

## The fight in the theatre

By Bremer Hofmeyr

**A** RECENT NEWS ITEM in the Johannesburg Press described a B.B.C. television programme in which leering boys watch a teenage girl doing a striptease act.

At the Edinburgh film festival a naked woman was trundled across the stage in a wheelbarrow. And the festival has royal patronage.

A leading Johannesburg actor recently declined a part in a play. He is no puritan and he needs the money. He said: "I am not willing to utter the filth they want to put into my mouth."

Such incidents could be multiplied *ad nauseam* (in fact until you are literally sick).

On the other hand the Johannesburg stage and film critics have taken up the cudgels against the theatre of decadence and dirt.

The Johannesburg film-going public have shown their preferences for wholesome films like "Sound of Music," "Lord Oom Piet," "Miracle of the White Stallions."

These are all symptoms of the battle that is going on in the theatre between those who say that life has no meaning and our planet is the universe's lunatic asylum, and those who believe that life has a purpose, man has a destiny that there are standards of decency which matter and that human beings are more than sophisticated beasts with shirts on.

The cynics who write as though life has no meaning furiously attack as propaganda any writing that suggests that it has. They overlook the fact that they themselves are fiercer propagandists for nihilism than those they cri-

ticize are protagonists of faith. They also forget that once the moral basis of society is destroyed anarchy follows, and then comes the very state control they will be the most vociferous to condemn.

But the cynics of Britain are not having it all their own way. The Westminster Theatre, a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace, produces plays exclusively of the constructive sort.

The Westminster Memorial Trust was set up by war veterans who gave their army pay to start the fund. They believed that the evils they had been fighting could only be finally vanquished in the spirit of man, and that the victors on the battle field could be taken over by the very decadence they had fought, unless they found in peace as great a dedication as they had in war.

The theatre they founded runs non-stop and shows a profit. Parties come by bus, train and air from all over Britain.

There are fascinating stories of a new spirit in home and industry that has begun after a visit to this theatre.

Nor is it only Britain that is being affected. People fly in from the Continent too, for the theatre is equipped with simultaneous translation through earphones. The plays can be seen in Arabic, Danish, Dutch, French, Finnish, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish besides English.