

GUINNESS TIME

Long before the Romans came to Rye or out to Severn stroke (as GKC says) the rolling English drunkards had not only built the rolling English roads but they had run up Stonehenge. And there it has been for thousands of years, unexplained, probably inexplicable—it may have been a device for telling the time, or a place for the children to play hide-and-seek in. But personally we cannot regard the scene without becoming filled with wonder about it—in fact it haunts us ; just like fiction—science fiction !



incidentally to its main intention. But sf has no *interplay* of character ; that's what the critics should have said—and thank heavens they did not, or our sf authors might earnestly have chased that hare. Then sf would have become more than ever like ordinary fiction—and finally disappeared altogether. For one of the prime functions of the novel proper is to study interplay of character, which has such ramifications that it would have pushed the science out of the fiction altogether.

Let's keep science fiction a thing apart. My personal preference is for something which is sf on every page ; Alfred Bester's two novels, "The Demolished Man" and "Tiger ! Tiger !" are ideal in this respect. Indeed, most of the Sfbcs choices can be praised on this score : "World of Chance" is a good example. This is the reason that novels set only one or two years into the future are suspect : they're bound to be about the present ! And that's something you can read about in your newspapers.

After years of discussion, the definition of science fiction has arrived : it is Edmund Crispin's 'an sf story is one

which presupposes a technology, or an effect of technology, or a disturbance in the natural order, such as humanity, up to the time of writing, has not in actual fact experienced.' This is excellent ; unfortunately, it embraces more than sf—for a textbook like "Peaceful Applications of Atomic Energy" and the first chapter of the Book of Genesis would both come under its banner ! We need a definition, in other words, not only of what sf *is* but of what it *does*.

How about this ? A good sf story produces in its readers a shock, in which the unexpected is made to seem inevitable and the future becomes as vivid as the past.

If sf authors accept this, or something like it, they will see why interplay of character (by which I do not mean mere juxtapositioning of hero and villain) is better left out of sf. Test your own memory and see what you recall from your favourite sf novel.

Think of "Fury," a recent Sfbcs choice. I remember the immortals in it alright, although not what they said and did ; but my clearest memories are of the especially sf-ish bits : the great Keeps themselves, and the fight they had