

EDITORIAL

WITH this number *Scrutiny* completes its second year. It is an occasion, then, to remind readers of our dependence on their continued support. Indeed, if *Scrutiny* is to become a permanent institution the subscription list must, in this next year, be considerably increased, and towards this end we invite the active co-operation of those readers who feel that we have not fallen too short of our undertaking.¹

Not that we would be thought to regard the performance up till now with unqualified satisfaction. In particular we know that we have not made such a direct approach to the problems of economics, social order and international relations as their terrible urgency might seem to demand of us. These problems must be the intense concern of every responsible person to-day, and it should not be supposed that we are unconcerned and irresponsible. But, as we have painful reason to know, our energies and opportunities are limited. And in any case *Scrutiny* could not perform the function of a weekly journal. The ideal weekly desiderated in our last number waits to be realized ; but, meanwhile, we do not suppose that *Scrutiny* forms the sole diet of its readers.

And those who read the *New Statesman and Nation* (the absorption by which of the *Week-End Review* means, we hope, that we are to be sure of having at least one focus of intelligent opinion upon national and international affairs) may have noted, in the issue for February 3rd last, this: ' Property has the means to hire propaganda and with it to mobilize the herd mind. Worse still, it has in the press an instrument that weaves the thinking of the masses as a loom weaves cotton cloth. The daily press, with

¹We shall be grateful if those who know of possible subscribers will send to the Editors for copies (stating the number required) of a leaflet we have prepared, and if they will distribute these, with such persuasion as they may find appropriate. Readers will also be doing us a service if they can persuade Public Libraries and other institutions to take *Scrutiny*.

the modern dependence on the advertiser, becomes with each decade a graver menace to democracy.'—Not merely to democracy, it will have been added. At any rate, of those disinterestedly concerned about the future of civilization all but the narrowest fanatics will see in such a passage the justification, in these times, of such activity as is represented by *Scrutiny*. The social and cultural disintegration that has accompanied the development of the vast modern machine is destroying what should have been the control, and leaves a terrifying apparatus of propaganda ready to the hands of the more or less subtle, more or less conscious, more or less direct, emulators of Hitler and his accomplices. What is to forestall or check them? To adapt a phrase used in the December number, without an intelligent, educated and morally responsible public, political programmes can do nothing to arrest the process of disintegration—though they can do something to hasten it.

Scrutiny stands for co-operation in the work of rallying and strengthening such a public, the problem being to preserve (which is not—need we say?—to fix in a dead arrest) a moral, intellectual and, inclusively, humane tradition, such as is essential if society is to learn to control its machinery and direct it to intelligent, just and humane ends. To assume that there can be a substitute, a solution by improvisation, is not to see the problem. The lines on which, in education and elsewhere, we see for ourselves the immediate chance of profitable effort have been defined and illustrated in these pages.

The function we envisage is essentially co-operative—involving co-operation and fostering it. And (as should be obvious enough) this would still be so even if it were merely literary criticism we were concerned with. The critic puts his judgments in the clearest and most unevadable form in order to invite response ; to forward that exchange without which there can be no hope of centrality. Centrality is the product of reciprocal pressures, and a healthy criticism is the play of these. The difficulty of getting anything like an exchange started is one of the most depressing signs of the present situation. We are correspondingly grateful when we meet in the way of comment, response or retort with something different from the usual exhibition of vanity and egotism, and if time and space permitted we should make appropriate acknowledgments (to the *Twentieth Century*, for instance).

Meanwhile, it is of the utmost importance that a plurality of serious critical organs should persist—and the English reader should not forget those which are published in America. We are glad to hear that we are not going to lose the *Symposium*, and that the suspension for the January quarter is merely for the purposes of reorganization: the next number will appear in April. The *Hound and Horn* carries on, and the unusually interesting January number prints an essay by R. P. Blackmur on Ezra Pound that will repay critical attention. And we have to welcome the first number of *The New Frontier*, edited by Brooks Otis and Reuben Brower. (\$2 for six issues, payable to *The New Frontier*, c/o Charles J. Hines, 40 East 66th Street, New York City). The programme is especially interesting to *Scrutiny*: 'Succinctly, we are concerned with the American aspect of two world problems which very roughly we may call the "economic" and the "cultural."'—The American aspect has an interest and an importance outside America. Whether in 'this American world' there exists any other aspect is a question that needs to be kept alive here, and to be answered if possible by something subtler than raw nationalism.

REVALUATIONS (III)

BURNS

THERE are certain elementary distinctions to be stressed before a just estimate of Burns becomes possible. His Scottish verse must first of all be isolated not only from his own English verse (which is so obviously bad that it may at once be dismissed as such) but from English verse. It has no connections with English verse at any point, so that to consider it as a 'reaction' to the English 18th century manner or, along with Wordsworth, the beginning of the 19th is (and has been) to breed confusions. What it is connected with is the Scottish vernacular verse which for at least two centuries precedes it and of which it is for all practical purposes the culmination. I take *Christis Kirk on the Green* and *Peblis at the Play* as strictly the earliest examples of this tradition. The native elements which have again begun to develop independently in these pieces are present in the verse of Dunbar and Henryson. But the verse of Dunbar and Henryson is not independent in this sense. It has something in common with the rest of medieval verse. It is Scottish and European. *Christis Kirk on the Green*, *Peblis at the Play*, the vernacular verse of the Sempills, Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns is, on the other hand, Scottish and Independent.

This latter tradition, if narrow, is correspondingly definite. *Christis Kirk*, *Peblis at the Play*, Fergusson's *Leith Races* and *Hallow Fair*, Burns' *Holy Fair* and *Halloween*, are in sort identical. So also are the verse epistles which start with those of Ramsay and Hamilton of Gilbertfield and end with those of Burns. *Habbie Simson, the Piper of Kilbarchan*, is the first of a series of which the burlesque elegies of Burns are the end. It was probably a positive advantage to Burns that he was compelled to work within these narrowly defined limits. It was a condition probably of his success. But the three years of poetic productivity at Mossgiel, which resulted in the *Kilmarnock* volume, were, it seems, sufficient practically to exhaust the possibilities. It is difficult to see what else was left him to do, if he was not simply to repeat himself, except turn for the remainder of his life to the songs.