

EDUCATION, WRITING AND ACTION

WRITING AND ACTION : a documentary anthology. Compiled and edited by Mary Palmer (George Allen and Unwin, 8/6).

This anthology consists of extracts from the works of men who 'wrote to persuade to action'—action for intellectual, social and political liberty, and against intolerance, ignorance and oppression. The greater number of the extracts are as noteworthy for their clear and vigorous prose as for their content. The value that the editor attaches to good writing and, consequently, good reading, is stressed in a very clear and sensible note 'On Reading and Writing.'

As history, too, the book is of great interest. It is possible to trace from Sir Thomas More (the first writer quoted) to the present day the same evils produced by the same ring of vested interests—'a certain conspiracy of rich men,' More calls them. The true nature of the Puritan rebellion is well brought out—any illusions about its 'revolutionary' nature can be disposed of from first-hand evidence in the extracts from Lilburne and Winstanley (some of the best prose in the book), the representatives of the truly revolutionary sections of the Commonwealth party.

The editor thinks 'that teachers may find in the book a useful link between English, History and Science in VIth forms' (it contains a good section on 'Science and Toleration'). Certainly, it could be used with advantage in English lessons with any of these branches, of the Sixth, or in History lessons, with a form not specializing in History, as an excellent introduction or groundwork. But something must be done about the price: very few schools or pupils can afford eight-and-sixpence for a text book. It is to be hoped that the publishers will feel encouraged to issue a cheap reprint as soon as possible.

F.C.

POETRY AND ANARCHISM, by Herbert Read (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

Miss Ethel Mannin, according to the publishers, says that it is a very long time since she has been so excited about a book ; she thinks that its lucidity is admirable, its sanity superb, and that its wisdom blows like a great clean breath of fresh air through all the hot air and general deoxygenation of so-called ' left ' thought to-day. With the best will in the world one can hardly say that Mr. Read didn't deserve this. Any good cause is liable to be discredited by its supporters but this book does nothing to mitigate the danger. And yet, painful as it is to think of the people who will be waving their red and black banners, there is a great deal of good in this book, and in its timeliness it may fulfil an important function.

It comes at a moment when people are fed-up with international affairs that consist of the manœuvring and power-balancing of states, whether quasi-democratic or dictatorial. And it reminds them enthusiastically and with much good feeling that an alternative political principle is ready to hand. The strength and weakness of anarchism both lie in its being a genuinely different political principle and not possessed of either the futility or the immediate workability of a mere variation in state policy, such as dictatorial communism.

Mr. Read believes that anarcho-syndicalism is readily workable and could keep production running at its present speed. Others may doubt whether it could maintain the existing standard of material prosperity—though what it did give us would be more secure and better shared out. About anarchism in Spain too Mr. Read is unpractically hopeful. In the light of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* he seems fatally to underestimate the repressive strength there of Russian (state) communism. In fact it is probably just at the times when state politics have produced crisis without collapse, and the states are braced up for survival, that anarchism can least hope to function successfully ; in an air-raid you support the best defensive organism, and that at present is generally a central government.

In the main *Poetry and Anarchism* leaves on one side both working policy and closely-reasoned theory, concentrating with a rather too consciously ' poetic ' directness upon central principle.