

## 1938 THE ORGANIC ARMY

In 1938, Pfeiffer published his book, “*Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*”<sup>1</sup>. It was Lord Northbourne who coined the term “organic” in his book, “*Look To The Land*” published a year later in 1939.

A key contribution of Northbourne was to take Rudolf Steiner’s idea of ‘the farm as organism’ and derive from it a named practice, a differentiated agriculture, ‘organic farming’ (Paull, 2006; Steiner, 1924).<sup>2</sup>

Northbourne’s underlying concept of ‘the farm as organism’ can be traced back to Ehrenfried Pfeiffer’s book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (1938), and Pfeiffer had it from Rudolf Steiner’s 1924 *Agriculture Course*. Steiner (1861-1925) declared, in the series of eight lectures held at Koberwitz, that: “Truly, the farm is an organism” (1924, lect.VIII, p.7).<sup>3</sup>

Northbourne was keen to organize an “organic Army” willing to do cultural battle with the forces of chemical science, economic profit and political muscle.

In January 1939, Northbourne visited Pfeiffer in Switzerland to organise the first biodynamics conference in England, and at which Pfeiffer was the lead lecturer (Northbourne, 1939b). The outcome was the *Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming* conducted over nine days, 1-9 July 1939, at Northbourne’s estate. One of Pfeiffer’s lectures at the conference was “The Farm as a Biological Organism” (Northbourne, 1939a; Paull, 2011b).<sup>4</sup>

Northbourne conducted a first and then a second *Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-dynamic Farming* on his estate in England. These conferences “summoned” and Organic Army of influential individuals with international forces drawn by a morality which bubbled along secret cultural and interpersonal pathways.

- Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, “the Bio-dynamic Agricultural Method”, 1938.
- Lord Northbourne, “Look To the Land”, 1939.
- J. I. Rodale. His periodical, *Organic Farming and Gardening* appeared in May 1942.
- Sir Albert Howard, “An Agricultural Testament”, 1943.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time he published his *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, Pfeiffer was the Director of the Bio-chemical Research Laboratory at the Goetheanum, the headquarters of the Anthroposophy movement, in Dornach, Switzerland. Pfeiffer played a key role in testing and evolving Steiner’s ideas into biodynamic agriculture, a system which eschewed synthetic fertilisers and pesticides (Paull, 2011c).

<sup>2</sup> LORD NORTHBOURNE THE MAN WHO INVENTED ORGANIC FARMING, A BIOGRAPHY, John Paull, Journal of Organic systems, School of Land and Food, Tasmania, Australia, June 2014, Pg. 32

<sup>3</sup> IBID

<sup>4</sup> ibid

- Lady Eve Balfour, “The Living Soil”, 1943. Her book led directly to the founding in 1946 of the Soil Association which became the UK’s leading organic advocacy group. (Brander 2003)

Each had the openness to the idea of “biologic or organic thinking” as Pfeiffer sometimes called it.

*“...three fundamental characteristics become evident in every phenomenon of life...*

The third fundamental characteristic can be approximately outlined in the following sentence: *The whole is not merely the sum of all its parts, but a harmonic unity of a higher order, which as organic being, as an organism with laws of a higher order, lifts the world of the physio-chemical inorganic to the world of the organic-living.* Expressed consciously for the first time by Goethe, this truth today affects more and more all our biological thinking. From it, we learn not only that a man, an animal, a plant is an organism, but that the living together of the plant world and earth, of plant with plant in certain groupings, of plant and with animal and man forms itself likewise into an organic unity. Indeed the entire development of the “living space”, let us say of a folk, of a continent is fashioned according to the same fundamental laws of the “will to evolve”, of the proper interactivity of all factors.”<sup>5</sup>

The leading English farming magazine said this about Lord Northbourne’s book, *Look To The Land* when it was first published in 1939:

“This book sounds an alarm. Lord Northbourne knows that for life and for well being man is dependent upon the soil. In this book he warns us that we are making improper use of our heritage... He believes that salvation will come not through government, not through large – scale centralized control, but by individual labors of love...”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> BIO-DYNAMIC FARMING AND GARDENING, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Anthroposophic Press, 1938. Introduction pg. vi.

<sup>6</sup> Leading British agricultural periodical THE FIELD, 1940, p. 104 (PAULL Pg. 33)