

Environmental Biology

THE POLITICS OF NEGLECT: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, ed. by Roy L. Meek and John A. Straayer. 1971. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. 256 p. Price not given.

This book contains 28 articles, each with an excellent introduction. Almost every facet of our environmental plight is considered. The frustration felt by ecologists is revealed in a surgical examination of politics, economics, and societal ineptness by such authors as Paul Ehrlich, Barry Commoner, Gene Bylinsky, Robert Rienow, and Peter Schrag. These articles give support to the idea that it is necessary for changes in attitudes to precede changes in politics.

For the teacher, lecturer, or citizen, including the high school student, I highly recommend this book. With everyone's help, perhaps we can get on with the business of making some of the policy changes the book recommends.

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THE NIGHT COUNTRY, by Loren Eiseley. 1971. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. 253 p. \$7.95.

In these 14 essays, most or all of which have been previously printed in a variety of journals, Loren Eiseley reveals a mastery of literary style that is quite unsurpassed among naturalists writing today. Perhaps, I used to think, Eiseley's style was a bit overstrained. There was a tinge of the precious in it. That time, if it existed beyond my imagination, is well past. Here are the sure fingers of the master craftsman and artist with words, who can immerse one quickly in a mood of reflection or nostalgia, quickening the imagination to the very smell of damp earth and the dark shadows of caves and abandoned dwellings, or the fresh wind of the prairie and the delicate fragrance of meadows of wild flowers. Often enough, there is no substantial intellectual content in these sketches. Some readers complain that after reading one of them you've read them all. That is not so, if you seek what is truly here: an evocation of moods, the bitter-sweet remembrance of things past, the childhood experiences that flower into the man's enduring quest, the unremitting search that marks the true nature of man.

It is rewarding, too, to study the ways of this artist with his words. How is the brooding mentality of the writer set forth so evocatively? What creates the spell of the senses that surrounds one with the feeling of being there? The sentence structure, almost always,

is simple. The use of adjectives is moderate, each one well chosen. Perhaps that is the greatest characteristic of Loren Eiseley's literary style. Every word is well chosen, not alone for its own sake, but as a part of the whole. The effect is like that of listening to a Beethoven sonata: not a note unplanned for its contribution to the line of the phrase and the structure of the whole sonata. Take these words, for example, picked virtually at random from an essay entitled "Paw Marks and Buried Towns":

The archaeologist, it is said, is a student of the artifact. That harsh, unlovely word, as sharply angled as a fist ax or a brick, denudes us of human sympathy. In the eye of the public we loom, I suppose, as slightly befuddled graybeards scavenging in grave heaps. We caw like crows over a bit of jade or a broken potsherd: we are eternally associated in the public mind with sharp-edged flints and broken statues. The utter uselessness of the past is somehow magnificently incorporated into our activities.

And from the next paragraph:

... A man who has once looked with the archaeological eye will never see quite normally. He will be wounded by what other men call trifles. It is possible to refine the sense of time until an old shoe in the bunch grass or a pile of nineteenth-century beer bottles in an abandoned mining town tolls in one's head like a hall clock. This is the price one pays for learning to read time from surfaces other than an illuminated dial. It is the melancholy secret of the artifact, the humanly touched thing.

There are two essays in this collection that warrant more than simple consideration in terms of artistic excellence. Every biologist ought to read "The Creature from the Marsh" as a wholesome corrective of proportion and scale, and every teacher ought to ponder the significance of Eiseley's commentary on the growth of the youth's mind and the influences upon it, which are to be found in "The Mind as Nature." It ends with a splendid truth embedded in characteristic imagery. Loren Eiseley writes:

In Bimini, on the old Spanish Main, a black girl once said to me, "Those as hunts treasure must go alone, at night, and when they find it they have to leave a little of their blood behind them." I have never heard a finer, cleaner estimate of the price of

wisdom. I wrote it down at once under a sea lamp, like the belated pirate I was, for the girl had given me unknowingly the latitude and longitude of a treasure—a treasure more valuable than all the aptitude tests of this age.

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THE PEOPLE PROBLEM, by Dean Fraser. 1971. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 248 p. \$6.95 (hardback).

Most of the recent books on environmental problems have been collections of readings rather than original works and have tended to deal with the problems in a fragmentary or isolated manner. By contrast, Dean Fraser presents environmental problems in an integrated manner by appropriately relating them all to excessive numbers of people. He begins with a section on the nature of populations, in which he clearly demonstrates why it is that a "population explosion" is upon us at this particular time. A second, and major, part of the book is called "Factors Limiting Population Growth"; he considers the environmental problems—of space, food, water, mineral resources and energy, pollution, and extinction—and shows that all of them are related to the size of the human population. The final part of the book deals with population control.

This rather brief book is neither superficial nor highly technical. The author does not offer new solutions to environmental problems, but he does strongly suggest that many of the proposed solutions will be effective only when they are preceded or accompanied by attitudinal changes regarding man's relationship to nature.

The book should appeal to a wide audience. Just about any "aware person"—especially one who has only read about environmental problems in newspapers and nonacademic magazines—should find it an enlightening summary of the most critical problems facing mankind today. Teachers, in particular, should read it. Those who purchase the book should pass it around—to friends and enemies alike.

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ECOLOGICAL ISOLATION IN BIRDS, by David Lack. 1971. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 415 p. \$12.00.

The director of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, at Oxford, is noted for his studies of the Galápagos (Darwin's) finches, which epitomize adaptive radiation in a "laboratory"

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