

THE LEFT HERESY IN LITERATURE AND LIFE. By Harry Kemp, Laura Riding and others. (Methuen; 7s. 6d.)

This is a book that very much needed doing, but not by the people we find doing it. For there is a distinctly amateurish note about the work which makes it difficult to disentangle what the writers can possibly mean, and the reader is not helped by the mixed authorship and the crazy sequence of chapter headings. Further, the authors seem to be unaware that the Left heresy has been taken over by the Right for lack of a better policy, and we are left to infer that orthodoxy is some sort of art-for-art's-sake.

What the authors seem to be battling against vaguely is, however, well worth battling against. For it is hardly deniable that there has been a definite betrayal of the intellectuals (Mr. Middleton Murry has implied complacently in the *Times Literary Supplement* that the first precept of Christianity is temporarily in abeyance): and this betrayal continues very actively at this present minute. The intellectuals are not interested in culture, but they are interested in power. Along with the rest of us they have become units in a uniformity imposed by governments from above in the interests of a beautifully streamlined civilisation where independent thinking has gradually become unthinkable. It is useless to pretend that the Leftists are the only propagandists for this kind of mass-civilisation: for at present Leftists and Rightists are united in unholy matrimony.

What have the authors of this book to set against this? Nothing apparently, except to entrench themselves in their Ivory Towers, producing their own arid type of poem. If theirs is freedom, no wonder the masses have chosen to be insects. Why poetry should not be propaganda escapes me; but look after the proper purposes of art and literature and the propaganda looks after itself. Indeed, our authors say it in a moment of comparative lucidity, 'Poets must indeed be practical; to attempt to be a practical politician, however, is to be the less practical as a poet' (p. 270).

Why is there so much aesthetic chatter nowadays? Because there is no place for literature in a mass civilisation: it is the end of literature, and we are living in unnatural times. Paradoxically, the existence of standardisation means the existence of no standards whatever: and because there are no standards critical argument descends to the level of personal quarrelling between the different literary cliques. The very book under review is an ominous illustration of the fact.

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