

■ **Heretics** is the usual name given to non-conformists.

SCREWBALLS AND FIREBRANDS

Barrows Dunham was head of the Philosophy Department at Temple University, Pennsylvania, when the Committee on Un-American Activities haled him before it for questioning. "When I fell silent before these gentlemen," Mr. Dunham tells us, "my employers dismissed me, alleging 'intellectual arrogance' on my part."

To fall silent in court before one's accusers may be judicious, but is it sensible, 12 years later, to remain silent before one's readers? Prof. Dunham doesn't say what crime the Committee accused him of: we suppose it was membership of the Communist party. He doesn't tell us whether he was guilty of the crime: we suppose he was. But it would be nice to know, because where a reader's sympathies are concerned there is a great difference between a man who is an underdog and a man who is just lying doggo.

Impressed by his persecu-

tion, Prof. Dunham withdrew into reflecting upon similar occurrences in history. *The Heretics* is the fruits of his brooding. It is a fairly long, interesting and informative examination of selected heretics from Socrates to Marx, with close looks at the forms their "intellectual arrogance" took and the characters of their accusers.

As is inevitable with such records, one is left with the impression that history's endless repeating of its own injustices is about the most mournful and tedious element in the whole story of mankind. But this impression is strengthened rather too much by the fact that Prof. Dunham is a strongly opinionated radical, to whom all persecutions look suspiciously alike. Such an attitude does not allow either history or human nature a sporting chance to express its diversity.

Heresy, however, as we can nearly all agree, is usually

what Prof. Dunham says it is — the screwball's refusal to play ball with the team. The fact that the former (at least in the more famous cases) is often acknowledged later to be the hero of the game should not blind us to the fact that he has not had hemlock poured down him in the first place just because all heretics are good and all authorities are bad.

To grasp the real drama of heresy and get a clear idea of why heretics are burnt with such monotonous regularity one must at least make an effort to see that something beside the heretic is at stake.

Pharisees, elders of the people, Calvinists, inquisitors and police-chiefs all believe that a few personal bonfires are preferable to a general conflagration. Religions whose whole foundations rest upon unquestioning faith in revealed truth believe inevitably that the stake is the best place for those who want to open their religion to dispute. If Marxism was the science that Prof. Dunham believes it to be, and not just another ideology, its leaders would long since have

made a policy of cossetting the best brains instead of blowing them out.

What Prof. Dunham has no difficulty in showing is the heretic's repeated advantage over the organisation-man in the matter of intelligence and good sense. He also touches on, but does not stress broadly enough, how much extra pugnacity, wit and nous the heretic develops as a result of being badgered by hostile mossbacks.

Socrates' defence before his accusers is such a model in this respect that his capital punishment for it comes as no surprise, while Voltaire's "English Letters" are still living evidence of the folly of releasing such a tartar from the Bastille and allowing him to visit a free country:

"Go into the London Stock Exchange, a place respectable than many courts. There you see representatives of all nations, gathered on behalf of usefulness to mankind. There the Jew, the Mohammedan, the Christian deal with one another as if they belong to the same reli-

gion, and call a man infidel only when he is bankrupt."

That was written in the good old days, of course, before the heretical Marx spoilt the fun by insisting that businessmen did just as much evil as clergymen. But one doesn't blush to read it, as one does whenever one reads the words of an organisation-man struggling, as always, to deny to others the privileges he enjoys himself:

"In every constituent body throughout the empire the working class will, if we grant the prayer of this petition, be an irresistible majority. In every constituent body capital will be placed at the feet of labour; knowledge will be borne down by ignorance: and is it possible to doubt what the result must be?"

This is Macaulay, begging the House of Commons not to grant the Chartist petition for universal suffrage and a secret ballot. But it might well have been spoken only yesterday, in Rhodesia. Heretics are often wrong, but they are usually original. But the spokesman for organisations are in a much worse fix, because the horse they elect to flog is usually dead and the cause for which they would die has usually gone bad.

Prof. Dunham records all this in a low, rather sorrowful tone. That is not a style that readily does justice to the numerous springy, lively heretics who sizzle through his pages. Wilful, headstrong and as much of a nuisance to the sleeping as bread-crumbs in a bed, their legacy is more of high spirits than of invalid port. — *By Nigel Dennis in The Listener.*