

RURAL BOOKS

THE FOOD OF THE PEOPLE. By Sir Noel Curtis-Bennett. (Faber; 16s.)

THE SCIENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS. (Rural Life at Home and Overseas; 2s.)

COUNTRY COTTAGES. By Marshall Sisson. (Methuen; 6s.)

WOODLAND CRAFTS IN BRITAIN. By H. L. Edlin. (Batsford; 15s.)

LANDMARKS. By A. G. Street. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 12s. 6d.)

WESSEX WINS. By A. G. Street. (Faber and Faber; 8s. 6d.)

WE have lately been informed, on unimpeachable authority, that two-thirds of the world's population are chronically under-nourished; and experts have done well to point out the need for a more sensible productive attitude and method if the earth's natural resources are not to be squandered beyond possibility of recovery. Food is therefore a subject about which there is a need for both historical and scientific information. Sir Noel Curtis-Bennett sub-titles his book a history of industrial feeding and gives us, as Lord Woolton says in his preface, 'a comprehensive picture of feeding the worker from the eleventh to the twentieth century'.

He deals with manorial and monastic catering and with domestic arrangements in the Middle Ages; he emphasises the fact that the peasants then did not live entirely on black bread and bean flour, for in Chaucer there is evidence that a poor widow in her cottage owned three large sows, three cows, a sheep and seven hens. This was not uncommon as the land was the source of prosperity for country people. In addition to this wide variety of potential food, peasants were able to choose between three kinds of bread—the white, brown and black. The best variety was the white, made from wholemeal stone-ground flour and not devitalised like the modern product.

The author's thorough survey covers such matters as Elizabethan poor laws, development of the coal industry, food in workhouses and prisons. One of the most valuable chapters is that dealing with the work of Robert Owen, a social reformer who is rightly described as the father of modern industrial catering. This man evolved principles to bring about an improvement in the character and status of working people.

Having dealt with catering as a science and with the experience gained during the war years, Sir Noel sums up by saying that industrial welfare has become a science linked with human biology. The power science has given our generation must not be abused and industrialists must face the problems so starkly evident. Will industry take this sensible road and study worker and community?

'Or is it going to put social considerations behind and pursue the ultimate goal of gain, irrespective of human welfare?'

My second book, or pamphlet, is full of creative ideas. It is the report of a conference on rural life at home and overseas organised by the Church Missionary Society, which took place at High Leigh in Hertfordshire. Its general purpose was to enquire what place the peasant or family farmer has in our changing world; what his values are; whether he can maintain his integrity in an industrialised community and by what loyalties he should strive to live.

Answers to these questions were sought by four commissions on Health and Housing, Co-operatives, Literacy and Education, and Secondary Industries in Rural Life; and by means of meetings at which those who were experts in particular subjects addressed themselves to chosen issues. Food had its place in the conference and Dr James Welch of the Overseas Food Corporation attempted to show what the vision was behind the groundnuts scheme in Africa. The vision was a great one and experience proves what the Christian knows to be true, namely, that a highly scientific and mechanised enterprise depends always for its success on the human person.

Other papers by L. J. Maxton and Kurt Hahn deal with the 'Scale of the Agricultural Unit' and 'The Loyalties by which we Live'. Also there is a report of a far-sighted proposal to establish an Institution of Rural Life at Home and Overseas which was first thought of by Horace Plunkett, the pioneer of agricultural progress in Ireland. This is a matter which will elicit the enthusiastic support of all who want to see Christian principles applied more carefully and intelligently to life on the land.

Country Cottages, by Mr Marshall Sisson, analyses the nature and development of the cottage in the various regions of England, where not only materials but the habits and local traditions of the people determined the character of their habitations. His chapters on the development of form and on constructional methods and materials are not detailed as the scope of the book does not permit this, but they are lucid; and his remarks on the cottage as a home for the rural worker now are worthy of special attention.

The townsman who visits the country during the summer months for a fortnight, staying at a local inn or comfortable boarding house, will admire the rugged stone cottages of Lancashire and Yorkshire, the half-timbered dwellings of Essex, or the thatched cob cottages of Devon, but he does not see or know what the people who live in them see and know. Through the hard winter months these folk often forget their charm, because they are so often and so forcibly reminded of their inconvenience.

Yet because of the obvious defects of low-ceilinged and damp houses it is simple for an over-zealous planning officer to condemn them out-of-hand. This is usually a serious error, as Mr Sisson points out, for the cottages can often be repaired without changing their appearance. They can be made comfortable and dry and remain beautiful. When new houses are necessary they need not be odious and garish structures of brick—our builders can learn much from the simplicity and discipline of their forefathers who, if they knew nothing of damp-courses, yet managed to give their homes a homely look.

Mr Edlin shows us in his book how the craftsman in wood has always been dependent upon the preparatory felling and hauling operations of the woodman, which are crafts in themselves. Not all English crafts are dying, and the author mentions the old crafts of chestnut-cleaving as an item of importance in the rural economy of Kent; while those of willow-weaving and basket-making flourish in other parts of the country. Because of the outstanding importance of this volume as a compendium of woodland crafts, one feels its one defect the more. This defect is its failure to link up crafts with craftsmen; certainly that is not possible in many instances, but it is so with those crafts that need encouragement; and the views of present-day craftsmen on their work would help towards an appreciation and understanding of its value. Mr Edlin has not written a popular general book; he has produced a text-book, thus missing, I think, a valuable chance to interest the ordinary reader in a fascinating subject.

Two books by Mr A. G. Street introduce us to a writer who has long been recognised as a persuasive and knowledgeable commentator on country affairs. He has entertained countless readers with his ease and urbanity; he can write with facility on almost any topic. He is at his best when dealing in a rambling way with things he has seen or heard in the village or on the farm. In his new book of essays, *Landmarks*, he treats of such varied matters as follies, farming talk, dogs, fox-hunting, ricks, farm sales, and country blessings.

For all his positive virtues as an articulate farmer, Mr Street is inclined to idealise the country at the expense of the town in a way that has become irritating by repetition. In his essay, 'Country Blessings', for example, he says that on a London underground he was peremptorily ordered by loud-speaker to hurry up: 'Me, mark you, a human being who had paid for his ticket with his own money . . .' There is a suggestion here that the townsman is less of a human being than the countryman.

The townsman cannot live and work as the countryman does, but

he need not be less of an individual. Mr Street goes on to assert that no countryman would dream of telling another countryman to hurry up. It is a pity to shatter such an illusion; but I am a countryman and have heard many farmers tell their employees, in emphatic and unbecoming Anglo-Saxon idiom, to get a particular sort of move on. There is no virtue, *ipso facto*, in the good fortune of country birth, or country residence.

In the reprint of his book, *Wessex Wins*, a series of autobiographical chapters, Mr Street is at pains to make it known that he has a poor opinion of literature as a profession; and that ploughing is a much more important matter than broadcasting. Yet in face of such reasoning he continues to write and broadcast as he elected to do of his own volition in the first place. Love of the countryside, respect for the farmer's labour and the solidity of his background, are no doubt admirable things, but they are not the only good things. Men labour also in the towns; and it is time to remind people like A. G. Street that the food for the mind produced by the conscientious author is as necessary as the farmer's products. It is a matter of values, and what is permissible in the full-time farmer may read like arrogance when it comes from the pen of a part-time writer.

E. W. MARTIN.

REVIEWS

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF UNDERSTANDING. By G. E. Ekbery. (Aquinas Paper No. 10, Blackfriars Publications; 1s. 6d.)

Every one of the Aquinas Papers so far published has gone out of print in a very short time, and the latest paper is not likely to prove an exception. Fr Ekbery's closely-argued essay concerns itself with the two fundamental principles, the principle of contradiction, and the principle 'which is frequently called the principle of sufficient reason'. The implications of these principles and their justification allow Fr Ekbery to sketch his theory of knowledge in an attractive and lucid manner, and to make many pertinent observations in doing so. He says, for instance, 'the correct answer to have given to supporters of Kant's theory would have been to point out that the division of judgments into analytic and synthetic assumes a false theory of thought because of its implication that the function of judgment must be either to clarify ideas or to construct objects of thought. For those who, like the scholastics, adopt a realistic theory of knowledge, the function of judgment must be above all to assert the conformity of apprehensions with the objects to which they refer. These objects are real things, not mere products of the mind'.

For the reader there remains only one regret—that he was not