

REVIEWS

THE ESTATE OF MAN. By Michael Roberts. (Faber; 15s.)

Michael Roberts died before he was able to finish *The Estate of Man*, which remains nevertheless a profound, if disturbing, summary of his sociological ideas. 'The main questions I have tried to examine are these: what are our total available sources in terms of material, population and skill; to what extent are these sources likely to increase or decrease in the near future; what limits are there to the natural productivity of the soil; and what limits are there to the adaptability of man?' (Introduction). It is an immense theme, and one which is argued with a formidable reference to inescapable fact. Good husbandry, at every level of man's social need, is the dominant note of the book: a clear warning that man's abuse of his resources must sooner or later bring its own retribution.

The primary factor in man's physical estate is food. Up to now the world's food supply has matched an increasing population, but 'each of us is losing an acre every few years'. There is a sharp limit to the possibility of further developing land for agriculture: the population grows by twenty million every year, but the area of earth remains the same. And the fantastic record of soil erosion is one factor among many which reveal an irresponsibility in the use of the resources without which man must perish. In the United States alone the soil has declined 40 to 50 per cent in fertility during the past thirty years, and vast territories have altogether lost their soil through storm and flood. And the wanton misuse of artificial fertilisers and other means of hastening the process of organic growth has in its turn produced its own nemesis.

With forests, coal, water-power and oil, the story is substantially the same: dwindling (or over-exploited) resources to meet a growing need. And the effect is graphically brought home by Michael Roberts in such an account as that of the devastation of the forests in North America. 'Twenty years ago Fullerton, Louisiana, was a thriving town of 5,000 people. By 1939, all that was left of the town with its schools and hospital and swimming pool was one old Negro living in the vault of the abandoned bank. Every single issue of a New York Sunday paper costs twenty acres of timber: no one has yet discovered a process for turning newsprint into trees.'

But the good husbandry which must be the policy to regulate man's social needs applies no less to his intellectual and moral capacities and their use. Here *The Estate of Man* takes an even more controversial turn, and one may question so clinical an assessment of human freedom and its limits. There are happily many historical precedents for the

uncovenanted ways of providence to make one pause before this grim analysis of political neurosis, this all but determinist alphabet of disaster. But it is surely true that 'Men have been at war with nature and therefore at war with one another'. No amount of political action or economic planning can escape the cardinal fact of man's place in the essential rhythm of nature, and his miseries must sooner or later be traced back to his abuse of his proper relation to the whole pattern of created things.

The Estate of Man is not a comfortable book, and some of its argument may sound too much like the detached observations of the airman while the city and its people burn below. But it provides much of the material which the Christian sociologist should be considering, and nothing short of its fundamental seriousness is enough for an account of man's destiny—or his disaster.

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TRADITION AND THE SPIRIT. By Daniel Jenkins. (Faber and Faber; 12s. 6d.)

One of the problems which arose at the Malines Conversations was the meaning of tradition in Christian teaching, and there is no doubt that Protestants find the subject perplexing or even shocking. Their difficulty must appear strange to Catholics, to whom it seems illogical to accept any one of the orthodox creeds without recognising that such formulations are based on the power of the Church to discern and explicate the content of Revelation, and to relate (or to refuse to relate) propositions and facts within the fundamental unity of faith.

The difficulty felt by Protestants that traditions and authority involve extrinsic coercion seems paradoxical when it is remembered that the authority that lies behind the traditions is that of Christ himself; the Church, under divine guidance, merely presents and interprets what is given. What is given is not an external imposition productive of mere mechanical consent, for consent is given in the context of faith. He who has the gift of faith responds to the teaching of the Church, because through the power of grace he has the ability to conform himself to the light which flows from the Word through the Church. This confirmation is not forced, but spontaneous, since the power of the grace of God in the soul of the faithful Christian attunes him to the voice of the Church. The point is that both faith in its subjective aspect and the magisterium of the Church are elements in the situation constituted by the way in which God has chosen to speak to men.

Mr Jenkins, who is a well-known Protestant theologian, has, in his latest work, attempted to formulate a Protestant account of tradition. His book is interesting, and he does face up to the difficulties which arise for a traditional Protestant owing to the insistence of modern