

POINTS OF VIEW

Readers of the *New Statesman* were recently offered an article entitled "A Counterblast to Science Fiction" written by Professor A. C. B. Lovell. The dictionary defines counterblast as an "energetic declaration against something" and Professor Lovell is, if nothing else, energetic—author, publisher and reader all suffer his disapproval. As far as the actual writing goes, "There is," he says, "a uniform forlornness and hopelessness, ending in tragedy and futility even when war is absent. The stories are insidiously horrible and a protracted reading of science fiction is a nightmare effort." But it is the readers whom Professor Lovell dislikes most. We are "the lunatic fringe of humanity", mere straphangers "for whom literary refinements in the description of the universe may not be important".

Science fiction is a craze; Professor Lovell uses the word three times in his article, ending up: "Until the craze burns out one's last plea is that those with children should keep their science fiction on a high shelf".

The *New Statesman* printed only two of the many letters it must have received in reply and it is worth while quoting Robert Conquest's last paragraph: "Need we really have these pompous and ignorant outbursts, more suited to a Sunday paper attacking another one for pornography, every time anything in the least strange appears in the literary field".

By way of contrast a number of publishers and others interested in the subject recently gathered for the first meeting of the Science Fiction Luncheon Club, at which the distinguished writer Miss Clemence Dane spoke on "The Future of Science Fiction".

Miss Dane said she had been an ardent and devoted reader of science fiction since she found her first two volumes on a Chicago railway bookstall in 1931. There were at that time, she said, only about three regular publications on the market, all most unattractively produced, printed in blunt type on grey paper and with horrible covers. But the stories had appealed to her as, she felt, they must appeal to anyone who loved fairy tales, folk lore, and stories of mystery and imagination.

Her account of the way in which she steadily read all the science fiction she could lay her hands on proved that she was indeed a devotee. She collected it, she said, on the long

TALKING SHOP

SFBC member Mr. C. Rees of Aberdare—and a great many others too—think that you should be able to speak your mind—and have the pleasure of reading your thoughts in print. "Personally," says Mr. Rees, "I should like very much to learn how other members feel towards the selection of books, and their opinions."

Since the editorial department now possesses two bulky files of your correspondence, we feel the time has come to fill that gap. This then is your column—comments and criticism, bouquets and brickbats are equally welcome, and write as much as you please. As a point of departure here is what some members think about the Club books:

Earth Abides was universally liked (SUPER said D. Marsh, London, in large capitals), but *The Martian Chronicles* provoked much comment. D. Murthwaite, Rainham, was first introduced and converted to s-f by reading Ray Bradbury in *Argosy Magazine*, and S. A. C. Shaston of R.A.F. Swindon, Lincs., thinks *The Martian Chronicles* was "one of the best science fiction stories I have ever read, and I have a collection of over 250 science fiction pulp mags, so I have read quite a few." Mrs. L. Hinde of Ross-on-Wye says: "Being scientifically minded I thought I wouldn't enjoy Ray Bradbury but I did, tremendously. Is he a poet?" On the other hand, A. F. Clark, Ferring-by-Sea, thinks *The Martian Chronicles* utterly "dead" and Sgt. R. F. Pulling out in Malaya felt that this book, after *Earth Abides*, took him "from the sublime to the cor-blimey."

The Club edition of Stapledon's classic *Last and First Men* was generally very acceptable to members, although Mr. J. W. S. Barrett of Leicester sent us a masterly and convincing "debunking" of the whole Stapledon philosophy. If space permits we may be able to print some of his comments at a later date. *Minimum Man*, which the Committee liked, was not so popular: D. Croste of Kilve, N.R. thinks *The Devil That Failed* dealt with the subject better. Opinions on *Tomorrow Sometimes Comes* again varied, and the anthology *No Place Like Earth* was very well liked. Many members ask for more anthologies, others like H. B. Stanton of Exeter say "Stick to the full-length story that gives you time to get your teeth into it; we've got all the shorts (or most of them) in our libraries already." Now, your views on Van Vogt, please. This is a writer many of you wanted—but we know he's controversial. Genius or hack?