Book Reviews

Man's Environment—Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

Face of North America: The Natural History of a Continent. Peter Farb. Harper and Row, New York, 1963. xv + 316 pp. Illus. $6.50.

The Ecology of North America. Victor E. Shelford. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1963. xxii + 610 pp. Illus. $10.

The Last Horizon. Raymond F. Dasmann. Macmillan, New York, 1963. vi + 279 pp. Illus. $6.95.

The Last Redwoods. Philip Hyde and Francois Leydet. Sierra Club, San Francisco, Calif., 1963. 127 pp. Illus. $17.50.

These volumes, in the order listed, present a symphonic sequence. Each deserves, as some already have had, its critical reviews. But at this point theme and significance seem more important than dissection. If we make the very modest assumption that the average college student's expenses are $1500 a year, this would make $300 for each of the five courses he is likely to take. The total cost of the books listed above is $40.95. On the basis of considerable experience, I would hazard the guess that a student who invests in and reads these books would emerge with a better and more lasting appreciation of his environment than he would be likely to get in a conventional run through the academic mill.

Farb tells us that in the *Face of North America* he writes about the "remarkable diversity of landscapes on the North American continent and the forces that produced them." And that "understanding lies in knowledge of the many forces—climate, vegetation, soil, geologic change—that have molded the scene." Text, photographs, and simple drawings are not designed to thrill, but to inform the reader in his study or on his travels. Combining, as he does, the sciences of earth and life, Farb renders a service all too rare.

Shelford's volume, *The Ecology of North America*, is the impressive climax to a half century of professional labor. The idea, as he explains, began in 1913 with his book *Animal Communities in Temperate America*, continuing in the *Naturalists Guide to the Americas* (1926) which he edited, and was carried on by extensive travel and field work meanwhile. His objective has been to reconstruct, so far as existing remnants permit, the character of biological communities as they must have been before European invasion. I have heard biologists criticized for "publishing their notebooks," but this is one instance in which the author deserves our profound gratitude, for without Shelford's book much would have been lost, to say nothing of the exhaustive references to other sources.

Since this is essentially a technical piece of writing, it may seem strange to suggest that it has value for the lay student. But the voluminous use of scientific names is cushioned by an effective scheme of translation into more familiar terms in body and index. Particularly valuable is the clear and simple exposition of ecology in the opening chapter.

Naturally, there are gaps, for North America is vast. I would have been pleased at some reference to the redwoods of the Pacific Coast and to the cardon, *Pachycereus Pringlei*, so strikingly dominant in large parts of Baja California, but these are details that should not be allowed to mar our judgment of a *tour de force*.

In *The Last Horizon* Dasmann does not confine his treatment of primeval remnants to our continent, but ranges worldwide. Authors do not write the "blurbs" on book jackets, which in this instance says "With love and sadness RFD tells the story of the wild country around the world that still remains."

Lest this raise the hackles of those alarmed by sentiment, I would substitute "with understanding and deep concern" as my honest appraisal. A biologist specializing in wildlife management, Dasmann is more interested in process than in minute description. He gives enough of the latter to serve as an anchor for his account of the impact of man in key areas of each of the continents.

Since there is, in this neotechnical age, a considerable distrust of those who see in the dynamics of natural communities an essential guide to human land use, we have here a valuable and convincing addition to the long list of conservation literature that has appeared since the 1930's. One hopes that it may help create a vision of the future which is richer than that planned according to present engineering canons.

Finally we come to the collector's item of the lot, *The Last Redwoods*—a magnificently illustrated and beautifully written plea to halt further destruction of the largest and second oldest forms of life now on earth. The superb photographs, one of which is used as the cover on this issue of *Science*, are by Philip Hyde and several other masters of the craft, including his mentor, the famous Ancel Adams. Leydet, a professional writer who combines skill with knowledge and concern, has done the text.

Following an account of the redwoods, we are given a record of their ruthless destruction. This is reenforced by a striking quotation of regret from a man who earlier profited by their exploitation. Of the original stands about 20 percent remain, the bulk of them being under private control and thus subject to further elimination. Despite pledges of careful operation, the aftermath, vividly documented in picture and text, is one of depressing ruin with attendant erosion and ugliness, to say nothing of residual promise.

One can only hope that this most recent effort of the Sierra Club will call forth ample reenforcement from the American public to enable this organization and the Save-The-Redwoods League to halt further aggression. It is possible that future generations would award us more honor for this than for many of the far costlier and more grandiose projects now in the works.

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