

Uncle Tom, your prejudice is showing

THE MYSTERY OF MORAL RE-ARMAMENT, by Tom Driberg (Secker and Warburg).

MR. TOM DRIBERG, as a member of the Executive of the Christian Socialist Movement, quite naturally dislikes the suspiciously rightist M.R.A., but why he should worry at it like an elderly gentleman with wax in his ear is less easily explained.

Can it be that the handsome Mr. Driberg has much in common with the handsome Mr. Howard, quite apart from the fact that they were both Beaverbrook alumni? Does love of the errant limelight bring both gentlemen in dissonant declamation to the centre of the set?

"Tom," for surely he is thus familiarly known to his Barking constituents, has delved deep into the comings and goings of the movement first known as Buchmanism, then as the Oxford Group and now as M.R.A.

A yawn

The result of his nagging labours is really an immense yawn. Who cares for the petty disinterment of Dr. Frank Buchman's early squabbles with the Pennsylvanian elders of his church, or for the musings of Major-General George Osborne De Renzy Channer, or for the personal animosity which our Tom shows towards a fellow Parliamentarian, one Mr. Patrick Wolridge-Gordon.

When author Driberg looks at South Africa he trots out

all the old clichés: "The most disgraceful tyranny since Hitler," "the monstrous crime of apartheid," and so on.

"We cannot blame M.R.A. for the bloodshed, oppression and fear that darken Africa. But it would be easier to feel sympathy with some of M.R.A.'s efforts if it did not pretend to have an infallible instant panacea, if only it would just occasionally admit to failure, forgo boasting, exaggeration and snobbish name-dropping, practise self-criticism and cultivate the virtue of humility."

Et tu quoque, Canon Collins, Barbara Castle, Ambrose Reeves, de Blank, Uncle Tom Driberg and all.

Smugness

The ineffable latitudinarian smugness of it all, until we read the final blast:

"M.R.A. is irrational in its mystique and authoritarian in its methods: it rejects free discussion: it practises with insufficient discrimination the dangerous and often deadly doctrine that the end justifies the means; and by seeming to proclaim the possibility of instant perfection, it raises hopes that cannot be fulfilled. In short, it is essentially non-Christian and anti-democratic."

So there you have it.

But anyway, skip the text because on the dust cover there's a perfectly adorable picture of honest Tom. Put it in your scrap-book along with other relics — such as Frank.

KEN HOOPER.