

REVIEWS

THE LIVING SOIL. By Lady E. B. Balfour. (Faber; 12s. 6d.).

On finishing this book you feel compelled to go down on your knees and say a Pater Noster in thanksgiving and dedication. It is about our daily bread and our supersubstantial bread. It is concerned with the will of God and the Kingdom of God and all the little fauna and flora that none but He could have made and none but man would have destroyed. Its aim is to further life in all its myriad forms and to halt the forces of death to which we have sold ourselves for a quick cash return. With the service of life will come health and happiness, where our present exploitation of life and service of death can only bring disease, decay and human misery.

The author is conservative in the deepest sense, and yet revolutionary in the fullest sense; she pleads for the conservation of all those vital forces in nature which the machine and the chemist and man's greed are so busy destroying, and she urges the paramount need to return to the earth all the residue of life, vegetable, animal and human, without which the life circle is broken and frustrated, and which at present are being wasted and destroyed in a wholesale and criminal manner.

What is her theme? It is health—in the soil, in the crops and stock that live from the soil, in man who lives from these crops and stock, and in man's environment. It is wholeness—that balance and integration between man and nature, within man himself, and between man and man in an ecological organism—without which the life of the spirit (and one might add the life of Grace) is made void. It is God's Creation, which we must know and love and serve.

And her argument? That the soil is a living biological reality, not a dead chemical mass. That it has a teeming life of its own formed only after untold ages of development in which a balance has been established between the fungus life in the soil, and the bacteria and insects that live on this fungus, and the vegetation and other creatures that live from it. This life is in the humus, the humus is maintained by all the wastes of life being returned to the soil. But to-day, far from returning humus to the soil, we are dressing it with so-called 'fertilizers' which it seems may well be destroying the very biological life upon which everything depends. And in so far as we are not actually destroying this life, we are certainly doing nothing to replenish and renew it. Food grown from chemically treated and dying soil may be shown to lack those vital qualities without which human life itself wilts. At the least it will lead to an increase and spread of sickness and disease, and to sterility of body and mind. On top of the evil wrought by chemical action are the destructive effects of the rough-shod and greedy use of machinery. The machine has its place, but nature will not be bent and changed to suit the machine. The tractor-plough and cultivator that tears through the

land and cakes the ground under its wheels; the milking machine that sucks milk out faster than a calf, or any other way in which man tries to force and exploit nature will only lead to disease, dearth and death.

All the evidence and indications collated by Lady Balfour converge to prove :

‘(a) The primary factor in health is nutrition.

‘(b) Fresh unprocessed natural whole foods are more nutritive than the same foods when stale, or from which vital parts have been removed by processing.

‘(c) The nutritive value of food is vitally affected by the way in which it is grown.

‘(d) An essential link in the nutrition cycle is provided by the activities of soil fungi, and for this and other reasons the biological aspects of soil fertility are more important than the chemical.’

Perhaps even the teachers of the People who talk about Poverty in the midst of Plenty (when the exact opposite is the truth) being a problem of distribution and not production (when again the exact opposite is the truth) and who tell us it doesn't matter how meaningless our work is so long as we do it for the glory of God (is this not almost blasphemy in the modern context!)—even the teachers of the People might stop to ponder whether they are leading. If the rot has already gone so far that we must have a Beveridge Bill to nurse us from an anaemic womb to ammoniac tomb, and a Butler Bill to provide more clerks and chemists and combines, and a Bevin Bill to organise all the little ants as they slowly and painfully crawl to death in their hygienically fumigated, chemically processed and mechanically controlled ant-heap, then, for the love of St. Michael and the great army of God's workers—not forgetting the microbes in the muck-heaps—don't let us pretend this is construction or reconstruction. You can't build and you shouldn't try to rebuild on foundations that are rotten. You can only patch where the cracks are worst and salvage what is still good against the day of the great wreckage.

But here in Lady Balfour's book are sound foundations; here is the sketch for construction and reconstruction; here is a Health Service; here is Education; here is Employment and full employment. Here is England. Here is a life that Christianity can redeem and make glorious. Here is matter for sacrifice and sanctification, for the Church of God to sing over and bless and offer on her altars. May His Name be praised!

BERNARD GOODE, C.F.

JESUS THE MESSIAH. By William Manson. D.D. (Hodder and Stoughton; 8s. 6d.)

Assuming that only the Synoptic Gospels provide valid evidence for the life and Teaching of Jesus, the author of this work examines