

weekly organ. Perhaps it is the public's fault ; if so, then the educated English reading-public insists that brightness shall be tied to the humorous, serious treatment reserved for religion, and intelligence only allowed an airing in the company of Science. One is obliged to conclude that first of all we need a radical revision of that public's conception of Bad Taste and Good Form, since it is no more possible to imagine the best reviews and articles of *The New Republic* appearing in any English weekly than the best jokes of *The New Yorker* appearing in *Punch*. But if the public is alone responsible why is it so noticeable that, and in other than weekly periodicals too, the literary articles and reviews form by far the weakest section? Why are they at best so empty and profitless (*Spectator's Gallery* can point to two exceptions—Mr. Edwin Muir on Scott and Mr. T. S. Eliot on Herbert ; as a conscientious though discouraged student of our serious press I doubt if all our other weeklies between them, with *Life and Letters* thrown in, can produce one a year)? Is it that few if any professional writers in the literary line are capable of any intelligent reaction to literature, or must we be driven to disagree with Mr. David Garnett's recent pronouncement that ' Providence itself watches over the serious weeklies, which are all uncommonly lucky in their literary editors ' ?

Q. D. LEAVIS.

FLANK-RUBBING AND CRITICISM.

There is, of course, room for a good deal of difference of opinion about the merits of contemporary writers and their relative importance for the future. All the same, one could hardly be anything but amused by the trumpeting with which the *London Mercury*, in its June editorial, turned out the Old Guard against the Reactionaries—those who have reacted, that is, against the traditions of late nineteenth century poetry. Professor Housman's lecture on *The Name and Nature of Poetry* provided the occasion. ' It was like a bugle-call, or the All Clear signal after an air-raid : the population stirred again, saying " Thank Heaven *that's* over ! " ' For during at least ten years, the field of poetry and poetical criticism has been invaded by swarms of people who haven't the least conception as to what poetry is, and who have affixed the name to things which have no relation at all to what has been called poetry

through all the long past.' It seems that the invaders are in flight and the Editor of the *Mercury* (who has a pretty fair idea 'as to what poetry is'—witness his remark that most of Donne's verse would be better in prose) can now, beer-mug of stout-fellowship in one hand, knightly sword in the other, flourish defiance behind their backs.

In itself the reappearance of this section of 'the population' after ten years in the cellar is of no particular importance (though one is glad to hear that Sir John is 'breathing more freely now'); it is the tone of the editorial that is significant,—rotarian unction is invariably a sign that there are friendly flanks near by. The *Mercury* mentions no names, rightly assuming that its audience will make a fair guess at 'Dons . . . who have tried to analyse the unanalysable, . . . alleged poets and critics who test poems by their intellectual content' etc., and that it will applaud.

That the *Mercury's* assumption is justified is proved by reference to the recent files of literary journalism. A representative selection of specimens from various articles and reviews showing a recrudescence of animus against Mr. Eliot has seemed worth making (a) because Mr. Eliot's poetry provides something of a test; (b) because those pronouncements which sound so brave in isolation lose something of their effect when they are recognized as fragments of a group chorus; and (c) because it is interesting to notice the non-literary motives which may influence literary criticism: now that Mr. Eliot has taken the unpopular side in religion and politics those who have never appreciated the quality of his verse find it safe to deny his achievement.

An article in the May *Student Vanguard* provides a hint: 'The retreat behind a barrier of obsolete cultural and religious prejudices—T. S. Eliot.' Now that the middle-aged have The Young behind them, as they had not ten years ago, they are less afraid of making fools of themselves. Eliot's 'retreat' was the theme of Mr. Llewelyn Powys writing in the *Week End Review* for May 20th—'The popularity of this poet, so adept at identifying himself with the predilections of London society, may be accounted for in two ways. First, from his disposition to champion orthodoxy . . . This poetical man-about-town . . . whose academic evasiveness has made it possible for him to seek protection behind the fashionable altars of the High Church party.' This 'Diagnosis' obtained some

notoriety, although the quality of its silliness was no better than that exhibited, say, by Mr. Herbert Palmer in *Everyman* for May 27th, ('The Eliotites are poets of obscurity, prosiness, experiment, and despair.') or by a *Saturday Reviewer* confronted with *Sweeney Agonistes* (10th December, 1932). But Mr. Powys has some really critical objections; his preference is for literature all hot,—'every word put down should come to the page fresh from contact with the blood of existence,'—and he is naturally incensed that Mr. Eliot's emotions do not find 'immediate and careless expression' (like Shakespeare's) in his verse. Mr. G. W. Stonier does not share Mr. Powys' predilections; indeed he confesses to feeling 'some thrill of the probe, some clinical excitement' when reading Eliot. Nevertheless he can boast that a review in the *New Statesman's* Supplement for October 1932 establishes him as one of the first larks of the new dawn. More recently he has flattered the prejudices of the *Life and Letters* public by an incoherent account of modern poetry in general (June, 1933). 'Eliot's poetry is at its best a skeleton poetry,'—He is proud of this phrase which he has nursed for some time (*N.S. & N.* 3rd December, 1932)—'but the attempt at finished creation is still-born.' Mr. Stonier's rhetoric dazzles, if it does not persuade: 'Atoms spinning in an immense recumbent hulk . . . the Oblomovism of modern letters . . . An atmosphere of the sick room spreading over literature . . . The message of Eliot's poetry—so far as it has one—is Amen to life, and Goodbye, with rather more lingering, to art.' The author of *The Waste Land* is finally disposed of by a magnificent metaphor: 'His poetry is the afterglow of a gas fire turned out.' It would be easy to add to this collection,—from the daily press, public lectures, and the columns of the higher journalism.

These gestures are not literary criticism and they cannot be discussed as if they were; they shirk any precise examination either of Eliot's writing or of their own critical concepts. The only interesting feature of the situation is the way the second-rate have all taken heart together. A few years ago they would have been *démodé* in expressing their dislike, for it was fashionable then to hold the tired conviction that there was nothing to be done about it all—economics, politics, education or one's own emotional life; and, superficially, Eliot's poetry could be identified with that fashion. Now, as long as we can be positive and active, we think it

worth while doing anything, from strike relief in Colorado to the production of enthusiastic verse about our friends' offspring. Eliot has not revealed so buoyant a faith in simple vigour. Whether his earlier poetry was fundamentally negative, as Mirsky thinks, and what relation his later work bears to it, are questions to be answered only by sensitive and exact literary criticism. The recent outbreak of derogatory articles will not provide that. They for the most part reveal nothing beyond their authors' thankfulness at being able safely now to set aside the writer whose work implicitly condemns their own shoddiness of thought and feeling.

D.W.H.

L.C.K.

THE MACHINE UNCHAINED.*

*The sweat of industry would dry and die
But for the end it works to.*—Cymbeline.

A demand that *Scrutiny* should show its colours was met in the issue of December 1932, but it is still objected that little space is given to politics and economics. This is not because we underestimate the problems to be solved by politics and economics—there are readers who accept *Scrutiny's* métier without being deterred from politics—but that political programmes have not sufficient ends: they are preoccupied with machinery merely. It is our concern rather to keep in sight certain essentials, without which mechanical reforms are negligible. Reference to Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, especially the latter part of *Our Liberal Practitioners*, and to the Commentary in *The Criterion* for October 1931, would save much explication, but for the moment matter can be found in one or two of the numerous recent books on 'planning' and economics.

One may dismiss the orthodox economists who assume the continuance of the 'capitalist' system; apart from the possibility that war is inherent in it, an economy which at its most productive fosters the kind of life exhibited in *Star-dust in Hollywood* is better ended. But a charge of neglecting this last consideration is not likely to be brought against the old by the newer economists; their criticism would be rather that a feeble attempt is being made to

**The Machine Unchained*, by L. Hausleiter (Routledge, 12/6d.).