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FREEDOM OF THE PEN

AUTHORS' GRAVE CONCERN

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The authors whose names appear at the foot of this letter are gravely concerned with the prosecutions for alleged "obscene libels" charged against a number of authors and publishers. Such prosecutions threaten to establish, they think, something like a police censorship of literature, constituting an attack upon the freedom of the pen for which a long and sometimes bitter struggle was fought and won in the past.

It is, of course, recognized by all decent authors that certain books of an entirely obscene and filthy kind should be condemned and destroyed, but it is equally recognized that that duty of the Law should not be allowed to open the way to a puritanical crusade, backed by police prosecution, against authors who claim the liberty and the right of describing the realities of life, freely and fearlessly for adult minds.

On this subject Mr. Justice Stable recently gave a wise and liberal direction in which he invited a jury to recognize that novels are not written solely for adolescent minds, and that what might have been thought improper at one period of history may be considered permissible at the present time when there is greater freedom of public opinion on such subjects as sex. Unfortunately this does not seem to have influenced other judges in recent cases, and authors and publishers are at the mercy of juries who vary in their verdicts according to their level of intelligence, or their ignorance of the great masterpieces of literature and contemporary writing.

It would be disastrous to English literature if authors had to write under the shadow of the Old Bailey if they failed to produce works suitable for the teen-ager, and if publishers were forced to reject books which, however serious in intent and however lit by genius, contained passages which might be blue-pencilled by a police sergeant or a common informer.

We are, Sir, your obedient servants,

RUSSELL, HAROLD NICOLSON, COMPTON
MACKENZIE, J. B. PRIESTLEY, H. E.
BATES, W. S. MAUGHAM, PHILIP GIBBS.

October 25.

HOLY TRINITY, LEEDS