

■ If we are to have legends, it is as well that their sources should be available. And already Pope John XXIII has acquired something of the aura that can so easily merge the man in the myth. An image of universal benevolence can very soon obscure the sharp features of personality – and they are always unique. That is why the publication, so soon after his death, of Pope John's diaries (*Journal of a Soul*, Geoffrey Chapman, 42s) is especially valuable. The authentic documentation of what was formative in his life is a sufficient corrective to the ready generalizations that ignore the seventy-seven laborious years that had prepared him for the five great years of his pontificate.

Perhaps the book is misleadingly named, for expectations of a sophisticated *journal intime* are bound to be disappointed. The great bulk of the diaries could no doubt be paralleled in countless other notebooks kept by pious priests from their seminary days, recording resolutions, summarizing retreats, reflecting a meticulous sense of vocation. And this is of immense value, for it provides the evidence of those roots which made Pope John what he was. The sturdy values of Sotto il Monte, the exact discipline of the Bergamo seminary, the laborious duties as Mgr Radini's secretary: these were the foundations for the later public career as apostolic delegate, nuncio and Patriarch of Venice. And the long life of fidelity to duty, of a totally loyal sense of the Church, reached its fulfilment in 1958 when, against all probability, he was elected Pope. All that happened afterwards, the serene confidence with which Pope John launched the Church into the modern world and so submitted it to a radical and often painful work of renewal, could only have happened because his roots were absolutely secure.

The personal element in a public rôle must always be a matter of fascinating interest. And Pope John's generous nature, spontaneous and outgoing, transformed the modern image of the papacy, marked as it inevitably must be with the solemnity of high occasions and the authority of a supreme office. He was able to reconcile the pontiff with the pastor because long ago he had committed himself (as he writes in 1919) 'to seek perfect poverty of spirit in absolute detachment from myself, never feeling any anxiety about positions, career, distinctions, or anything else'. That was why *Obedientia et Pax* was so properly his motto, for the peace of soul that was so supremely his was grounded in

a simple obedience to God's will that led him from the simple fidelities of seminary days to the courageous calling of a Council. All his life was a single response in charity and truth to God. And so at the end of his life he could recall the 'two graces' that summed up his whole achievement. '*First grace*. To have accepted with simplicity the honour and the burden of the pontificate, with the joy of being able to say that I did nothing to obtain it, absolutely nothing . . . *Second grace*. To have been able to accept as simple and capable of being immediately put into effect certain ideas which were not the least complex in themselves, indeed perfectly simple, but far-reaching in their effects and full of responsibilities for the future.'

It is too soon to assess the final greatness of Pope John. But we can discern the secret of it, and there is much here to encourage those who may feel the strains that his initiatives have necessarily created. 'One must accept the good inspirations that come from the Lord, simply and confidently,' he writes. And the confidence of a man whose conscience is clear, who has no other ambition than to commend the things of God to men in truth and charity, can, as death approaches, quite simply say: 'My trunks are packed. I can go at any time'. Above all, Pope John's *Journal* is a reminder – and at this moment a very necessary one – that the work of renewal must spring from a deep and abiding sense of obedience to God's purpose realized in prayer and detachment. It was many years later, and it might seem in another world, that the homely resolutions and familiar acts of devotion of his formative years finally came into their own. He could afford to give to the Church a new and revolutionary sense of her mission only because he had learnt above all the gift of serenity. 'I desire nothing more or less than what the Lord continues to give me. I thank and bless him every day and I am ready for anything.'

■ The crisis in the National Health Service has not been due to a simple claim for increased general practitioner remuneration. The main cause of discontent is the conditions under which general practitioners work. They consider that they are unable to practise medicine to the satisfaction of themselves and their patients under the present arrangements. These conditions of service have, of course, been implicit in the National Health Service from its initiation, but the feeling of frustration has been exacerbated during the last few months by a number of factors, only one of which was the review body's report and its rejection of the doctors' claim.

In 1948, the architects of the National Health Service did not anticipate the very greatly increased demands that were to be made on doctors' time by the rising population, the increase in preventive medicine carried out by the family doctor, the volume of National Insurance

certification and the fall in the number of general practitioners. These demands have now reached a point beyond which they cannot be met. If the medical services are to be maintained at the level to which the public are accustomed, the organization and, indeed, the concepts underlying the Health Service, must be reviewed in the light of experience.

The great majority of doctors approve of the National Health Service in principle and the profession has shown itself determined to make it work. Increasing numbers, however, feel that the 'turn of the tap' type of service, introduced in 1948, must be modified. The underlying cause of the troubles within the Health Service is common throughout all the social services and any reassessment of one part involves the whole complex and, ultimately, the Welfare State itself. Fundamental in the crisis is the failure of the individual to accept responsibility for his actions and welfare. This is most easily seen and its effect felt in the Health Services, which, at general practitioner level, offer the simplest means of passing responsibility from the individual to the Welfare State. The increasing tendency to blame 'them' for anything from financial troubles to the weather has gone one stage further with physical ailments. The individual no longer assumes responsibility: someone else must take the blame or carry the burden. The cure must require minimal effort on the part of the patient as well as being as nearly painless as possible.

A great part of the increased work-load throughout the social services is due to this weakness in the individual, and is thus, in part, responsible for the doctors' dilemma. Unless people at large adopt a more responsible attitude to the social services and use them with prudence, the National Health Service will not be the only one to crack at the seams. It remains to be seen if the individual will heed the warning and fit himself for citizenship of the Welfare State.

■ Things have certainly changed since the days when Lord Reith would begin an interview with a prospective BBC employee by asking what his views were on the Trinity. By this the scriptural texts so carefully carved in the entrance hall of Broadcasting House have acquired a certain irony. The recent criticism of failing standards, especially on television, are hardly due to a puritanical displeasure. As so often happens, what is morally questionable proves to be professionally unacceptable as well. In its desperate attempts to escape from the solemn image of conformist taste, the BBC has assumed that undergraduate humour and night-club sophistication are the way out of the difficulty. The sneering assumptions of so many recent programmes can hardly claim the merit of wit: casual and unrehearsed, they seem to suggest that any honestly-held defence of traditional values must necessarily be a matter for mirth if not contempt. No one wants to see an arbitrary

system of censorship on any medium of information or entertainment. The demand is not that the BBC should be controlled, and indeed its record has for so long been one of admirable responsibility that it deserves better than to be the irritant cause of so much indignation. Serious subjects need to be considered seriously, and, however legitimate in themselves, the views of a small group of professional entertainers should hardly be the criterion of a great organization which still - officially at least - is devoted to the ideal of 'nation speaking peace to nation'.

That implies some concern for peace within the nation itself: which by no means involves a repudiation of the most rigorous concern for honest debate but does mean a rejection of the gratuitous sneer and the implied assumption that freedom is a passport to anarchy.

■ The Berkshire vicar who has been providing his congregation with visual aids to their theological understanding, such as 'gas-filled balloons to illustrate the Ascension', is no doubt succeeding in his aim of 'taking the stuffiness out of church services', though gas may not be the happiest medium for clerical innovation. The Cambridge theologians are unlikely to approve of so crude a de-mythologizing - or is it re-mythologizing? - but they have as yet themselves to find a language of instruction to support the language of debate. Now that so much of the furniture has been shifted from the familiar rooms of faith, it is perhaps legitimate to ask what is to take its place. Maybe the Bishop of Woolwich would say that nothing should, that the emptiness is going to make it easier to breathe. Perhaps the bishop's next book, now that he has proclaimed a new Reformation (if only one with a question-mark), might look to its language. It would be sad to be left with balloons.