

Woolly & discursive

Nonscience . . . or how to rule the world by *Brian J. Ford* 7234 0413 5 (Wolfe £2)

IF ONLY one could hail this as another 'Gamesmanship,' or even as another 'Peter Principle.

Alas, Brian Ford has allowed himself to be tempted into fighting on his opponent's ground.

His thesis is excellent: that in place of the dedicated scientist of former times what we now have is the mere 'expert', a practitioner of 'nonscience', more concerned about a stable career, a good income and favourable public relations than the advancement of knowledge.

Instead, however, of concentrating on the meat of his subject—cycles of fashion in scientific research, for instance, which he treats with clarity and verve — he prefaces, postfaces and intersperses his telling points with passages that are not nearly acid enough to make good satire. They are, in fact, as woolly and discursive as the scientific papers he dismisses as 'numericumulative' (serving the sole purpose of putting the author's name into print.)

One wishes that Mr Ford had taken as his models Sellars and Yeatman, and learned from them the devastating economy of expression which wastes no words on bracketing the target but hits it spot-on every time. To my great regret, what I'm reminded of is not *1066 and all that*, but a Becket's *Comic history of England* which followed the regular Victorian pattern of belabouring every joke until it slumped unconscious.

There's an awful lot of bracketing in this book, and some of it is dreadfully square.

John Brunner
