

## THE ORAGE LEGEND

SELECTED ESSAYS AND CRITICAL WRITINGS OF A. R. ORAGE. Edited by Herbert Read and Denis Saurat (Stanley Nott, 10/6).

This book will be opened with some eagerness by those whose acquaintance with the *New English Weekly* leaves them wondering over the legend of A. R. Orage. They will hope to find some explanation of the influence he is said to have wielded and the enormous impression he appears to have made in distinguished quarters. They will be disappointed. This selection from Orage's writings was, no doubt, undertaken as an act of piety, but it will not help to prolong his reputation. For what it exhibits to us is a mind of no distinction or force of any kind. There is a certain pontifical egotism as of a would-be Arnold Bennett, but Orage has none of the liveliness and vigour that make *Books and Persons*, Bennett's best journalism, still enjoyable. In fact, he shows here as a very poor journalist, while certainly offering no grounds for being taken seriously as a thinker or critic. He does indeed offer evidence of unusually wide reading (for a journalist), and he accosts with assurance a wide range of topics. But his air of cogency and incisiveness is not even superficially convincing; the effect is lame, limp and dull. He clearly thinks he is thinking, and as clearly doesn't know what thinking is—which, of course, is the almost inevitable result of a journalistic career, however fine the natural endowment the journalist may have started with, and however high the level at which he is supposed to work.

That Orage had some compelling personal quality we are forced, by the nature of his reputation, to conclude. Yet on the evidence of the *New English Weekly* it is difficult to see why he should have been reputed a brilliant editor, even. Was what followed on that prolonged inaugural fanfare anything but a pitiful flop? One remembers a good contributor or two, but that is all. And it appeared that Orage was ready to encourage the most brassily empty young careerist.

Perhaps you have to be a Social Crediter to appreciate him.

F.R.L.

## THE LAST EPICUREAN

*THE LAST PURITAN: A MEMOIR IN THE FORM OF A NOVEL*, by George Santayana (Constable, 8/6).

For once the familiar blurb about 'exquisite urbanity and humour,' 'perfect prose' and 'a mind of rare subtlety' is justified. Many readers of Professor Santayana's lectures and essays must have remarked his latent gifts for novel-writing, for instance his genius for dramatising his criticism of abstractions and the habitual ease with which he produces explanatory metaphors and anecdotal similes by way of enforcing a point; also that his criticisms of the views of (for example) William James, Royce and Emerson are inseparable from the portraits of these writers that they go to build up.

This bent towards the use of fiction as a medium for criticism is traceable in his works through several stages. The first stage, a kind of witty generalization from observed facts, is typified in this account of the effects on Catholicism of the American environment (*Character and Opinion in the United States*, p. 47):

'Consider, for instance, the American Catholics, of whom there are nominally many millions, and who often seem to retain their ancestral faith sincerely and affectionately. This faith took shape during the decline of the Roman empire; it is full of large disillusionments about this world and minute illusions about the other. It is ancient, metaphysical, poetic, elaborate, ascetic, autocratic, and intolerant. It confronts the boastful natural man, such as the American is, with a thousand denials and menaces. Everything in American life is at the antipodes to such a system. Yet the American Catholic is entirely at peace. His tone in everything, even in religion, is cheerfully American. It is wonderful how silently, amicably, and happily he lives in a community whose spirit is profoundly hostile to that of his religion. He seems to take stock in his church as he might in a gold mine—sure it is a grand, dazzling, unique thing; and perhaps he masks, even to himself, his purely imaginative ardour about it, with the pretext that it is sure to make his fortune both in this life and in the next. His church, he will tell you, is a first-rate church to belong to; the priests are fine fellows, like the policemen; the Sisters