

THE PARA-EXPERT

Brian J. Ford: *Nonscience*. London: Wolfe, 1971 (£2.00).

When I was in Boston (Mass.) in 1963, the local Mensa group was in about the state the Birmingham (England) group is in now—it had become a series of friendly groups with little if any connection with whatever passes for main-stream in our Society. One of these groups had invented a game some months before (Laurie van Someren was one of the group but I don't know if he'd invented it; it had his style, though). It was a Perversion-of-the-Month Club, and the last month, as far as I know, was devoted to Paravoyeurism—the derivation of sexual pleasure by watching Peeping Toms.

The last few years have seen the emergence of a new breed of author. Whereas the popularisation of science used to be dry, usually very factual, occasionally sense-of-wonder-ish and rarely witty, recent books which might be considered for the same audience have become progressively more terrifying—quite deliciously terrifying, my dear, have you seen the latest Desrad Ardlow? We really are all going to die of ingrown grüntfuttocks if we continue to eat chocolate biscuits, you know . . . and our grandchildren will . . . *etcetera ad nauseam*.

Brian Ford is, I believe, the first Para-expert. His book analyses wittily but often repetitively the recent phenomenon of the Expert, the exponent of *Nonscience* (I

prefer to pronounce it to rhyme with conscience and sound like nonsense—Brian pronounces it nonscience) and in many ways the antithesis of the ancient, revered, and kindly scientist. The Expert must never be seen to be wrong, must be guided always by that which sells rather than that which is true, must cultivate his memory but never show any originality, and he will gain his proper reward: riches and a satisfying material happiness! *Nonscience* is mostly in the form of an instruction manual for up-and-coming Experts, and is often very funny and sometimes a little edgy; weakest are his photographs and captions, and a close second come his newspaper article cuts. But for his analysis of the required Expert-ise (*q.v.* FN, I.O., S.S., and EreN) I have nothing but praise—and I won't tell you what they mean because I want you to buy the book and find out. His list of earlier discoverers than, for example, Fleming, Harvey, Jenner, Pasteur . . . all of them successful Experts with considerably more 'fashionism' than their predecessors. He has a few gratuitous remarks, too, about Marx and Freud in the same section; these early Experts benefited by *when*, not *what*, they said. This part of the book is very like *To England with Love* by Frost and Jay. Perhaps it is very easy to be clever about Authority and Authorities. But it is amusing reading, and probably does as much to help us bear the bridle of Authority as the common English habit of printing 'Government Property' on the lavatory paper in public buildings.

Lastly, I am not the best person to review this book for you; I am of course an Expert. But a cardinal rule for the Expert is never to let an opportunity for publicity slip by . . . as you will discover when you persuade your rich friend to buy the book and then borrow it from him. But make sure he's not a psychiatrist; Brian says 'Psychiatry is a form of mental disorder in which the sufferer feels he has a profound insight into the mental problems of others'. I wonder if Brian is right about me too?

JACK COHEN

Memor Journal

Jan/Feb-72