

Books And Behaviour

Reading of the recent mass murders—a blood bath in New York when ten people, mostly children, were found shot in the back of the head while presumably watching television, by an intruder; and in another case, a crowd of children suddenly attacked by a psycho who ran amok in Taiwan.—who can but conclude that crimes of this nature are the outcome of violence depicted on the television screen today?

We live, who can doubt it, in neurotic times, in times when the weak-minded and maladjusted are easily influenced into psychotic action, such as those we have recounted. And it is time we ceased talking about the bad influence of violence on the screen, and did something positive about it being prevented. Whether television is responsible or not is beside the point. Scenes of savage slaughter and wholesale carnage cannot but have a pernicious effect on the mind, to which children who are still malleable, are particularly prone.

Books, however, can never have such a baneful effect on readers. We can safely read of the villains in Shakespeare or in Jacobean plays, without wishing to emulate

their antics. They act, rather, as a catharsis. They are images in literature, a lesson in morals, rather than archetypes to be held up for our adulation. In fact, it is just this tendency to worship the anti-hero today that may be the cause of our principles having undergone such a drastic sea-change.

The reading of books has always helped man to maintain a sane outlook on life. Books minister to our thoughts rather than to unrehearsed action. Theoretically, we can live and suffer with the worst characters and realise the consequences of their ill-conceived deeds. That is why we had the idea behind the Book Lovers' Voluntary Association, which is responsible for the renewal of pedlars, with their packs of books distributed to educational institutions, commercial offices and residential areas. This undoubtedly has done not a little to encourage the reading habit, so much fallen into desuetude of recent date.

But the high costs of production have removed books from hands eager to hold them once again, and we feel that it is time the authorities did something about controlling the price of paper and newsprint generally, so as to make them more easily available.