



MAKING GOOD

Richard Hopton reviews three books about regeneration

1 HERMIT
by Jade Angeles Fitton
Anyone who has ever had the urge to escape the intrusive clamour of modern life, and to experience the balm of solitude, will warm to this memoir. Trapped in a long-term, persistently abusive relationship – which she describes in unsparing detail in the book – Fitton escapes to a remote barn on the fringes of Exmoor to reset herself. From there she moves to a cottage in Croyde and later spends six months on Lundy Island. The book has much to say about the resilience of the human spirit, the importance of communing with nature and the story of hermits, ancient and modern. For Fitton, 'solitude is as vital as company to a human's well-being'. The book is beautifully written, albeit in some of its more aphoristic passages the prose hovers uncertainly between the mystic and the meaningless. *Hutchinson Heinemann, £18.99*

2 GOD IS AN OCTOPUS
by Ben Goldsmith
In July 2019 Ben Goldsmith's 15-year-old daughter Iris was killed in a freak accident at the family farm in Somerset. *God is an Octopus* is his account of how he came to terms with the unimaginable bleakness and grief of the tragedy by immersing himself in the natural world. Goldsmith found a lifeline in restoring nature in a broken world at a time when his own world was shattered. From the small beginning of 'rewiggling' the river which runs through the farm, he embarked on a full-scale rewilding of the land (read more about his journey on p92). This engaging book, part memoir, part ecological tract, tells the story of this process but ranges widely, touching on natural history, religion, the paranormal, and psychodelia. Ultimately, it's an optimistic book: even in the darkest moment, there will be light again, one day. *Bloomsbury, £20*

3 SHAPING THE WILD: WISDOM FROM A WELSH HILL FARM
by David Elias
In this gem of a book David Elias, a lifelong naturalist and conservationist, explores a hill farm in North Wales to investigate the threats that face the upland environment. Its strength lies in the author's clarity of vision and fairmindedness. In these upland communities, farmers and nature must co-exist. Nature must be given a helping hand but so too must the farmers. Elias acknowledges that no solution to any problem can be straightforward: measures to help one species are likely to affect another, frequently adversely. The book is both a hymn to the wild beauty of these hills and a reminder of the unforgiving grind of the hill farmer's life. Elias's prose is wonderful: describing a hen harrier, he remembers how its 'yellow eyes look back at me with the blank indifference of planetary moons – the gaze of untroubled evolution.' *Calon, £18.99*