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Book Reviews

The Care of the Earth; A History of Husbandry

By Russell Lord. Thomas Nelson & Sons, New York.
480 pages. 1962. \$7.50.

MOST PEOPLE who review Russell Lord's latest book will no doubt do so in terms describing "grace of style" and "depth of feeling." I have known Russell for nearly 40 years and have long been aware of these two fine qualities in his writing. He is an artist but he is also an agricultural philosopher and historian. Until he founded "Friends of the Land" and its organ *The Land*, I had not been fully aware of the depth of his agricultural philosophy.

Lord's *History of Husbandry* is written for the general public but is badly needed by both the scientific and economic technicians. They tend to suffer (and benefit) from overexactitude and thus lose the broad sweep of the millennia. Lord in spite of a few minor and forgivable inexactitudes, furnishes perspective. In the white heat of his insights Russell has always been prone to let the "greater" override the "lesser," sometimes not doing the "lesser" accounts justice. When I was Secretary of Agriculture and not as tolerant of minor mistakes as I am now, Russ once said to a mutual friend, "The Secretary is sure hell on commas." As time has gone on, I have come to realize that Russell Lord's minor faults are infinitely outweighed by his firm grasp on a magnificent overall picture of the land as it has made man over the past million years and man as he has destroyed land over the past 10,000 years. His skill is almost like that of the unknown scribes who reduced the age-long traditions of the Hebrews to writing in the book of Genesis.

In Russell Lord's cosmology, present-day man appears as a tiny dot bobbing about on the vast ocean of previously elapsed time. However, Lord tries to find a key to it all which will give present-day man wisdom to do justice to the soil and to his suddenly expanded world. Lord like so many of us is torn between man's tininess and his enormous potentiality. Like most of us he is fully aware of the vast but uneven impact of science

in the West and in Russia on the underdeveloped peoples. The author sees the age of soil and resource exploitation coming to an end, not soon but eventually. He sees a vast expansion in man's capacity to realize the unity of life. This is a man of faith speaking, not a man of science.

One concrete basis for Lord's faith is what he has observed about Puerto Rico from the time he first went there with Rex Tugwell in 1941 until today. Giving Tugwell, Roosevelt, and Muñoz-Marín full credit, he realizes that great as has been the advance of the past 20 years, the industry created by favorable tax laws has not been enough. Nor has it been enough that there are a few favorable places to which Puerto Ricans can migrate in the USA. True, in terms of dollars the income per capita in Puerto Rico is now five times what it was 20 years ago and today nearly all the people can read and write whereas 20 years ago only one-half could do so. Lord is a sufficient realist to be aware of the backward places both in Puerto Rico and Harlem. We have moved upward in Puerto Rico and that is enough for Lord. He does not expect any ultimate answers, only movement in the right direction as he quotes Liberty Hyde Bailey, "The upward signs of life and growth are greater than the signs of death."

Lord above all is enormously impressed with the growth of ideas through the ages. He sees ancient man whether in Mesopotamia, Peru, Java, India, or China relating himself to the soil. In some cases he sees a balance struck between man and his environment which lasts for many hundreds of years. In other cases the lack of balance, the failure to replenish the soil, caused continued migration or the downfall of mighty civilizations. History again and again relates the downfall of the exploiters and conquerors who did not understand "land."

Nowhere have I seen in one book such a rich and thought-provoking assemblage of quotations from the sages of the past 2,500 years. Out of it all Russell Lord evokes a deep feeling for the unity of life as it is properly related to the ever-renewing earth.

When Lord comes to the agriculture of the USA during the past century his tempo changes completely. Here the essence of his contention is found on page 265:

"The present American experiment in developing flexible forms of economic and social democracy, striking midway courses between individual and public enterprise, seeking reconciliations between local, state, regional, and Federal mandate and decision, is certainly a far more daring and radical departure from pre-ancient modes of government than communism is, or probably ever will be." He goes on to define communism as a "concept of absolute government older than the pyramids, older than the stone gods of the Incas."

Lord thinks our system radical and the Russian system reactionary in an extreme degree. He then proceeds to put agriculture, the soil, and all the civilization built thereon, on a political basis, claiming that it was never more so than right here and now in the USA. I find it hard to go along with Lord on this unless he defines politics in far broader terms than "Conservative" or "Radical"—"Republican" or "Democrat."

He quotes Einstein as saying, "From now on, Mr. Wilson, it is a race between education and catastrophe." Then he goes on to say, "The time may come, even within the lifetime of those now young, when the excessively nationalistic passions and programs born of war in this and other lands will be reshaped into more definite and durable instruments of progress."

In conclusion, I may say I am glad that Russell, on pages 421 and 422, honors me by quoting from a 1959 talk I gave in Washington, D.C. Curiously enough in that talk I referred to the DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid is the chemical that passes on hereditary information from one generation to the next. DNA has recently been given Nobel Prize publicity. In my talk, which Russell quotes, I referred to DNA in the following way: "No matter how much we may learn about DNA and the control of heredity, I say the mystery of life will grow greater, not less, as our knowledge expands. . . . May we find the wisdom and knowledge to reconcile our past with our ever more rapidly changing future."

Russell Lord strives in his book to find the answer to my prayer.

Henry A. Wallace