VOLUME XXXII, NO. 47
NOVEMBER 21, 1979

LIGHTNING, WIND, AND NIGHT

THERE is a state of feeling—when we take note of it, a state of consciousness—that we know from personal experience. It is the feeling that what we are witnessing or going through is not "real." We hear the rattle of events, see a portion of ourselves respond by reflexes long since part of our equipment, yet we remain apart, wondering, feeling something akin to disgust, as though, for a moment or two, or sometimes longer, there had taken place an intersection of two levels of our being. What else could it be, if we are to find meaning in the immediacies of experience which comes to us directly, as we say, "at first hand"?

Dr. Alan McGlashan tells of a farmhand who described to him such an interlude of feeling, saying: "Suddenly the notion came over me that all this—the animals, the farmers and their dogs, the smells, the noise, the sunshine—was just silly, empty, made no sense. My life, and everyone's life, somehow went blank. There wasn't no point in going on. . . ." One does go on, of course, but the feeling is remembered. Dr. McGlashan thinks that it represents an aspect—a negative component—of the peak experience, although he does not use these words. How shall we regard such nihilistic visions? "By the principle," he says, "of 'honoring the opposites' we may regard them as valid glimpses of one aspect of Reality, not merely as distortions of a sick mind."

This seems a way of saying that there are times when abnormal psychology needs to be regarded as supernormal psychology. Great poets and dramatists know this. You have the feeling that Shakespeare was overtaken by choirs of invisible realities—that he inhabited another world as well as this—and that his art always has an intersecting dimension. In a passage on the madness of King Lear, Harold Goddard says (in *The Meaning of Shakespeare*):

> Primitives, instead of degrading them as we do, worship the insane, holding that madness is in touch with the gods.
>
> Some madness is divinest sense,
>
> says Emily Dickinson. *Some* madness. The fact that there is plenty of insanity of the infernal brand has not blinded poets to the same truth that primitives accept too indiscriminately. As with crime, so with mental abnormality, it is certain species only that are of tragic interest: the madness of Orestes, of Cassandra, of Don Quixote, of Kirillov and Ivan Karamazov. Lear, sane, is exiled from the truth. His egotism is intolerable. He is devoid of sympathy. It is Lear of so-called sound mind who disinherits Cordelia, banishes Kent, and curses Goneril. But as his mind begins to break, truth begins to break in on it. Indeed, Shakespeare chooses Lear's shattered brain as the vehicle of not a few of his own profoundest convictions, mixed, it is true, with wild ravings, as lightning is with wind and night. After the restoration to him of Cordelia, he is never again incoherent, and he never utters a word that does not enforce attention either by its truth or its pathos. But this mind is not in normal condition, and, just before his dying speech, Shakespeare is careful, for our guidance, to have Albany remark,
>
> He knows not what he says.
>
> His last flash of insight is the perception of a supernormal mind.

Lear declares the truths of another world, truths which cannot be voiced except as hints. But a madman can say them out. Goddard continues:

> Or better, it may be, of a *childlike* mind. For Lear, after the return of his sanity, is in his second childhood, not in the ordinary sense of being afflicted with stupidity and dullness, but in the rarer sense of being gifted with a second innocence and ingenuousness, as if he had indeed been born again. (Emerson, in his last days, was "broken" in this beautiful sense.) And so at the end it is more strictly the wisdom of simplicity than the wisdom of insanity with which he is crowned.

Lear, in his last hour, with all the commonplace reasons for distrusting what he says, makes for Shakespeare a framework for intrusion of the timeless upon the timebound circumstance. And Goddard, a kindred spirit, seconds the framework. The King sees life in his daughter's face, exclaiming, "Look on her, look. . . . ! "

> And so on that last line and a half of Lear's role are concentrated, like sunbeams by a burning glass, the inspired visions of old age, of misery, of death, of insanity and simplicity, to put beyond the possibility of challenge the truth of what Lear at this extremest moment *sees.*
>
> Death but our rapt attention
> To immortality.
>
> It might have been the last scene of King *Lear,* with the father intent upon nothing but what he saw on his daughter's lips, that elicited those astounding words of Emily Dickinson's.
>
> Prove true, imagination, O, prove true!
>
> prayed Viola. So prayed Shakespeare, and, by writing King *Lear,* helped answer his own prayer. This is Keats's "truth of Imagination." Like Cordelia's, its voice is ever soft, gentle, low, and the din of the world easily makes it inaudible. But in the end, Shakespeare seems to say, it is the only voice worth listening to.

Emerson, Goddard notes, is of the same persuasion. He says: "Power to appreciate faint, fainter, and infinitely faintest voices and visions is what distinguishes man from man."

By his craft as a dramatist, Shakespeare has given Cordelia a pervasive presence throughout the play, and she "still lives in Lear's imagination after death."

> And she lives in ours. In all these ways, Shakespeare confers upon her existence in the Imagination itself, which, as William Blake saw, is only our human word for eternity. "Love without Imagination is eternal death." From *Julius Caesar* on, Shakespeare's faith in the existence of spiritual entities beyond the range of ordinary consciousness, and hence objective to it, increases in steady crescendo. Of his belief in the reality of infernal spirits, he has long left us in no doubt. In the storm scene of *Othello,* and in the "divine" Desdemona we can sense the coming of the last scene of King *Lear.* But in *King Lear* more unequivocally even than in *Othello*—however embryonically from the merely human point of view—he asserts the reality of a celestial spirit. The debased current use of the word "imagination" must not be permitted to confuse us. The imagination is not a faculty for the creation of illusion; it is the faculty by which alone man apprehends reality. The "illusion" turns out to be the truth. "Let faith oust fact," as Starbuck says in *Moby-Dick.* It is only our absurd "scientific" prejudice that reality must be physical and rational that blinds us to the truth.

Goddard is not proposing the embrace at random of all sorts of supernaturals and a permissive entertainment of extravagant beliefs. The artists and poets whom he quotes were the most disciplined of men, all *thinkers* in their way. There seems a sense in which the dean of twentieth-century scientists, Albert Einstein, whose birth a hundred years ago is now widely celebrated in appreciative papers, might have wholly agreed with Goddard. He, too, was a defender or advocate of free acts of the imagination as the foundation of all true thinking. In the *American Scholar* for the summer of this year, Gerald Holton presents Einstein's explanation of how his discoveries were made, based upon statements scattered throughout his writings. In a letter to a friend, Einstein said that discovery begins with an intuitive leap from the complexes of experience to a synthesizing idea which may become an "axiom," and which is then developed by logical inference into a theory. The theory is tested by its inner perfection and by its capacity to throw light on additional aspects of experience. In his letter, he illustrates this process with a diagram that becomes the basis for Holton's article. Commenting, Holton says:

> As one would expect from him, Einstein did not speak of the technique of elevating a supposition or hunch to an axiom or fundamental principle as if it were some hypothetical advice. He had done so in his scientific papers and, what is more, confessed it quite frankly. For example, on the first pages of his first paper on relativity, he refers to a few well-known experimental facts, some of them in quite perfunctory manner, invoking them chiefly to say, without further

specification, that they "lead to the conjecture (*Vermutung*)" which he calls the Principle of Relativity. Without further apology or explanation, he then declares, "We will raise this conjecture . . . to the status of a postulate." Moreover he adds at once, and indeed without any preparation at all, that he will "also introduce another postulate," namely that concerning the constancy of light velocity.

We know that reaching these conjectures and gathering the courage to raise them to fundamental principles, was not the result of momentary, enthusiastic decisions but the result of years of groping. It was in fact forced on Einstein that the kind of fundamental theory he was trying to build could be attained in no other way. . . .

The spirit in which he proposed his ideas is well conveyed in a passage in his "Autobiographical Notes," immediately after he has begun to give his answer to the question "What, precisely, is 'thinking'?":

"With what right—the reader will ask—does this man operate so carelessly and primitively with ideas in such a problematic realm without making even the least effort to prove anything? My defense: all our thinking is of this nature of a free play with concepts; the justification for this play lies in the measure of survey (*Uebersicht*) over the experience of the senses which we are able to achieve with its aid."

The idea that "facts, justly arranged, interpret themselves," was not accepted by Einstein. Holton says in explanatory interpretation:

We create new concepts, perhaps suggested at first only tentatively, and add them to the old concepts whose usefulness has been tested in previous struggles—knowing that neither the one nor the other is sacred and unchangeable, neither induced nor in any other way securely abstracted from the plane of experiences below. . . . Not only each individual concept, but the whole "system of concepts is a creation of man" achieved in a "free play." The justification for it lies only in the pragmatic success of the scheme being built, when it gives ultimately a measure of survey over the experience of the senses which we are able to achieve with its aid." . . . "There is no logical path to these elementary laws; only intuition, supported by being sympathetically in touch with experience." . . .

One result of adopting Einstein's method of theory construction is that the innovator must give his proposed jump to the axioms a chance to prove itself. Hence, during this early and usually private stage of theorizing, the researcher may well grant himself a moratorium on premature attempts at falsification (i.e., making every attempt to disprove the hypothesized postulate). One can call it the right of "suspension of disbelief." Though the very idea is contrary to the naive picture of the scientist, it is an essential part of the scientific imagination. In Einstein's case it is connected with his ability to tolerate ambiguities, to keep unresolved problems and polarities before his mind's eye.

It should be borne in mind that in Einstein's view no theory could ever be "proven" once and for all. This, as Holton says, "would entail subjecting it to an infinity of tests by observation and not just now but for all future times."

There is no such thing as final verification or confirmation of a theory by experiment or observation. The most one can ever claim is that a theory gains more and more plausibility or usefulness the longer the various predictions derivable from it are found to correspond to the growing area of available sense experience—and the fewer the contradictions.

Discovery, then, in science, depends in part upon exercise of the right of "suspension of disbelief." You challenge some axiom of the past, hold former assumptions under suspicion, and give the new conception full sway for a time, to see whether, ultimately, it may not be verified in terms of a more inclusive scheme. You start with conjecture and end with a wider organization of fact.

But this, of course, is in relation to "the growing area of sense experience." There are other areas, not under the rule of the senses. These are the regions explored by poets and artists. Shakespeare had his best protagonists challenge axioms, and listen to the "faintest voices," giving ambiguity every opportunity to reveal hidden verities. What we *imagine* may be true, while ambiguity veils the level of its verity. So, at the end of *King Lear*, the King sees what is not there at all in sense experience. Looking at the face of Cordelia, whose body lies extinct in his arms, Lear says,

Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there!

Cordelia lives! And Lear, as Goddard says, "clasping his restored child to his heart, falls 'dead' of joy." Albany had judged, "He knows not what he says," but Goddard suggests that the King says better than he knows:

> For all its sound and fury, this story at least is not a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. And here the rest is not silence.
>
> On the contrary, it will be said, Lear's delusion only makes the blackness blacker, another night fallen on midnight. For *we* know that Cordelia *is* dead.
>
> We do? How do we? And if we do, we know more than Shakespeare. For like a shower of golden arrows flying from every angle and every distance to a single target, every line of the play—almost—has been cunningly devised to answer our skepticism, to demonstrate that Lear is right and we are wrong. Why but to make the old King's dying assertion incontrovertible does Shakespeare so permeate his play with the theme of vision?

Goddard is of the same tribe as Shakespeare and no one is better qualified to investigate his meanings. He, like Emerson, Emily Dickinson, and Blake, speaks mantically, playing freely with concepts, speaking now of this world now of the other, revealing some practice in the art of bifocal vision. They feel and seem to see the divided and distinguished worlds that Sir Thomas Browne declared, having in their art the lens that Shakespeare used so well. Galileo had his telescope, and was able to change human opinion about the movements of the heavenly bodies by what it disclosed, but Browne invited his readers to use the "intellectual tubes" which see beyond the world of the senses, giving "a glimpse of incomprehensibles, and thoughts of things which thoughts but tenderly touch."

Browne, though he was born in 1605, may stand for what Huston Smith has termed the "pre-seventeenth century" conception of science, in which the love of truth had not yet been divided by the admirers of machinery into accessible earth and inaccessible spirit. The writers of that time, of whom the greatest was Shakespeare, were champions of the imagination, the creative power of man, by which, as Einstein affirmed, he makes whatever he knows. In his introduction to an edition of Shakespeare's "Works," St. John Ervine says:

> Marlowe and Ben Jonson kept closer to the formal classic manner than Shakespeare did, but all of them had that wayward English quality which made it impossible for them to regard a man as without mastery of himself. Shakespeare broke all the laws. He cared so little for action, in comparison with character, that he made very slight effort to keep his plots in plausible condition. . . . he neither made his people do this nor that because religion or doctrine said they must do it, nor did he make them do this or that because he was anxious to prove a point of his own. He created his people and let them go their way. There are no cages in the Shakespearean plays, nor are there any fetters. Macbeth seems to be a doomed man, but he has the right to choose.

Shakespeare died at fifty-two. His working life was little more than twenty years, during which he wrote thirty-seven plays and some books of poems, while managing his company as well. Ervine continues:

> What industry he had, to be able to write nearly two plays every year, while busily employed in other matters! And what plays! He lived in a great time. Cervantes was his contemporary—they died within ten days of each other. Milton was a lad of seven when Shakespeare died. Six years after our poet was buried in Stratford, Moliere was born in France. Greatness walked often in those days, and genius freely flowered in England, France, and Spain. It is our pride that the very accents of humanity were most truly repeated in the heart of this great countryman of ours who was born in a small community and returned to it to die. We do not know in what agony of mind he spent his final years, but we do know that he recovered his benignity before his death. If he expressed a disgust with mankind in *Timon of Athens*, he did not let it be his last word. In a great and lovely peace, he left us *The Tempest.* It has seemed to me at times that Shakespeare felt that his imagination . . . his delicate Ariel . . . was forsaking him, and that he would never be able to write again. With what dignity he broke the wand of Prospero. . . . He made

> *The Tempest* for a final gift to mankind, and then, peacefully and without complaint, broke his staff and died.

Goddard is a persuasive champion of the power of the imagination. "We put up massive monuments to military heroes," he says, "because otherwise their very names will be erased. We do not need to put up monuments to great poets nor to those heroes they have made immortal." The influence of Shakespeare is perhaps best illustrated in what Goddard says at the end of his essay on *King Lear:*

> I hope that I have myself given no impression of speaking "the truth" about *King Lear* in [any final] sense. All I have wanted to do is to point out the figures I see moving in this fiery furnace of Shakespeare's imagination, in the hope, naturally, that others may see them too. But if others do not see them, for them they are not there. Far be it from me in that case to assert that I am right and they are wrong. If, as the old King bends over his child and sees that she still lives, he is deluded and those who know that she is dead are right, then indeed is *King Lear,* as many believe, the darkest document in the supreme poetry of the world. And perhaps it is. There come moods in which anyone is inclined to take it in that sense. But they are not our best moods. And the chief reason, next to the compulsion of my own imagination, why I believe I have at least done no violence to Shakespeare's text is that I have so often witnessed the effect on youth of this reading of the final scene of his tragic masterpiece.

King Lear, a student said to him, is "a miracle play." It contains everything of truth about this world. But it contains more. The light we have on this world comes from that power of mind through which we see more than meets the eye, and feel what we do not—perhaps cannot—yet know.

REVIEW
STEADY-STATE ECONOMICS

ONCE the idea of the need for change takes hold, the role of criticism becomes indispensable. New ideas, it has been said, must be planted on clean places, and there is no more important principle for those hoping to introduce changes that will *work.* Herman Daly's *Steady-State Economics* (W. H. Freeman, 1977), while based on positive conceptions, is a work of criticism, both formal and common-sense criticism, that exposes and then sweeps out the fallacies of conventional economic thinking. Its intent is to restore the discipline of economics to its original foundation in ethics. Its propositions and arguments are specific remedies for the bad habits in economic thinking engendered by economists who borrowed from mechanistic science and from the formulas of mathematical analysts. The book is an essential text for all those who are trying to cope with misconceptions inherited from the past, and who have a part in reorienting the thinking of present-day managers and planners. It should also be a part of the general education of the citizens of tomorrow. No one can think well with all the debris of old mistakes taking up space in the mind.

What is a Steady-State Economy? Daly makes this reply:

> What is it precisely that is not growing, or held in steady state? Two basic physical magnitudes are held to be constant: the population of human bodies and the population of artifacts (stock of physical wealth). Since artifacts are, in a very real sense, extensions of the human body, the steady-state economy may be thought of as a logical continuation of the demographer's notion of a stationary population to include not only human bodies but also their multifarious physical extensions. What is held constant is capital stock in the broadest physical sense of the term, including capital goods, the total inventory of consumer goods, and the population of human bodies.
>
> Of equal importance is what is not held constant. The culture, genetic inheritance, knowledge, goodness, ethical codes, and so forth embodied in human beings are not held constant. Likewise, the embodied technology, the design, and the product mix of the aggregate total stock of artifacts are not held constant. Nor is the current distribution of artifacts among the population taken as constant. Not only is quality free to evolve, but its development is positively encouraged in certain directions. If we use "growth" to mean quantitative change, and "development" to refer to qualitative change, then we may say that a steady-state economy develops but does not grow, just as the planet earth, of which the human economy is a sub-system, develops but does not grow.

One chapter, "A Catechism of Growth Fallacies," is devastating in effect. It begins with the claim by the 1971 President's Council of Economic Advisors that it is impossible "to have too much of a good thing," and that more economic production and output will be good for everyone. Daly exclaims:

> If rain is a good thing, a torrential downpour is, by definition, better! Has the learned council forgotten about diminishing marginal benefit and increasing marginal costs? . . . At another point in the same document the council admits that "growth of GNP has its costs, and beyond some point they are not worth paying." However, instead of raising the obvious question—What determines the optimal point and how do we know when we have reached it? the council relapses into non sequitur and quickly closes this dangerous line of thinking with the following pontification: "The existing propensities of the population and policies of the government constitute claims upon the GNP itself that can only be satisfied by rapid economic growth." Apparently, these "existing propensities and policies" are beyond discussion. This is growthmania.

Growthmania contemplates impossibilities with delusive calm, proposing that the buying habits of the public and the industrial belief in more production and profits are sufficient reason for embracing error, on the ground, it seems, that widespread *belief* in the error justifies continuing to do the wrong thing. But as Daly says:

> Once we have gone beyond the optimum, and marginal costs exceed marginal benefits, growth will make us worse off. Will we then cease growing? On the contrary, our experience of diminished well-being will be blamed on the traditional heavy hand of product scarcity, and the only way the orthodox

paradigm knows to deal with increased scarcity is to advocate increased growth—this will make us even less well off and will lead to the advocacy of still more growth! Sometimes I suspect that we are already on this "other side of the looking glass," where images are inverted and the faster we run the "behinder" we get.

Environmental degradation is an iatrogenic disease induced by the economic physicians who attempt to treat the basic sickness of unlimited wants by prescribing unlimited production. We do not cure a treatment-induced disease by increasing the treatment dosage! Yet members of the hair-of-the-dog-that-bit-you school, who reason that it is impossible to have too much of a good thing, can hardly cope with such subtleties. If an overdose of medicine is making us sick, we need an emetic, not more of the medicine. Physician heal thyself!

Throughout the book this devotion to impossibilities is analyzed, case by case, with concrete examples and citation from "authorities," showing the extraordinary hold of dogmas which are reinforced in practice by uncontrolled appetites that have been whetted by glamorous marketing devices. It soon becomes evident that the recommendations of the steady-state advocates are the voice of simple sanity:

The steady-state economy respects impossibilities and does not foolishly squander resources in vain efforts to overcome them. Our present institutions allow technology to be autonomous and force man to play the accommodating role. The steady-state economy seeks to change institutions in such a way that people become autonomous and technology is not abandoned, but is demoted to its proper accommodating role. Growth economics gave technology free rein. Steady-state economics channels technical progress in the socially benign directions of small scale, decentralization, increased durability of products, and increased long-run efficiency in the use of scarce resources.

A peculiar weakness of the thinking that leads to advocacy of "growth" without counting the cost is the narrow specialization of present-day research. Daly points out:

Probably the major disservice that experts provide in confronting the problems of mankind is dividing the problems in little pieces and parceling them out to specialists. Food problems belong to agriculture and energy problems to engineering or physics; employment and inflation belong to economics; adaptation belongs to psychologists and genetic engineers, and the "environment" is currently up for grabs by disciplinary imperialists. Although it is undeniable that each specialty has much of importance to say, it is very doubtful that the sum of all these specialized utterances will ever add up to a coherent solution, because the problems are not independent and sequential but highly interrelated and simultaneous. Someone has to look at the whole, even if it means foregoing full knowledge of all the parts. Since "economics" as well as "ecology" come from the same Greek root (*oikos*), meaning "management of the household," and since man's household has extended to include not only nations but also the planet as a whole, economics is probably the discipline that has least justification for taking a narrow view.

The meaning of a good life for human beings is a question of ends. Economic activity should take its orders from humans who think about ends, about what economic welfare and its practical means are for. Wealth has only a modest part in the determination of the conditions for the good life. Too much wealth not only throws life out of balance, it also deprives the poor of even the means of decent subsistence. The pursuit of wealth for its own sake and the advocacy of unlimited accumulation as an absolute good are the self-destructive principles of the modern age, in Daly's view. The rules of thinking now practiced shut out attention to ends. Science and technology disdain, or admit their incompetence, to inquire into the highest good, and therefore know nothing of the means of reaching it, or modestly approaching it.

Daly gives briefly the shaping forces behind our society and time:

Teleology and purpose, the dominant concepts of an earlier age, were banished from the mechanistic, reductionistic, positivistic mode of thought that came to be identified with a certain phase of the evolution of science. Economics followed suit by reducing ethics to the level of personal tastes: individuals set their own priorities, and economics is simply "the mechanics of utility and

> self-interest" (Jevons, 1924), with no questions asked about whether individual priorities are right or wrong or even about how they are formed. Our refusal to reason about the Ultimate End merely assures the incoherence of our priorities, at both an individual and a social level. It leads to the tragedy of Captain Ahab, whose means were all rational, but whose purpose was quite insane. We cannot lend rationality to the pursuit of a white whale across the oceans merely by employing the most advanced techniques of whaling. To do more efficiently that which should not be done in the first place is no cause for rejoicing.

It should be noted that Mr. Daly does not exaggerate the importance of economic thinking. He says at the close of his book:

> The Steady-state paradigm is far from a sufficient answer to the question of right purpose. It is merely a strategy to correct some past mistakes before we are destroyed by their cumulative effects. It recognizes the error of omission in our past treatment of ultimate means and of the Ultimate End. It attempts to establish institutions that do not depend on continual growth. It recognizes that ultimate means are scarce in an absolute sense, and that the Ultimate End is such that, beyond a certain level, it is not served by further physical production.

COMMENTARY
COMMUNITY HONOR ROLL

IN *Landscape Papers* (Turtle Island, 1976) Edgar Anderson wrote fondly of the happy six months he spent living in a busy Mexican town where the city is a *garden.* His neighbors kept chickens and stabled burros, and there was "a productive small orchard in the down-town business zone."

Anderson thought this couldn't happen in America without new attitudes "at a basic philosophic level," but the black people of Willowbrook, in south-central Los Angeles, near Watts, where the city lots are oddly deep, have done it. They raise chickens and rabbits and cultivate vegetable gardens. In Willowbrook, according to a writer in the *Los Angeles Times* (Oct. 22), "there are horses grazing, roosters crowing and corn growing."

> Fresh eggs. Vegetables harvested by the wheelbarrow, Kentucky wonder beans and pears peddled by the bagful. Banana squash, pomegranates, pecan trees and more.
>
> Homeowners in Willowbrook, right next to Martin Luther King Jr. County Hospital, have turned their 300-foot-deep lots into agricultural havens to supplement poverty-level income.

A picture shows the long rows of okra and squash raised by Alvin Butler with the help of ten mentally retarded youths whom he took in and cares for (saving them from being institutionalized). Another picture shows Joseph Evans with a batch of eggs his seventy chickens have laid, bringing him supplementary income of $40 a month. One family has a backyard garden with nine fruit trees and a place for rabbits which they raise and sell.

Ironically, this area is now threatened—and more than threatened, already being eaten away—by a plan to "redevelop" the 356 acres in Willowbrook, with the approval of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. The first step will take twelve acres for a shopping center and enlargement of a medical school. This means the displacement of 107 families.

The Willowbrook residents are resisting—not all of them, of course—and are being helped by attorneys of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, who are putting together a case. The argument will be that the relocation of these people will provide housing nothing like the paid-for homes they will be giving up.

Meanwhile, why not engrave their names on some ecological roll of honor, as community architects who have already turned their part of the city into a garden? (A protesting letter to L.A. County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn might do some immediate good.)

An essential vitamin of character is present in these city farmers of Willowbrook—the self-reliance referred to by Bill Caddell in this week's "Children" (page 8). What they are doing—if it were copied and repeated in every urban area where it is at all possible—could in time transform the cities of the country into places where it is good to live and bring up children.

Interestingly, Edgar Anderson blames the conservationists and professional naturalists for their part in isolating the cities from nature:

> They have in the United States raised the appreciation of nature to a mass phenomenon, almost to a mass religion; yet at the same time they have refused to accept man as a part of nature. For the beneficial contemplation of the world around us, they would have us always get as far away from man as possible. They go to seaside and mountain top, at the very least to a farm. . . . They are one of the chief ultimate sources of our unwritten axiom, that cities are something to flee from, that the harmonious interaction of man and other organisms can only be achieved out in the country, that the average man is too noisy, too ugly, and too vile to be accepted as a close neighbor.

The Willowbrook people are showing that the opposite is the case.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WORKING WITH NEIGHBORS

ALL these conferences, workshops, and symposiums on solar and other alternate forms of energy going on around the country—how much good do they do? Are they more than a lot of well-intentioned talk? Last year a staff writer for *Rain*, Steven Ames, wondered about this (in *Rain* for July, 1978), deciding that some of the "fatter affairs," perhaps financed by a federal grant, with their large budgets and over-ambitious agendas, cost more in human time and energy than the benefits were worth. On the other hand, "there are those modest gatherings that work with the resources available and manage to turn people on and catalyze action."

Ames reports such a get-together, in Frankfort, Indiana, a town of about 16,000 people, which, he says, gave "ample evidence that fertile ground exists in conservative, small-town America, where—with a little poking and prodding—people are increasingly willing to lend an ear to the ideas of renewable energy, appropriate technology, and beyond." The story of what happened at Frankfort during two days in May of last year is of particular interest as an account of successful adult education. Steven Ames relates:

> In one fell swoop, workshop participants experienced a rather intensive seminar with some of the best authorities available talking about energy-efficient homes, passive solar design, integrated bioshelters and wind energy potential. They were able to see actual solar and wind installations buy the latest materials available and ask questions about how all this could change their own situations. More important is how this eye-opening experience was mobilized far from any metropolitan or university setting, and how a small community came to rally round this workshop with considerable support.

Ames's report shows what one man—with help from his neighbors and friends—is able to do:

> A great deal of the success of Frankfort's Energy Workshop has to do with the good energies and thoroughness of Bill Caddell, prime organizer of the event. For some time Bill has been interested in all kinds of appropriate technologies, from antique hand tools to wood stoves. Recently the Caddell family has undertaken the construction of a passively solar heated house outside Frankfort, utilizing a greenhouse/Trombé wall system with wood heat for back-up. With this personal background, Bill is firmly committed to spreading the good word on renewable energy, and as Director of the Frankfort Community Public Library he's in a good place to do just that. . . .
>
> Since coming to the library, he has taken an active role in the community, working with various local groups, and putting information into the right hands when it can influence important decisions. In the last couple of years the library has sponsored successful small workshops on solar and wood heating that were attended by people from all over Central Indiana. Eventually, Bill found that they had used up all the local talent in these fields with no decrease in the demand for information.

He decided to attract people with knowledge and wide experience from other places:

> Last January [1978] he started contacting potential speakers for an energy workshop, writing letters and following up with phone calls. Steve Baer of Zomeworks in New Mexico showed an initially strong interest in this post-Sun Day event, saying that he would pass up an opportunity to speak in New York for a small-town setting. The publisher of Malcolm Wells' new book, *How To Buy Solar Heating without Getting Burnt*, arranged for the "underground" architect to come to Frankfort. Other speakers became interested in converging in Middle America, to learn from each other and to see what the local people were doing. Alex Wade. John Todd of New Alchemy Institute. Michael Evans of *Wind Power Digest.* Don and Abby Marier of *Alternative Sources of Energy* magazine. Rather quickly, Frankfort's Energy Workshop mushroomed into an all-star show, and it was the community's turn to respond in kind.

The next part of Steve Ames's story illustrates the fruits of Bill Caddell's previous efforts:

> This was where Bill Caddell's understanding of a small town's strengths came to the fore. "His use of local resource people and the Frankfort infrastructure

was incredibly effective," says Jim Laukes, editor of *Acorn*, the midwest a.t. networking journal. In promoting the Energy Workshop, he managed to create a genuine community-wide happening, weaving together the support and assistance of not only local appropriate technology enthusiasts, but also elected officials, civic organizations, prominent citizens, students—everybody, it seems, but the high school marching band.

Not surprisingly, the library Board of Trustees lent their backing to the project, sponsoring the Workshop and extending $1,000 from their Gift Fund. The School Board did the same; it had recently formed a citizen's energy conservation task force, which would perhaps find answers to their specific questions at the Workshop. They also generously offered the Workshop free use of the High School and its facilities.

High school students volunteered to park cars and some adult groups took over preparing meals. Publicity was handled by the library staff, and as a result there was wide newspaper and magazine coverage. A thousand people attended a full day's activities, including tours of solar homes and wind and water power sites. Good questions were raised:

A lot of attention was focused on Why Do All This? . . . Speakers examined what attitudes had taken us in hopeless directions, and what the impetus was for changing. Somehow, on the home turf, these dead serious insights took on compelling directness. "Our science and technology is addressing itself to cosmetics," said John Todd, "cleaning up a little bit, but not tampering with the system that is based on the limitless consumption of materials. . . . Any society that builds itself on an unforgiving technology, whose waste products are leaking into the environment daily, is simply committing itself to a long-term folly." As Todd spoke, one of the Indiana Alliance groups leafletted outside against the construction of Public Service Indiana's Marble Hill nuclear reactor.

These critical realities were balanced by the presentation of the disarmingly logical alternative: that wind, water, sun and wastes can be integrated into our lifestyles to do the jobs that need doing while enhancing our quality of life and survival on the planet. Malcolm Wells showed how the destruction of the land's topsoil and vegetation could be reversed by building underground homes and offices—even airports. Steve Baer discussed his 7,700 sq. ft. passive solar warehouse/office building in Pecos, New Mexico, which last winter had a $30 heating bill. Alex Wade emphasized the tremendous potential in recycling used lumber, bricks and glass in construction as a form of energy conservation itself.

There were, says Steve Ames, "glimmers at Frankfort of the need not only to change the way we do things, but to change our expectations and our understanding of what the 'good life' really is." He concludes with a list of a few of the good things happening in Frankfort:

The once strong ethic of self reliance is in sad shape. Bill Caddell admits that it will take a lot of effort to change complacent attitudes—like the blind faith in electricity as some kind of energy cure-all. But he's also begun to see change happen. And then, like his old friend, the township trustee who never saw fit to get rid of his wind-powered pump in the first place, there still exists a strong connection between these folks and self-reliance that can be built upon. Some of it has to do with dollars and sense. Some of it has to do with knowing how to work with neighbors. There is a certain kind of realism in small towns about problems and their solutions. It makes them very appropriate places to jump into action in trying to build a future we can live with.

FRONTIERS

The Inevitable Myths

A SERIES of questions raised by the writer of a letter to the June *Resurgence* deserves attention. First, the contributor gives his credentials:

> I think I'm probably as strongly committed as most to the ideal of changing industrialized Western society, and I find the current debate of "New Age" lifestyles and values exciting and inspiring. As a family my wife, two small sons and myself have changed direction completely since 1976; I have given up a career in university teaching in order to write and publish on a small scale, and my wife has revived the ancient cottage craft of making hand-dipped candles. With a good garden, a couple of acres of grazing, and a few animals, we are reasonably self-sufficient, and we are happy.

However, the literature of the movement of which he is a part is beginning to bother him. Ardor, he fears, is replacing common sense:

> The "Small Is Beautiful" movement is growing up. As it grows it is losing some of its charm, and in some respects it is becoming less attractive. The movement has already attracted a large following; and as it gets stronger some of its followers have tended to replace its original naivete with dogma and prejudice. The Alternative Society (if we can use such a simple label for a society which is anything but simple) has evolved its own insidious mythology. Too many people now accept that self-sufficiency is a noble ideal, that the simple life is the perfect life, that government devolution is inevitable, that alternative technology will end the energy crisis, that small economic units will save the world. . .The trouble is that the media men have got hold of the ideas contained in the magazine [*Resurgence*]; they are promoting them not because they believe in them but because promotion makes good commercial sense.

Even the best of the Alternative advocates, such as John Seymour in England, unwillingly do some harm, he thinks. Their books are slickly packaged to sell Utopia to the "literate" masses, and a fresh generation of true believers out there is gobbling them up. The critic says:

> John Seymour knows that the self-sufficiency enthusiast who comes away from his book [*The Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency*] with these ideas is liable for a rude awakening just as every small farmer knows the precarious reality of life on the land. But because the self-sufficiency movement is still youthful there are few people prepared to put a damper on its naive enthusiasm. Books like Patrick Rivers' *Living Better on Less* gives a completely false impression to those who are thinking of adopting a simple rural life-style. Too many New Age evangelists, following the evangelical tradition, have encouraged a misguided feeling of security. A sense of euphoria is abroad, and euphoria is a dangerous thing.

This writer, Brian John, who lives in South Wales, goes on and on, listing not three or four but twenty-two "fallacies" or "myths" of the movement. He expands critically on several of them, such as the dream that the simple life gives relief from drudgery. The hard labor of rural life, he says, "can dull the senses and sensibilities of those who once enjoyed art and music in the industrial society which they have left behind."

There is certainly truth in this comment, as anyone who has worked on a farm for a season or two knows. Even with the assistance of properly scaled intermediate technology, there will still be days of exhausting labor, when one keeps at it for twelve or fourteen hours. And as occasional reports from recent beginners make plain, the discouragements may often exceed the satisfactions.

But what this writer leaves out of account is the way in which, historically, major changes in the outlook of human beings, especially of large populations, commonly take place. First comes a general feeling of disillusionment coupled with the longing, often only half-conscious, for another way of life. Then the pioneers and the utopian writers begin to make their appeal. The first American colonists were surely as much dreamers as any of the modern back-to-the-land enthusiasts. And although many of them were farmers to begin with, when they got here there was a great deal that they had to learn from experience.

Perhaps we should say that there is *always* a mythic element in the appeal made by pioneers. This is partly because those whose physical and

psychic endowments make them able to be pioneers usually take for granted a kind of effort that reaches beyond the capacity of ordinary folk. This is not deception, but it has what amounts to a misleading effect. Meanwhile propagandists who climb on the bandwagon of well-intentioned crusades are as subject to such illusions as the people they write for, and common sense emerges only after practical participation in the arduous processes of change.

But the myths which support the longing for self-sufficiency, for alternative sources of energy, for decentralization and the revival of community, while they may result in some disappointment and chagrin, are nonetheless pointed in the right direction. And in their final effect they are very different from the myths which promise a wholly mechanized technological paradise. By comparison, the myths of the "Small Is Beautiful" movement are *good* myths which, when difficulties and contradictions are encountered, call out hidden resources in human beings. Myths are an inevitable part of massive change, and defects of understanding are as much the cause of disillusionment as the exaggerations of enthusiasts.

It would be better, of course, to recognize from the start that any far-reaching innovation will confront us with unfamiliar problems and serious obstacles. But even here, the man or woman with dreams may be better equipped to cope with unexpected conditions than others whose hopes are weak or passive. Karl Hess put this idea well in *Community Technology,* suggesting that people who want to participate in deliberated change ought to start their planning by saying to themselves, "We can do *anything!";* and who then, after they have schemed out what seems an ideal arrangement, look closely at the field of action to see how, under its actual limitations, they can turn that "anything" into a "something" that is worth having.

This would be using the inspiring character of myth deliberately. The flight of the imagination is a necessary beginning, and consultation with "reality" the indispensable next step, in order to change circumstances by application of the powers and skills we actually possess. This combination of myth-making with reality-testing is always present wherever there is enduring progress in human affairs.