

SCIENCE PAST AND PRESENT. By F. Sherwood Taylor. (Heinemann; 10s. 6d.).

It is a truism that nobody to-day can afford to ignore science; and as a result there has been a great demand for popular books on all aspects of it from a public which likes its reading to be serious, but not over-difficult. Unfortunately the demand has been too often met by writers ignorant of both science and philosophy, so that this new book by Dr. Sherwood Taylor, who is a scientist, a Catholic, and a lucid writer, is particularly welcome.

Science Past and Present is primarily intended for sixth form school boys, as a supplement to the narrow academic teaching suitable for the passing of examinations, but quite unsuited to giving a balanced view of the whole field of science. As in previous books, he rightly considers the historical approach to be the most satisfactory, and an interested added feature is the large number of quotations from original sources, beginning with Egypt and Babylon, ending with Dirac and Eddington. Dr. Taylor has not made the mistake of concentrating too much on the Physical Sciences, always a temptation because of their spectacular achievement, but has also included Biological and Sociological studies. Especially, one cannot be too grateful for contemporary accounts of the terrible effect of the Industrial Revolution on the poor, a convincing rejoinder to those who see in unaided science a means to Utopia. Indeed, he is careful throughout to define with precision the limits of the knowledge that scientific methods can be expected to give.

Unfortunately, the general effect will be a little bewildering, on a first reading, to a person with no scientific training, and a more drastic selection of material might have been an improvement. But there is no doubt that the book will help many people, whether school boys or no, to a clearer view of a subject whose misuse is threatening civilisation.

RONALD BRIGHT.

THE NATURE AND ORIGINS OF SCIENTISM. By John Wellmuth, S.J. (Marquette University Press; Humphrey Milford; 5s.).

THEOLOGY IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE. By Leonard Hodgson. (Oxford University Press; 2s.).

These two lectures deal with the same fact, namely "the belief that science in the modern sense of that word, and the scientific method as described by modern scientists, afford the only reliable natural means of acquiring such knowledge as may be available about whatever is real". Fr Wellmuth, who thus defines "scientism", is concerned with showing that this belief did not originate with the Renaissance period. Relying principally on the studies of Gilson and Michalski, he finds the origins thereof in the "gradual loss of confidence in the power of the human mind"; and he briefly outlines the history of that loss of confidence from the early middle ages to Ockham.