

but because for various reasons the whole idea came to seem cruel and absurd. The progress made in public health in the last century has been possible because the public has grasped the idea that disease can be spread by micro-organisms and has taken preventive action based on this idea. The new political idea that must be propagated is simply this: that it is foolish to expect world peace while there is world anarchy in the economic and political relations of the different states. As so often before, Norman Angell puts his case with such lucidity that one wonders that even statesmen should fail to see his point.

It is clear that a development in human society is possible only when there is both machinery to implement it and an acceptance of the psychological assumptions without which the machinery cannot work. At the moment we have for the organisation of peace certain machinery which, though inadequate, is in advance of the state of mind of those by whom it is to be used. The right thing to do is to attack ruthlessly the pre-peace assumptions (such as the inviolable sovereignty of nations) which still generally prevail, and to displace those statesmen (however well-meaning) whose actions and inactions are based upon assumptions that must lead to another world-war. There is no very great hope of success, yet surely only those can fail to make an effort who are untroubled by the ironical thought that Man may well be extinguished through lack of adaptability to an environment he has created for himself.

H. L. ELVIN.

NEW BEARINGS IN ENGLISH POETRY by F. R. Leavis.
(Chatto and Windus, Pp. 214. 6/-).

It is the distinction of this book that it consistently treats poetry as one of the major products of normal human activity, and the making of poetry as being at least as responsible an occupation as, say, scientific research. In fact the quality of the book may be indicated by saying that an intelligent scientist (if he were free from conventional preconceptions about literature) could read it without getting exasperated and without a sense of

lacking initiation. It is only those for whom poetry is a cult with initiates, or an archaic pursuit surviving as a pastime, like archery, who will complain that the book is esoteric. They will be puzzled by the constant implication that a poet's 'magnificent qualities of intelligence and character' are the concern of a critic of his poems. They will be irritated by the assertion that there are in the present age 'no serious standards current, no live tradition of poetry, and no public capable of informed and serious interest.'

As a consequence of his point of view much of Mr. Leavis's criticism of poetry becomes, in a certain limited sense, a criticism of the poet's personality. Not that he is a moralist or psychopathologist *manqué*. He sets out to confine himself 'as strictly as possible to literary criticism, and to remember that poetry is made of words.' Yet he makes it clear, for instance in condemning the bulk of Ezra Pound's poetry, that his only deep interest is in words that communicate valuable attitudes towards experience. 'The possible interest in verse form so distinguishable from interesting communication seems extremely limited.' He is constantly engaged in appraising the poet's state of mind, of which any one poem may be only a partial indication. He says of De la Mare's later poems, for example, 'the poignancy turns into a duller, heavier desolation. . . the unwholesomeness of the fantasy habit is, implicitly and explicitly, admitted. It is as if the disastrous consequences of drug addiction were being recognised. Life seems now not tragic but flat and empty.' He reminds himself, in discussing *Ash Wednesday*, that 'the sequence is poetry, and highly formal poetry.' But he proceeds: 'Yet it is impossible not to see in it a process of self-scrutiny, of self exploration. . . The poetry. . . is a striving after a spiritual state based upon a reality elusive and yet ultimate.' This concern with the spiritual state that poetry reflects involves no prying biography and no irrelevant probing for the poet's 'underlying experience.' He quotes T. S. Eliot's saying: 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.' But he recognises that there must, nevertheless, be one individual who is responsible for the state of being out of which the poems have come. And this belief that the poet is morally accountable for what he writes lies behind the critical

position that Mr. Leavis has taken up and consolidated in *New Bearings*.

No one is more aware than Mr. Leavis of the dangers of this critical approach, and of the necessity for remembering 'that poetry is made of words.' A discussion of many contemporary poems is bound to be, as he remarks of one, 'a delicate business, incurring danger both of crudity and impertinence.' But the danger only shows the need in the critic for fine insight and complete seriousness. And these qualities Mr. Leavis undoubtedly possesses.

Though *New Bearings* contains some excellent exegesis and detailed criticism of poems by T. S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Ezra Pound, Mr. Leavis's main concern with separate poems is to relate them to the rest of the poet's work; just as, in turn, the whole of the poet's work is related to the state of culture in which it was produced. His argument is, in brief, that poetry in the nineteenth century became established in a tradition of remoteness from other human activities, not merely from industrialism, but also from pursuits demanding fine intelligence, such as research and speculation in science. He then proceeds to an admirable summary of 'The Situation at the End of the War,' a chapter distinguished by extremely skilful compression and generalisation combined with scrupulous care for exceptions from the general statement. The study of W. B. Yeats is an outstanding example of this capacity for making comprehensive statement without distorting or neglecting any of the facts.

Having demonstrated the unsatisfactory state of poetry at the end of the war (and, implicitly, of most of it still) Mr. Leavis looks for a way out. He looks for an attitude to poetry that will allow it to become not merely the poet's comment on his life but an integral part of his life and growth. He looks too for a way of using language which will make this attitude effective. This use of poetry and this technique he finds in the work of three poets: in T. S. Eliot's poems pre-eminently, in Ezra Pound's *Maunderley*, and in Gerard Manley Hopkins' poems. These three poets he studies in detail, and fully establishes his claim that they are to be considered as giving, in their various ways, new bearings in English poetry.

Mr. Leavis ends his book with a brief examination of the

work of two young poets—W. Empson and Ronald Bottrall—whom he regards as being in the tradition of poetry re-opened and extended by T. S. Eliot. Bottrall's work he classes confidently with Eliot's *Waste Land*, finding not merely similarities of outlook, but also (what is more important for the validity of the comparison) significant differences and originality in Bottrall's poems. Here one may feel inclined to question his conviction. It is difficult to believe that Bottrall's extra buoyancy and 'positive energy' were not well within Eliot's spiritual compass, but that Eliot saw their limitations and so had to make a less direct approach to assurance. It may be, as Mr. Leavis suggests, a representative difference between the generations; but it seems possible that it is a difference between greater insight and less. The question can be answered only by Bottrall's future work.

It testifies to the healthiness of Mr. Leavis's critical standpoint that one can question his detailed opinions and yet wholeheartedly accept his main contentions. It means that he has brought to his task not merely keen sensitivity and personal taste, but sufficient intelligence and power of generalisation to approach a genuine discipline of criticism.

D. W. HARDING.

THE LONDON BOOK OF ENGLISH PROSE, Selected and Ordered by Herbert Read and Bonamy Dobrée (Eyre and Spottiswood, 7/6d.).

The London Book of English Prose marks the end of the purple patch anthology. This is significant, for the type of mind which rejoices in the more highly coloured passages of prose is the type which seeks in poetry merely a particular kind of emotional stimulus, which is satisfied with the immediate thrill, and is uncritical of the way in which the effect is produced. Its possessors are the last adherents of the magical attitude towards words, and their criticism resembles incantation rather than reasoned statement. Fortunately Messrs. Herbert Read and Bonamy Dobrée are free from this kind of romanticism; for them prose is an instrument which may serve the humblest as well as