

Book Reviews

Wilderness and Plenty, by Sir Frank Fraser Darling. BBC, 21s.

Before Nature Dies, by Jean Dorst. Collins, 63s.

In the present flood of literature on conservation these two books, the Reith Lectures of 1969 and a good translation of a recent book in French, by distinguished scientific conservationists, deserve to be picked out and are well read together. They traverse the same ground, utter the same warnings, share the same outlook and reach the same conclusions by approaches and treatments appropriate to a treatise and to a course of lectures, and they are illuminating in their differences.

The main topics treated by both writers are the impacts made by man upon his environment since prehistoric times, when he was not yet dominant, and in his increasing skills and growing numbers in much later eras until the recent explosion of population. Dorst deals with past changes, despoliations and blunders in some detail and with telling effect; Darling paints with a broader brush, but he too emphasises blunders and misconceptions of policy, no longer excusable by ignorance, yet pursued in all parts of the world under pressures which governments are too weak to resist—among them massacres of animals, destruction of forests, over-grazing and pillage of marine resources.

As a 'qualified', though not 'utter pessimist', which Sir Frank continues to be after a survey of 'global changes' in the environment, both actual and possible, he stops short of allying himself with the prophets of Gloom and Doom. Nevertheless, his forward vision is neither smug nor starry-eyed, to use his own epithets. 'The world's wild life is *not* safe in our enlightened cave', and time is not on our side. His conception of wilderness is the key to his position. 'People still speak of wilderness, which covers the nobility of Nature, in a derogatory way, yet until our day, few have voiced effectually their detestation of the desolation of the land'. Now the question is whether pollution and population pressures are to 'shrink our lives to a condition of life in death, or do we look outward and proclaim that we live in a beautiful world which we mean to maintain?'

Firm economic and other good reasons can often be given for a rational conservation of our resources in land, water and the natural life which they sustain. But ultimately both writers fall back upon more fundamental arguments which cannot be dismissed because they appear to be ethical or philosophical.

'Organisms exist in their own right as fellow-members with us in the world community of living things . . . we cannot give up our world to the production of human beings' (Darling). 'Man has no right to destroy a species of animal on the ground that it is useless' (Dorst). Those who know Sir Frank will appreciate the passionate conviction underlying his concluding appeal to a sense of human responsibility throughout the world and his claim that 'there can be no greater moral obligation in the environmental field than to ease out the living space and replace dereliction by beauty'. It will perhaps be more surprising to many to find a scientific zoologist like Professor Dorst, a Frenchman at that and a leader in a great national museum, concluding his powerful work, and his appeal for a reconciliation between man and nature 'before Nature dies', with a passage to be pondered: 'Man has enough objective reasons to safeguard nature. But in the last analysis it will only be saved by our hearts. It will only be saved if man loves it, because it is beautiful and we need beauty,

in whatever form our background and training enable us to appreciate it. For that, too, is an integral part of the human soul'.

HURCOMB

Memories, by Julian Huxley. Allen & Unwin, 63s.

Julian Huxley states in his preface that the reason for embarking on his memoirs is to 'show that an embracing inquisitiveness and widespread curiosity can bring their own rewards'. But it is the penetrating mind behind the curiosity that renders his book of importance in the history of science. Unlike his grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Charles Darwin, he had not the early discipline and wide experience of a long sea-voyage; there was no equivalent to the 'Rattlesnake' nor the 'Beagle'—though in later life he travelled widely.

His home surroundings provided a great range of intellectual activity; his mother was a granddaughter of Thomas Arnold of Rugby; his father, Leonard, editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, was the eldest surviving son of Thomas Henry Huxley. In July, 1909, when Julian was 22, he was invited to Cambridge to attend the Centenary Celebrations of Charles Darwin's birth; and there he became 'deeply impressed by the stream of addresses stressing the importance of Darwin's many-sided work'. He adds, 'This was not so much a turning point in my career, as a crystallisation of my ideas, a clear vision and inspiration which I can truly say remained with me all through my life'. It was not until 1942 that he published his *Evolution, the Modern Synthesis*.

Julian Huxley was never a great experimenter nor a specialist; his wish is to be remembered as a generalist, and his many published works, a list of which is given, bears out the wide spread of his net. These memoirs disclose the man and the manifold aspects of his influence.

NORA BARLOW

Innocent Killers, by Hugo and Jane van Lawick-Goodall. Collins, 45s.

Over 90 excellent photographs, distributed throughout the text, are the obvious strong point of this book, which deals with some of the lesser known carnivores of East Africa; any naturalist and visitor to East Africa would be excited by them. The text consists of four chapters; a general one on hunting grounds and three dealing with wild dogs, golden jackals and spotted hyaenas. Reading them one senses something of the great satisfaction Jane and Hugo must have derived from watching the life of these carnivores.

The first chapter is mostly about the life of this well-known husband and wife team and their small son in Africa, but the others deal with their actual observations and their reactions to them. There are some really interesting descriptions, little flashes of insight into the unknown life of these oft-despised creatures, enlightening in the same way as can be a photograph. But in a way, the book is frustrating because it does no more than this; there is no attempt to give the observations a general biological significance, and one cannot help but feel that this is to some extent a waste of an excellent opportunity to do so. But, as the authors themselves make clear, the book is in no way intended to be scientific.

Most of the observations are on social behaviour and some on scavenging and hunting; these are also the topics covered in the photographs. There are some lovely scenes of parents and pups, and I think that in