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Books

LOST IN THE FOREST

DANCE OF THE TREES, by Richard St. Barbe Baker; Oldbourne Press, English price 15/-.

(Reviewed by D. W. McKenzie)

THIS is a very painful book to have to review. The author has spent his life in a crusade for trees, both to prevent their destruction and to encourage their planting, and has founded a society with the inspiring title of "The Men of the Trees." With his aims in general the reviewer could hardly be more in agreement, for lack of appreciation of the role of forests in land use can and does lead to very serious problems of land deterioration, with resulting fall in living standards; and a determined effort by peoples to control the uses of their forests on a managed basis is essential to maintenance of national economic health.

Mr Baker realises this strongly; but he makes a case by ignoring evidence, by misinterpreting it, by even manufacturing it, in a way which makes this book a menace to anyone wanting to understand the relationship of forests to man. The most profound error, which appears over and over again, is the belief that the presence of trees can alter continental climates on a grand scale. The actual existence of a Saharan desert is seen as the result of deforestation. On the margin of this desert, he says, while you smoke a cigarette the sand will have advanced several feet beyond you. Egypt was a desert when written evidence began there, and a small calculation will show that at this rate of movement the southern margin of the Sahara should have advanced 150,000 miles since then!

The author also produces as "evidence" fossil trees from the Sahara "thousands of years old," though they have, of course, no bearing on recent changes, as their age is measurable in many millions of years. Again, a photo-

graph of the central Sahara shows a landscape of characteristic arid erosion type, which has been described by geologists as existing in the area for many millenia at least. It is simply described as "An example of erosion in the Hogar Mountains, central Sahara." As the only erosion the author discusses is excess erosion due to deforestation the misleading inference is obvious.

What can we say of a forester whose air turns into dew, the leaves of whose trees absorb not carbon dioxide but nitrogen, who can say that the Grand Canyon of the Colorado is the result of what can happen when the earth loses its trees, who thinks root hairs are hermetically sealed against water, who does not know whether a treeless desert such as the central Sahara is treeless because it is dry, or dry because it is treeless? We can only sigh with despair at a great cause with so poor an advocate.

Mr Baker is unintentionally amusing about New Zealand. Did you know we had a wood like deal called "miro matai totara"? Well, you know now. And did you realise that when prison labour was used here for tree planting "It was heartening proof that work in the open among trees has a beneficial effect on the spirit, for the incidence of crime dropped rapidly?"

It is easy to laugh about this book, but to anyone who has the welfare of the forest at heart I'm afraid there is only one word to describe it—it is infuriating.

THE ROCK

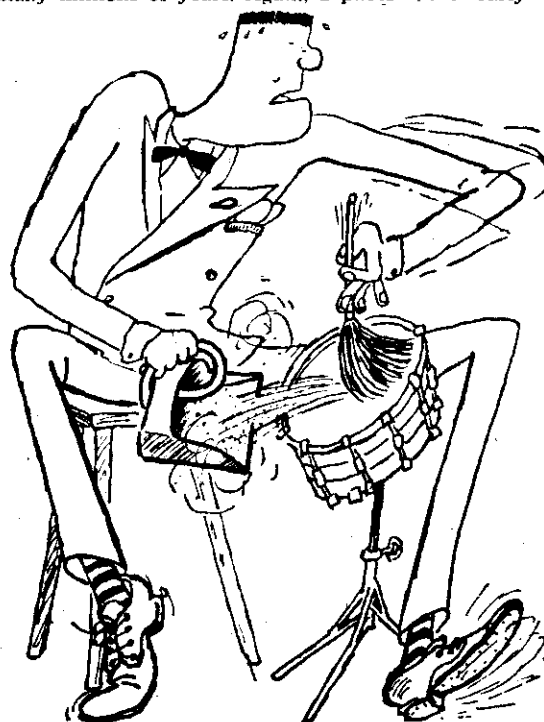
SAINT PETER, by John Lowe; Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, English price 10/6.

THE most controversial figure in the New Testament, and in some ways the most lovable because of his big, blustering, impetuous loyalty, Saint Peter has been the subject of innumerable studies. Was he the leader of the early Church, and if so why is

James named as the head of the Church in Jerusalem? Was he the first Pope, and if so why is there no mention of him in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans or in the parts of the Book of Acts where St. Paul's visit to Rome is described? What did Jesus mean when he called St. Peter "the rock"?

With scholarly patience and impartiality, Dean Lowe, of Christ Church, examines these and other relevant questions about the apostle. His exposition claims that St. Peter was certainly the leader of the Church at the start, but that his activities as leader of the mission to the Jews led to the "primacy" in Jerusalem falling on James, the brother of Jesus.

Saint Peter's connection with Rome is closely examined, and if it is in places inconclusive, that is surely understandable because of the meagre evidence



J for JAZZ: One of the illustrations from "The Hoffnung Companion to Music," by Gerard Hoffnung; Dobson-Putnam, English price 4/6