Book Reviews

Policy-Making for Conservation: A Pragmatist's View

The Politics of Conservation. FRANK E. SMITH. Pantheon Books (Random House), New York, 1966. 350 pp. $5.95.

Until recently, books and articles dealing with the conservation of natural resources have had a strong moral flavor. In order to publicize a complex and technical problem, they have usually indulged in oversimplification and implied that their proposed solution—a new national park, a new set of regulations—embodies the highest degree of public virtue whereas all other proposals or criticisms, directly made or disguised behind such labels as "states' rights," "economy," or "more jobs," come from the enemies of the people. In the last decade, however, a growing number of scholars with an interest in the processes rather than the ideologies of democracy have examined the ways in which the nation has decided how to waste or use its natural heritage. Because they are still engaged in scrutinizing particular topics within limited time periods, they have not yet reached the point where they can bring together the full history of resource conservation.

Frank Smith offers a welcome and useful alternative to the publicist's polemic and the scholar's detailed study. He is not a scholar in the academic sense, but he bases his narrative on the works of those who have examined government archives and personal manuscript collections. He is far better equipped than any scholar to inform us that conservation has been something more than a St. George-and-the-Dragon epic. He is a pragmatic conservationist, whose 12 years as congressman from Mississippi and 4 years as a director of the Tennessee Valley Authority have taught him that the making of resource policy does not consist of applying the pat answers of purists in some automatically perfect program. Along with many others he learned that "to achieve anything, we would have to master the multiple art that is pork barrel politics—the ever shifting coalitions, the compromises, the trades, the inter-agency lobbies, the special interests alliances—the lesser evil from which has come the greater good."

Although Smith's book ranges through the full variety of resource topics from forestry and reclamation to air pollution and strip mining, it is not so much a full political history of conservation as it is a series of chapters in that history. The subjects he covers most thoroughly are those involving what he calls "the water barrel": the Erie Canal, the reclamation of arid lands, the construction of water power projects, and —most significantly—the TVA. The last of these affords an amazing and frightening illustration of the dangers of public apathy and ignorance on the one hand and the opportunism of several segments of the economy on the other. Although scholars will find some of his judgments open to question (the influence of conservation issues on national elections, and the achievements of Harold Ickes as Secretary of the Interior, for example), Smith's candor is admirable through the entire narrative. He does not set up the traditional stereotypes of "looters of the public domain." Instead, he correctly identifies other "villains" in the drama: bureaus seeking to defend their own jurisdictions, states hesitating over constitutional scruples, and leaders rendered timid or impotent by financial or economic theories.

This history of conservation is a story of missed opportunities. Whenever surveys were made by military or technical advisers, legislatures, both state and federal, tended to disregard them. At the turn of the century, when the wasteful loss of resources was painfully obvious, the sensible arguments of a John Powell or a Gifford Pinchot would be listened to, but enacted into policy only reluctantly and partially. Both Roosevelts were able to blend popularity and executive skills by which they enlarged the scope of federal resource planning. As Smith points out, Eisenhower's administration was unable to modify the nature or extent of federal resource programs. No president, however, has yet provided sufficient effective leadership for the fulfillment of the broadest possible policy. There are many new opportunities facing America, Smith reminds us, for example in controlling air and water pollution and in expanding outdoor recreation. These new fights, like those of the past, must still be made "with the tools at hand." Those "tools" are an aroused citizenry who, with their leaders, are adept at "the politics of conservation."

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Ideas about Inheritance

Origins of Mendelism. ROBERT C. OLBY. Schocken, New York, 1966. 204 pp., illus. $6.95.

Robert C. Olby, librarian of the Botany School at Oxford, has written a stimulating interpretation of the attempts of biologists to fathom the principles behind the overt results of organic inheritance. He analyzes some of the prominent explanations of heredity from the time of Comte de Buffon (1707–1788) to William Bateson (1861–1926) and modestly claims that he has retraced and then added to the material covered in H. F. Roberts' classic *Plant Hybridization before Mendel* (Princeton, 1929; reprinted by Hafner).

In outward form Olby's dependence on Roberts is obvious; in the first two chapters he concentrates on the hybridizing experiments of Koelreuter and Gaertner; in the next two chapters he scrutinizes the solutions offered by Darwin and Galton; he devotes the fifth chapter to the work of Mendel and the final chapter to the rediscovery of Mendel's paper in 1900. This is basically the form of Roberts' book, but many of the interpretations go far beyond Roberts' account.

Perhaps the most novel and provoking section of Olby's book is the treatment of Darwin. Roberts emphasized Darwin's observations and discussions of plant and animal hybridi-