

SF & IQs

By DR. J. G. PORTER

Have you met the man who thinks sf is rot? I'm sure you have—like the rest of us, he lives in a house full of gadgets, and his children read "Eagle," but this type takes a poor view of science and of the future. He will talk about TV programmes, take the time signals, go to the pictures, insist on nylon or terylene; but, like the devil rebuking sin, he has no use for science. Yet the simplest things in his life are controlled by science. The morning milk on his doorstep—how is the bottle cleaned?—how is it filled? The flint in his lighter, the ink in his pen, the colour of his socks—these, and almost every other thing in his life are the products of modern science.

Whether you like it or not, science dominates the modern world—and a very good thing for the world. Yes, you may think of atom bombs and other horrors, but these are only the crazy by-products of the sweeping changes that are taking place in our daily lives. By and large, science is making a better world for us, so why shouldn't we dream of what the future holds? Most of us, I suppose, would like to have machines to do all the drudgery. I want a machine that would do all my proof-reading for me; my wife wants a house that keeps itself clean, like the one in Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains."* But if you know anything of machines, you will know what a headache they are when it comes to servicing them. Behind every machine there is an army of mechanics. There is an electronic computing machine in America—the Raydac—whose thousands of valves enable it to do the most incredible calculations in a matter of seconds. In order to keep it going there are four operators, fourteen maintenance engineers, twenty-five mathematicians and five clerks. There's

* See "The Martian Chronicles," No. 2 of SFBC choices.

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your giant brain for you! A senseless, uneconomical bit of machinery whose temperamental behaviour is the cause of more blasphemy than is proper. Can you picture a robot, an unmanned space-ship, or any other kind of machine, looking after itself? Neither can I. Any silly little thing will upset these machines—a scratch, a grain of dust even. We have a saying about our calculating machines that they are at least like men in one respect—any bit of fluff will put them off their stride.

No, I have no faith in the present-day machine unless there is a good man at the back of it. The machine has no intelligence, no foresight, no initiative, no judgment. These are human attributes, and they cannot be found in transistors or mercury storage drums or magnetic tapes. Man will always dominate the machine, will always rise superior to his circumstances. And that is why I commend to you our latest choice, *Fury*, by Henry Kuttner. Here is fury indeed, in a futurist setting—a fast-moving story of man's ability—but read it, and see what I mean.

INCREASED POSTAL CHARGES

The Autumn Budget contained proposals for greatly increased postal charges, to become effective from the first of January 1956. Representations on behalf of the Book Trade are being made to the Postmaster General protesting against what is considered to be a tax on books. As we go to press it is not known if this protest will be successful or not, and we have no alternative but to announce with considerable regret that the postal and packing charge for Club books is increased from 6d. to 9d. commencing with the January/February 1956 choice. This increase does not apply to overseas members.

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WRITERS AND THEMES

THE other day we had a long and most interesting talk with a well-known science fiction writer, William F. Temple by name, whose stories many members will have read and whose *Four Sided Triangle* was also made into a film which we found good entertainment. In reply to our question of "Why is so much written about space?" he said "Because there is nothing left on earth to write about." The terrestrial poles, the peaks, the jungles, the oceans (on or under them) had been written about, he thought, till the public had just about had enough. This point of view we do not share. In fact we believe that science fiction on earth (for example *Earth Abides*, *Player Piano*, *More Than Human*) offers a great opportunity for truly imaginative writers. However, it is not the Club's purpose to dictate, but to select. Henry Kuttner (whose *Fury* is our current choice) we think would be more than halfway in agreement with Temple. No conventional review of *Fury* appears in the News but Dr. Porter's article is intended to be read in conjunction with this book.