

REVIEWS

OUR PLUNDERED PLANET. By Fairfield Osborn. (Faber & Faber; 10s.6d.)

Mr Fairfield Osborn renews in this book the discussion on that 'other world-wide war' which is 'man's conflict with nature' and its consequences. The imperative practical issue revolves round two major factors: one is the 'population problem'—the enormous increase in population the world over—a permitted topic of academic discussion; the other is the decrease of the cultivable surface of the earth, the ultimate source of sustenance for those increasing millions, which only the reality of starvation, it seems, will compel us to take seriously. Over half the book is taken up with a survey of 'what man has done in recent centuries to the face of the earth and the accumulated velocity with which he is destroying his own life sources'. There are no more acres of virgin land left to be exploited. And the total acreage in use now is being rapidly diminished through various forms of erosion and agricultural malpractices. Hopes founded on the supposed resources of Africa, Australia and America are based on sheer illusion.

Impercipience in this connection is merely a reflection of man's fundamental disregard for the order of the universe, for the laws of nature which govern the manifold spheres of being, themselves organically inter-related and interdependent. 'This interdependence of elements is, in truth, the basic law of nature.' Mr Osborn defines 'nature' as the 'sum total of conditions and principles which influence—indeed govern—the existence of all living things, man included', a definition which one may accept within the limited perspective of his argument. 'Science' understood as the field of the empirical sciences—as distinct from any bogus 'scientific theories' whether materialist or Wellsian—would seem to be validating in its own order the conclusions arrived at by the metaphysical 'argument from design' and emphasising the value and truth of the distinction between the two orders of natural knowledge—that between an order already made or given which is an object of knowledge and an order to be made, which is at once an object of knowledge and a principle of action—and justifies thereby the hierarchy of values upon which it is based.

How are people to be made aware of these truths, these facts and the consequences which flow from them? Mr Osborn faces the difficulty and calls, in America, for 'a nation-wide effort', 'a complete co-operation on the part of both government and industry, backed by the public's insistence that the job shall be done and asks that 'processes should be established throughout our educational system so that coming generations will grow up aware of the situation that lies at the root of the wellbeing of the nation'. He is aware that perhaps the chief obstacle to enlightenment comes from 'the flattery of science'. 'Probably, however, the most potent

soporific affecting popular opinion comes from the belief we all innately share these days to the effect that the marvels of modern technology can solve any of the riddles of life.' Elsewhere he makes the pertinent remark, 'Ingenious as man is he cannot create life'.

The 'mystery of life' is a romantic illusion. Man in his own estimation has become the demiurge of the cosmos. He has lost all sense of dependence: his universe is a closed universe dependent on himself. The final principle on which all other assumptions rest is that of formal idolatry. That illusion can only be shattered by death—either in the spiritual or the physical order. It needed the catastrophic warning of 'that dramatic day when the dust clouds from the Far West hid the sun from the Capitol in Washington and darkened the Eastern cities' to initiate action within the sphere of soil erosion. Without such a warning books and educational reforms remain very ineffective—for they may perhaps gain a notional assent from the mind but do not engage the will. The only other source of permanent hope is the recognition of and submission to the truth that the cosmos, 'nature' and all things are indeed subject in the order of reality, of being, to the law of relativity—they are relative in relation to an Absolute by whom they are, move and have their being. The recognition of the fact that the Absolute *is* and that 'nature', the cosmos, man, *have* being, is the basis of religion, which St Thomas defines as a relation of order to God considered as the first principle of the creation and of the government of the world, and of prayer which is the cry of the creature to its creator expressed through worship. It may well be true, however, that only the crushing consequences of our refusal to respect the inter-relationship of all secondary causes and our dependence on them, will lead men to acknowledge the First Cause, on whom the latter depend. Mr Osborn has however presented us with a valuable insight into the inter-relatedness of those secondary causes as revealed by the findings of the sciences of biology, ecology and agronomy.

P. W. SINGLETON.

THE ANSWER TO COMMUNISM. By Douglas Hyde. (Paternoster Publications; 1s.6d.)

As a brief survey of the part played by Communism in this country, of the methods employed by the Communist Party, and of the theories underlying its activities, Mr Hyde's book is to be recommended. He recognises Communism as constituting a threat to all spiritual values as an undermining of family life with the ultimate object of setting up the all-powerful State in the place of God. Although Communism appears to be in the vanguard of every effort to crush the Capitalist system for the general benefit of the working classes, Mr Hyde is now convinced that the ideals of social justice are very far from being the driving force. Rather is it the case that social injustices are exposed, not in order that they may be the more quickly remedied, but in order that they may