

Vest-Pocket Thinking

shrewd enough to secure a let-out clause in his agreement with his publishers. If the publishers, soulless creatures as they sometimes are, have insisted on full reproduction rights, the unfortunate author then has, to coin a new phrase, *had it* as far as digests are concerned.

union of publishers. No new book should see the light of day unless it bore the approval of this committee as being something really worth reading. Scribblers and dealers in sensation for its own sake would be discouraged, and eventually forced into advertising



One of the more influential and wealthy digests (still no free advertising) recently came into bad odour because it was discovered to be backing certain publications, so that it could reproduce from them, free of charge. Considering the enormous circulation of this particular digest, it was good business on their part, but hardly ethical—if publishers can be considered to have any ethics.

Viewing the situation broadly, it is an undesirable one from every point of view. The publisher, in his rapacity has found himself overwhelmed with books and magazines he really does not want: but having created the demand he is compelled to churn out masses of inconsequential reading together with the appropriate digests. The war put some sort of a brake on their production but the public appetite has been whetted and there is no indication that it will subside after the war.

The reader is pandered to in his laziness, and if this practice persists there may come a time when the market for really good literature is confined to a few old dodderers to whom Conrad is something more than a new cocktail.

The obvious remedy is to curtail the literary output at the source. That is to say, manuscripts that show any promise at all should be closely examined by a committee appointed by a

or newspaper work, two unavoidable evils.

Digests would then be compelled to *digest* either good new literature or some of the older works which have stood the test of time and criticism. It is significant that no digest ever reviews, say, Stevenson, or Tolstoy, or Voltaire, or even GBS! Perhaps the average perception would spurn these pearls with a contemptuous grunt and turn impatiently to a nutshell description of sea-serpents which existed only in the bibulous imagination of a broken-down sea captain. Sad to relate, some people are really happy knowing something of nothing and nothing of anything.

It only remains for some bright spark to write that *Cue* is after all a form of digest. Why not? Could it be that he would recognise himself in the previous paragraph?

