

BOOKS

SCIENCE ITSELF

SCIENCE IN TRANSITION. By A. W. Haslett. Published by Christopher Johnson. Our copy from Oswald Sealy Ltd.

SCIENCE AND POLITICS. By A. D. Ritchie. Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press.

THE writer of popular science walks a tight-rope between the full, and probably mathematical, treatment which would interest only those prepared to make a study of it and the triviality that follows on over-simplification. Mr. Haslett performs this feat with skill and grace. At one time a radar officer in New Zealand, at another the editor of *Science To-day*, he combines the precision of the true scientist with the flair and ease of the journalist. Wisely he does not address himself to an explanation of recent work in the whole field of science.

His book is concerned with the historical approach to the problem of atomic energy, a similar study of radar and jet propulsion, an analysis of food production and an inquiry into the chemical control of disease. But it opens and closes on the problem of scientific responsibility. To what extent is the scientist to be held responsible for the uses to which his work is adapted? Should he have more claim than any

other man to have his advice accepted as of right? And what is the social function of science? Does it exist to be of use or is it enough to know? It is correctly pointed out that war stimulates technology at the expense of science and that no great scientific advances can be looked for in war-time, yet the point that many such advances must wait on the perfection of new techniques is not evaded. Mr. Haslett is strongly on the side of the "pure" scientist, but he does not minimise the work of the technologist. It will no doubt be salutary for many people to read of the comparative unimportance of the inventor except from the financial angle. The whole book stresses the fact that once the fundamental research has been carried out adaptation to use is not nearly so difficult as it appears.

Haslett links the problem of atomic control to the freedom of information among scientists. Secrecy, he argues, is an idle dream. International control seems possible, but is it desirable? The immense benefits to be derived from the radioactive materials obtained from the atomic piles are not lightly to be foregone. These offer our brightest hopes of learning something of the fundamental nature of disease. Yet control of one activity is not possible without control of the other.

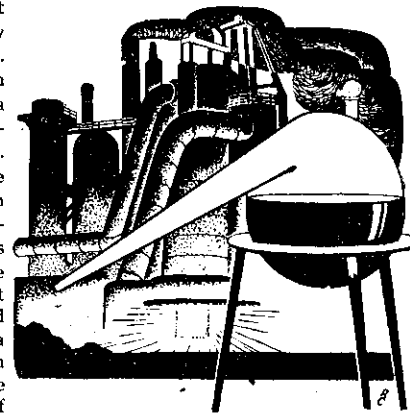
Radar is treated as what it really is: that is, a purely technical problem, but it is also noted that the invention of the magnetron, essential to the development of radar, has provided science with a tool of great use in further research. It is this inter-action of pure and applied science which is the most interesting part of the book. Incidentally, the story of the organisation of the string of radar defence stations in the days of the "phony war" is a most exciting one and Haslett had an inside view of the whole affair.

The chapter on Jet Propulsion is a rather naive panegyric of Whittle. The work of the Swiss firm of Brown Boveri in the development of the gas turbine and of the Italians who first flew a jet-propelled aircraft receive a great deal less than justice. Similarly the pioneering work of the Opel rocket-propelled car is passed over in silence. However, it is ungrateful to carp at this when the author proceeds to deal so interestingly with the possibility of a 30 per cent. increase in the total food supply of the world by the scientific application of fertilisers

and the principles of genetics. It just happens that the slip is disappointing.

There is a short list of books appended for "for further reading," but most of them make heavier demands on initial knowledge than the average reader can muster.

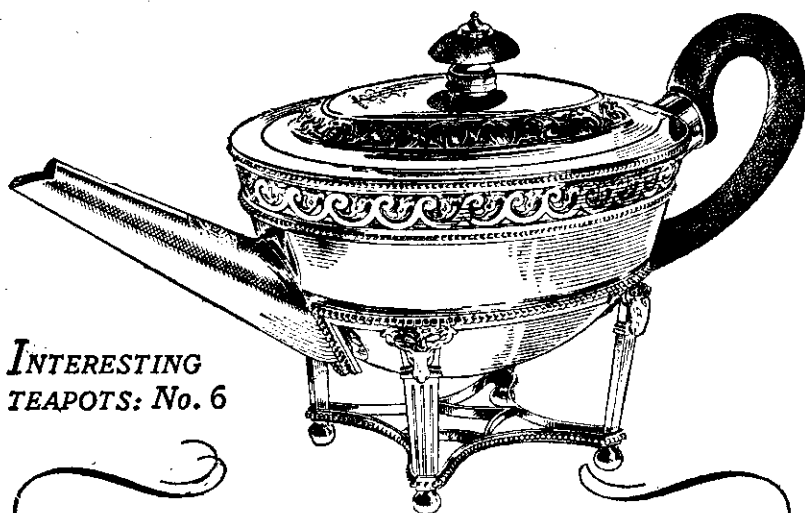
PROFESSOR RITCHIE, who is a chemist and a physiologist as well as a professor of logic and metaphysics, considers the state of science and of society. His purpose is not to spread information, but to put forward a point of view. Indeed the title of the first lecture could well be *Science or Politics*, since the conclusion reached is that the best way in which politics can assist science is by leaving it alone. Both Ritchie and Haslett draw a sharp distinction between the scientist and the



technologist. The latter, it appears, should be a public servant, but the former never—unless we re-define "public servant." Science is to be regarded as an attempt to understand, whereas technology is an attempt to use, yet

(continued on next page)

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