

## REVIEWS

### PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

CAN WE LIMIT WAR? By Hoffmann Nickerson. (Arrowsmith; 8/6 net.)

Had Mr. Nickerson been content to take the *fact* of war for granted instead of trying to justify it, the value of his remarkable book would have been considerably enhanced. His opening chapter on the 'Inevitability of War' is, to put it kindly, less than unconvincing.

If, however, we assume (as indeed we do, for reasons other than Mr. Nickerson's), that the abolition of war is scarcely to be hoped for in this sinful world, his study of the manner in which it has been and can be controlled and limited is very instructive and opportune. He analyses the permanent factors—religious, moral, economic, political—which automatically prevent 'absolute' war, and he shows us how these factors have operated, in widely different degrees, from the wars of the Greek city-states until that of 1914-18. We see their effectiveness under the Pax Romana and in the Middle Ages, their decline in potency with the break-up of Christendom at the Reformation, their recovery for a brief spell under the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and finally their reduction to virtual negligibility due to the rise of parliamentary democracy (strangely alleged to be pacific), with the result that war has degenerated into 'mass-massacre' of a ruthlessness and destructiveness undreamed of by barbarians. If civilization is not to destroy itself, the factors which have limited war in the past must come into full play again.

Mr. Nickerson puts forward a very good case for his belief that democracy is the real cause of the butchery of modern quasi-absolute warfare. Mechanisation, he holds, is a negligible factor, and it is a fallacy to suppose that armaments make war or disarmament makes peace. Indeed, he believes that 'planes and tanks make rather for the abolition of vast conscript hordes in favour of small professional armies. 'Nevertheless, no form of military technique, whether it seem favourable to the strict limitation of war or not, can by itself achieve limitation. That is a matter of the human will.' We may readily agree that any movement for peace which confines attention to the reduction of armaments and ignores the more spiritual factors which make or unmake wars, brutalise them or moderate their horrors, is sheer trifling. Mr. Nickerson's caustic account of efforts at

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disarmament since the last war will certainly serve to mitigate regrets at the recent débâcle at Geneva.

Is there any hope for escape from the present disastrous cycle of quasi-absolute war? Mr. Nickerson thinks there is—in the downfall of liberal democracy and (apparently) of Protestant culture, in the re-union of Christendom (involving decentralisation of the Roman Catholic Church) and the intensification of Christian life. During the period of transition something may be hoped from armed dictators on the Stalin-Mussolini pattern. Which seems absurd—until you have read his book.

V.W.

THE END OF OUR TIME. By Nicholas Berdyaev. (Sheed and Ward; 6/-).

We no longer regard the Middle Ages as a time of bygone hopes and foregone conclusions. The New Age speaks its language. M. Berdyaev, in the first essay of this book, saw the fact and its causes as long ago as 1919. In this and three succeeding essays he traces the growth of Individualism after the Renaissance, its completion by the Enlightenment, and now he proclaims its disappearance in a future of totalitarian States. Man, detached from God and become the centre and measure of all things, has fed upon himself, and modern philosophy, poetry, and art dethrone the Reason and Identity of Man. Individualistic thought has produced barren and envious egalitarian democracies which the struggling modern towns too clearly represent. Man has exchanged the City of God for the Suburb of the Jerry-builder, and he is home-sick for a strong organic society. Central and Eastern Europe, and now the United States (perhaps because of their enormous Slav, Teuton, Latin and Semitic populations) have moved towards dictatorship and a merging of the individual in an organized corporate society—the Corporative or Totalitarian State. M. Berdyaev points out that Russia offered by far the best field for the creation of such a State—democracy would have been a far greater revolution for Russia than a new despotism—but he also shews that Utopias are cheap to-day. People want them and technical means of constraint make them easy for Governments to achieve. The horrors of unfettered competition have produced a longing for Status and 'towards Utopias we are moving.' M. Berdyaev sees the clear alternative between Materialistic Communism or Theocracy, 'Brotherhood in Christ or Comradeship in Antichrist.' He makes specific and interesting prophecies about the Christian State he hopes to see rise over against the materialistic States that are already arising and assigns a noble part to the Church—which is a somewhat vague concep-