

- 'The Master and Margarita' is a notable work revealing the thoughts of a Communist on the life of Christ.

RUSSIAN IDEA OF CHRIST

A new novel that for the first time in Soviet fiction sympathetically describes the trial and crucifixion of Christ has been published in Moscow last year and has rocked this country's literary circles.

The philosophical satire "The Master and Margarita," is the work of Soviet Russia's most eminent playwright, the late Mikhail Bulgakov. It was suppressed by Stalin-era censors before the author's death in 1940.

The scene is laid in Moscow in the middle 1930's with the arrival of Satan in the guise of a foreign magician who casts a malicious spell upon all and sundry and causes widespread evil, chaos and death.

Christ, of course, is the antithesis of evil.

The author develops his theme into a struggle between the powers of good and evil and, among other things, concludes that abso-

lute power untempered by a sense of dedication to humanistic ideals can only bring evil.

"And once a man takes a stand on the side of evil, encourages it or remains indifferent to it, power becomes tyranny and might become weakness," is how an editorial note to the book by literary critic A. Fulis interprets one of Bulgakov's messages.

The author relates an imaginary dialogue between Roman Proconsul Pontius Pilate and Christ to develop his allegory on the conflict between good and evil.

Portraying Christ as an unhumanly kind and saintly man who sees nothing but good in all his fellowmen, Bulgakov makes Jesus infuriate Pilate by declaring at His trial, "all government means violence over human beings and the time will come where there will be no government and no Caesars. Man will enter the kingdom

of truth and justice and no government whatever will be necessary."

Bulgakov poignantly and sympathetically describes the road to Calvary and the agony on the cross.

Although he does not follow the account of the four Gospels, Bulgakov does introduce a hero named Levi Matthew and a villain Judas who betrays Christ.

Judas is described as a "dirty traitor," and contrary to all traditional versions, Pontius Pilate, in a fit of remorse has Judas executed.

In a preface to the novel, Stalin and Lenin prize-winning writer Konstantin Simonov describes "The Master

and Margarita" as one of Bulgakov's greatest masterpieces.

According to critic Vulis the novel "is an outstanding phenomenon of Soviet Russian prose. . . . remarkable for its magnificent language, precise and subtle in the portrayal of characters and the matchless architecture of the book."

It is not the kind of book that will appeal to the masses like the post-Stalin muckraking novels exposing the horrors of concentration camps.

But to the Russian intelligentsia "The Master and Margarita," is easily the literary sensation of the year. — *U. P. I.*

SHREWDNESS

A boy, generally known about the village as being not too bright, was annoying the busy blacksmith. Hoping to scare him away, the blacksmith finally held a red-hot piece of iron under the boy's nose.

"If you'll give me half a dollar I'll lick it," said the simple-looking youngster.

The smith held out the coin. Without a word, the boy took the coin, licked it, dropped it in his pocket, and whistling softly, walked away. — *Anon.*