soul of England, and even went into exile.)

Laura, for all her affection for him, keeps up a running commentary in her mind, based on sensible English attitudes, while listening to her grandfather’s amusing diatribe. After all, her brothers are probably playing cricket at this moment with just the right amount of seriousness.

During her train journey with the Count they are joined by one of the terrorists. He is a man whom the Count had known on his country estate and had taught to hunt birds—to be expert with a revolver and to kill and not leave for maimed any of God’s creatures. How they converse! They carefully examine each other and exchange ideas that range from the profound to the hilarious. But they also reveal what they know of the activities of the Czar’s agents and the terrorists. Suspicion grows as the chronicle of past crimes leads inevitably to present fear. A note of terror insinuates itself as they become aware of what they face—the possibility of a double agent.

Laura tries to hold back from the approaching abyss by using every reasonable English form of protest. She is full of indignation that her grandfather should allow himself to listen to a man

whose list of deeds makes him a rival of Jack the Ripper. Yet the old man murmurs, "For what you have spent your life doing, you are a sensitive man."

All Western attitudes are failing her. She, and the reader along with her, will have to enter the Russian way of feeling and thinking, with its mixture of pity and terror. Before long Laura will even find herself planning to act as an accomplice in an assassination plot.

Fortunately, the intensity of the drama is mercifully balanced with rich humor and paradox. Laura's appeals to her English father for help avail little,

and when he does come she is already more Russian than English. She can but recommend his trying the dessert: "Have some *plyoomkek*. They call it that because they think they're copying our plum-cake, but it's much nicer."

So is this book, compared to others in the field. Not sparing any of the hair-raising elements, Dame Rebecca has created characters who delight us; the portrait of the double agent is a triumph. The novel is dedicated to friends "... whom I love and honor." The author has certainly honored her readers with a civilized, engrossing entertainment.

## Bonsoir Tristesse

**La Chamade**, by Françoise Sagan, translated from the French by Robert Westhoff (Dutton, 156 pp. \$3.95), concerns a triangle involving an intelligent, sensual woman, her sad, wealthy, fifty-year-old lover, and a sad, poor, younger man. Dorrie Pagones is a free-lance writer and critic.

By DORRIE PAGONES

**M**ENTION that Françoise Sagan has written a new novel, and it's like saying that Brigitte Bardot has made a new movie. People begin to look titillated and ask, "Is it—you know—like her other ones?"

*La Chamade* is like Sagan's other ones, but she is far from being the BB of the literary world. Jane Austen would be nearer the mark. Certainly no Sagan heroine would feel, as an Austen one did, that refusal to dance with one gentleman "put it out of her power" to dance with anyone else. She might not even feel that accepting one gentleman as a lover put it out of her power to accept another the next night. But Miss Sagan, like Miss Austen, is incapable of describing her characters inelegantly.

The title is untranslatable. At the end of the novel an erudite guest at a society party tells the others that "According to Littré, it's a roll on the drums to announce defeat."

The plot concerns itself, as no one will be surprised to hear, with an amorous triangle. Those involved are Lucile, an intelligent and agreeable sensualist verging on thirty, Charles, who is sad, wealthy, and fifty, and Antoine, who is sad, poor, and thirty. Although Lucile has been Charles's mistress for two years, the stage is rapidly set for her to become Antoine's. "As her only form of morality was the avoidance of self-deceit," she stays with Antoine until, after several

passionate but monotonous months in his small, ugly apartment, she comes to realize "she no longer loved loving him."

The heroine's world is inhabited by a vapid group of aging society types, most beautifully portrayed by Miss Sagan. There is Claire, a little past fifty and a little too tightly belted into her Cardin dress: "... she was a clever woman and never spoke ill of anyone, unless it was absolutely necessary in order not to appear stupid." Then there is Johnny, who "had been a homosexual until the age of forty-five, but now, after a day's work and a dinner, felt incapable of meeting a handsome young man at midnight." Last there is Diane, who has ruled society for twenty years but breaks its basic rule of indifference and becomes its victim.

Lucile finds these people alternately amusing and touching. To her they look frightened, "frightened of growing old, of losing what they have, of not being able to get what they want, of being bored. . . ."

Lucile herself is never frightened, except when she is prevented from doing whatever makes her immediately happy. She might be Dominique of *A Certain Smile*, or even Cécile of *Bonjour Tristesse*, a dozen years older and tempered, though not altered by experience. Underneath she is as adolescent as they.

*Bonjour Tristesse* was the novel that any eighteen-year-old girl worth her salt would have loved to shock the grown-up world with. Now the heroines are growing older, and their lovers older still. Ten years from now I suppose the heroine of the latest novel, fortyish but still almost ravishing, will be obliged to consummate her desires with a boy of eighteen. Then, indeed, *bonjour tristesse*. However unhappy or bored her languid ladies get, I hope Miss Sagan will be putting her fine mind to work on short, elegant novels for at least half a century more.

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