

BOOK REVIEWS

SCIENCE AND REVELATION. By Leslie J. Walker, S.J. (London ; Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1932, Pp. 87 ; 2/6.)

Catholics may have liked the change of atmosphere, but they did not heave a sigh of relief when the attitude of modern scientists towards religion became popularized. They had found that their philosophy and theology could work quite happily with the mechanistic science of the nineteenth century, though not with the mechanistic philosophy illegitimately engendered. Fr. Walker's thoughtful reflections on the B.B.C. symposium on science and religion evince the true temper of the Catholic mind ; disinclined to accept uncritically the claims of modern science, even when it comes bearing gifts in its hands.

The recent fraternizing of religion and science has been a success on the whole. But here, as in politics, an occasional over-heartiness of manner leads one to suspect that sometimes the harmony is more apparent than real. Agreement is easy enough when the true nature and claims of one or the other is reduced to a shadow ; when, on the one hand, science finds that it has no quarrel with religion, because its conclusions cannot controvert the private and personal experience of values ; and when, on the other hand, the modern scientific attitude of diffidence with regard to the real and objective significance of its processes is pressed to its utmost and beyond.

In the first case, no Catholic can countenance this thinning down of his religion to a ghost. For him it implies a body of systematized doctrine, based on divine authority, developed by the scientific reason, then consequently confirmed in practice by experience. In the second place, it is queer for the scientific spirit to be so misdoubtful of itself, and few scientists would conceive their science to be nothing more than a scheme of symbols connected by mathematical equations. Fr. Walker thinks that the Eddington phase of scepticism regarding the physical significance of science is a passing one, and hopes that this is true as well of the modern willingness to reject the idea of scientific determinism owing to the chancey behaviour of electrons.

Contraries, says St. Thomas, must be about the same thing. By clearly separating the two functions, complementary but distinct, the author is able to suggest how conflict between the two should never have arisen. This harmony is obtained by

Blackfriars

a diminution of the true nature of neither. Theology is not an appendix to science; science not inerey ancillary to theology. In itself, science is neither theistic not atheistic, nor is it concerned to establish or deny theological or philosophical principles. The unpredictable jump of the atom no more proves free-will, for instance, than the old scientific determinism disproved it.

Admitting all the strictly scientific discoveries of modern times, Catholic teaching remains unshaken. Professor Julian Huxley has told us of how science has forced theology to shift from various positions—a flat earth, a geocentric universe, a material heaven aloft and so-on. This reminds Fr. Walker of the stockbroker who was accosted by a friend with the remark: 'I hear you made a hundred thousand dollars in Chicago last week over a deal in cotton.' To which the stockbroker replied: 'What you say is more or less correct; only it wasn't last week, it was the week before; and it wasn't in Chicago, it was in New York; and it wasn't in cotton, it was in wool; and it was not a hundred thousand dollars, it was *one* thousand dollars; and I didn't make them, I lost them.' Another good point he makes is that the disinclination of Catholic thinkers to accept the popular hypothesis of Evolution can be explained, not by prejudices acquired from Scripture or their traditional philosophy, but by a habit of mind formed by a rigorous training in the use of logic.

Once or twice the distinction between the fields of science and philosophy seems rather blurred: and is it true that the notion of duration is bound up with actual change? The price is reasonable, but the book certainly deserved something better than its cheap-looking cover. It should be bought by all who desire a clear and very readable account of the relations of Catholic theology and modern science.

T.G.

NIGHT OUT. By Rupert Croft-Cooke. (Jarrolds; 7/6.)

Mr. Louis Golding heralds this book with a pæan of praise that is likely, I think, to redound to the author's discredit while it successfully advertises the novel. I refer to the phrase 'it is a book which diabolically analyses the futility of a lost generation': that surely does less than justice to this 'rattling good story': to my mind it suggests a malicious triumph over the myopic and the wilfully blind, and I find Mr. Croft-Cooke so sincere in his single-mindedness, and so—albeit starkly—truthful, that the suggestion of malice prompts me to defend him