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A DISTINCTIVE NORMALITY

A SYNDROME, according to the dictionary, is "a group of signs and symptoms that occur together and cause a particular abnormality." Most of the serious books that are coming out these days are devoted to arraying the signs and symptoms of social, economic, and cultural decline. Considerable attention is given to the unwillingness of a great many people to recognize their implications. The force of the critical analysis is not sufficient to win readers over to the depressing conclusion that the modern world is headed for disaster and collapse. This is understandable. What can people do with a conclusion like that? They have their lives to live, and predictions of ruin by monstrous and inaccessible forces have to be either denied or ignored if they are to go on meeting everyday responsibilities. Totally disquieting facts are simply unacceptable. Maybe the worst won't happen, and meanwhile there are things that must be done.

Yet the ominous signs keep on multiplying. There was a time when, in a wry way, we could see a little sense behind the claim that what's good for General Motors is good for the nation, but last year we were informed that General Motors had just lost half a billion dollars. Ford, too, is in trouble, to say nothing of the Chrysler Corporation, which business analysts seem to regard as a hopeless case. How long can this go on? Why are the car manufacturers so deep in the red? The simple explanation is that they didn't start making small automobiles which consume less gas soon enough, while the Germans and the Japanese did. If you wonder why the American car manufacturers delayed, they point out that the Government insisted on keeping gasoline cheap, when it ought to have been allowed to rise in price along with the cost of petroleum from the Arab countries. So the Detroit executives miscalculated; they thought Americans would still buy big cars, and they put off making littler ones.

Why did the government hold down the price of gas? Because politicians want to be elected. They could claim that they were doing a better job than the Europeans who have allowed gas to sell at two, three, and four dollars a gallon. Politicians, too, have their category of unacceptable facts. A fact which says they can't be elected is not a fact that can be allowed influence. So political thinking is of necessity short-term. All thinking geared to acquisition as the highest good is short-term. So it is entirely reasonable to conclude that our society, too, is short-term.

But that's being pessimistic. How can a society whose future depends on growth allow itself to be pessimistic? It can't, of course. As a result, the commercial press is filled with schizophrenic moralizing. We *must* keep on growing and at the same time we *must* prevent the intolerable side-effects of growth. That's schizophrenic—a clear-cut case of the double-bind.

This is simplistic analysis, based on what one can read in the newspapers. But it seems sound enough. It is made in far greater and much more accurate detail in the books that are coming out. The books are brilliantly critical, no doubt of that. Take three that have come out recently—*Human Scale* by Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Lean Years* by Richard Barnet, and *Entropy* by Jeremy Rifkin. These are enough to read in order to find out what, in general terms, is certain to happen if we go on as we are. Yet effective as these books are, they don't make much of a dent in prevailing attitudes. Americans can't stand pessimism as a collective outlook. The entirety of their history, the momentum of their lives, grows out of an

optimistic reading of events. So these good and valuable books, while they have an effect on the few, are very largely ignored.

Is there any other way to look at the human condition? Must the signs and symptoms of the times have only a pessimistic reading? Suppose they do no more than instruct us in the way things really are: is not this a sign of health, and isn't health a ground for optimism? The problem, then, is to generate attitudes which value health more than acquisition. How might this be done? It can be done by the few, of course, but we've always had those few, and they seldom have much influence on the many. So what sort of activity is called for?

One way of getting at this question would be to ask if behind the facts that seem so pessimistic there may be an emerging outline of laws of nature that until now we haven't been aware of. If so, knowledge of these laws is not a ground of pessimism. The pessimism, after all, relates to the threat against the way we live now. It may be extremely beneficial for us as human beings to be threatened by natural law. Having pain and sickness in youth is often a way of discovering how to live to a ripe old age.

Now this, obviously, is a radically different way of thinking about "progress." It would take a miracle beyond our imagining to convert very many people to this view—soon. But that, nonetheless, should be the content of every hopeful Last Chapter in books of critical analysis. Why would it take a miracle? Because the only conversion that remains effective is self-conversion, and that, too, may prove to be a law of nature. The needed self-conversion has to do with how we think about ourselves and the world—with or without problems. It has to do with making fresh and independent decisions about what is Good, helped by both intuitive inspiration and rational inquiry. This means learning to let go of the assumptions which have condemned us to pessimism. But you can't just let go of an assumption without replacing it. There is no human life without postulates. This is true for individuals, true for societies. We really live in our minds.

An editorial in last summer's *Ecologist* (published in England) gives a fairly clear idea of our present assumptions. Edward Goldsmith, the editor, writes:

> The goal of just about every country in the world today remains the maximization of GNP regardless of the destruction this must cause to their social and physical environment, and not surprisingly such destruction has continued unabated.
>
> What is new, however, is that this destruction is now noticeably affecting our economic activities. The biological, social and ecological costs that we thought could be incurred with impunity are being translated into economic costs. Nature is at last hitting back, hence the new inflation which differs from the normal type, in that, rather than occurring exclusively during periods of boom, it is occurring today during a period of economic stagnation, thereby giving rise to a new situation referred to as "stagflation." . . .
>
> People seem to have forgotten that it is not just resources that are required to maintain an industrial society, but *cheap resources.* The post-war boom was built up on cheap oil at one dollar fifty a barrel. At forty dollars a barrel, the boom would never have occurred. Nor at that price can the world industrial system of today expand any further. . . . All this means that we are running up against the "Limits to Growth" *indirectly* via the price mechanism, rather than directly, as we all once expected.
>
> But we are running up against them indirectly in yet another way. If the formal economy is ceasing to provide people with consumer goods and services at a price we can afford, so it is failing to provide people with jobs at the salary required to support them in the present inflationary conditions. Unemployment has previously occurred only during periods of economic stagnation. It is now endemic to our society, and is likely to remain at a high level even during whatever economic booms still lie ahead. Because of increasing automation, manufacturing industries, *whether they are successful or not*, provide less jobs today than they did ten years ago.

The accustomed mode of meeting unemployment is with government-created jobs, but in England, where Mr. Goldsmith lives, half the GNP is already being spent by government. It

follows that giving more people government jobs will tax productive industry out of business. This is a pattern which may be more advanced in Britain than elsewhere, but it is draining the substance of every industrial country. As the editor says:

> We must also ask ourselves whether any industrial society can stand the combination of run-away inflation and massive unemployment for very long. . . . Since precisely the same trends are also occurring in all other industrial countries, what we are faced with is an almost certain breakdown of the world economy and the collapse of all those societies that have become its appendage.

Mr. Goldsmith now writes with a candor seldom found in the commercial press:

> I think that it is unrealistic to expect the ecological movement to prevent this breakdown from occurring. Our movement is undoubtedly gaining strength, but not fast enough to shift society in time from its present suicidal course. Instead, we should do two things. First, fight a holding action by every means at our disposal against the developers and polluters. . . . The second thing we should do is *prepare for the collapse* and work out how, after it has occurred, we can influence the social groups that will emerge from the debris to develop in an ecological direction.
>
> The collapse will undoubtedly be very unpleasant for all of us. Like most people we shall hate the social chaos that it will inevitably give rise to. On the other hand, if it does not occur, if the industrial world continues to expand for another thirty years, the consequences would be too horrible to imagine. Our environment by then would have become so hideously degraded that living in it would not really be worth while. . . . Our society too would have disintegrated to the point that the patterns of behaviour that are only found today in the worst industrial slums of North America would have become the norm. Crime, delinquency, vandalism, drug addiction, alcoholism, would be just about generalised. In these conditions democratic government would have become but the flimsiest of facades. Those states that would have remained capable of maintaining some semblance of social order, however superficial, would be those that had transformed themselves into ruthless dictatorships and they would be in a perpetual state of war with their neighbors in order to secure for themselves the biggest possible share of the remaining economic sources of raw materials: oil, minerals, phosphate rock and sweet water, which by then would have become as expensive as champagne.
>
> The breakdown will have another beneficial effect. It will provide the trauma required to drive home to those who have not yet understood it, that we live in a world of pure fantasy, and that just about all the basic assumptions of modern science and economics, in terms of which the worldview of our industrial society is formulated, are *not only false but indescribably pernicious.* They must be, since they provide the rationale for that pattern of behaviour that is leading to the systematic annihilation of the world of living things of which we are part.

This seems a concise outline of what the modern world will be obliged to learn from the school of experience. Already this realization has come to the articulate few, some of whom are laying the groundwork for assumptions of another character. Jeremy Rifkin's *Entropy—A New World View* is a fine example. His last chapters do not gloss over the problem of altering the common assumptions of industrial society:

> Completely divorced from nature, our urbanized intellects really have no insight into our true relationship to our environment. Our high-energy culture has, in fact, so fragmented our minds that we are no longer in harmony with the source of life. Divorced as we are from nature, we have no real chance to become enlightened, as that word has been understood by peoples throughout history. True, our ancestors had no scientific understanding of and explanation for the phenomena around them, but perhaps they had a better intuitive grasp of what was really important in life.

Rifkin regards the attempt to continue in lives based upon high consumption of energy as an impossible defiance of the second law of thermodynamics. We have, rather, to learn to cooperate with the normal physical conditions based on this principle. He sees no possible escape:

> We must voluntarily reformulate our lives so that they reflect the new paradigm. But that is not enough. We must also join together, in a popular grassroots social force, to begin the dismantling of the existing high-energy infrastructure. At the same

time, we must build our new society based on a new set of values which reflect awareness of the entropy process.

Rifkin gives an account of the meaning of this process: "After a long, futile search to find out where we belong in the total scheme of things, the Entropy Law reveals to us a simple truth: that every single act that occurs in the world has been affected by everything that has come before it, just as it, in turn, will have an effect on everything that comes after." He sees the confusion of the present as evidence that humans are seeking confirmation and fulfillment of their deepest intuitions in the wrong place by inverted means. We have the drive, but not the understanding to direct it:

> The whole world is temporary. In its finiteness we experience our own. In its fragile nature we experience our own.
>
> Yet we desperately search for immortality in this finite world while knowing there is none. There is a nihilism in our search. The finiteness of the world is a constant unpleasant reminder of our own. We tear into everything around us, devouring our fellow creatures and the earth's treasures even while telling ourselves that it is progress we are after. It is, in truth, our own immortality we seek. It's as if we were determined to destroy every last reminder of this finite world in the hope of ridding ourselves of the painful awareness of our own temporary nature. Our violent actions only bring us faster to our own demise and to the demise of the fixed endowment bequeathed to all future living things. Meanwhile, we remain unconcerned about the carnage and affliction because we believe that modern science and technology can develop a substitute for everything we use up in nature's storehouse.
>
> Only when we learn to accept the finite nature of the world can we begin to appreciate how precious this gift called the earth really is. Only then will every occurrence take on a special meaning and will life itself be something worth cherishing and conserving. . . . It should also be recognized that we often mistakenly associate new human ideas for organizing the physical world we live in with higher forms of consciousness. The two are not the same. In fact, social development and spiritual development have, for the most part, followed opposite trajectories throughout much of human history.

The trajectories may have a harmonic balance, but they are *different.* Here, in this suggestion that our frenzied quest for satisfaction and fulfillment on earth is really a search for immortality, may be a clue to the central delusion of our lives—that we are essentially *material* beings. There are indeed appropriate satisfactions to be found on earth, and fulfillments natural to earthly beings, but these do not nourish or reward the man of mind and spirit. They are not final. The Garden of Eden, we have thought, existed on earth; but it did not. Mount Olympus crowns no earthly height, nor is the Fountain of Youth somewhere in Florida. Dante's Beatrice was not flesh and blood, and both Heaven and Hell, while substantial, are works of the mind.

This is the change of assumptions we are called upon to make, and it is no wonder that we have difficulty in making them. All the ills of romanticism are the result of often innocent compromise on the matter of where our fulfillments are to be found, yet without the infections of romance we should be animals or gods or devils—never humans. This is really the mystery of human beings, that even in their confusions there should be finite splendors, and that they should make endless material replicas of all their spiritual dreams. Are we in desperate shape? Someone will create a dark metaphysic to explain it. Do we want the moon and some day the stars as part of our empire? Someone will devise a theology of galactic conquest. When we are weak we invent a God to assure our salvation, and when we are strong the virtues and even the pieties are modelled on our goals. The vast universe is always a tail to our speculative kite. Can it be that we are infant godlings, yet old enough to go on a binge, and addicted enough to our intoxications to resist with Faustian determination the instinctive urge to sober up?

And yet, one by one, we are beginning to make sense of our predicament. This is what the last chapter of the confessional books should be filled with—accounts of how people are beginning

to make sense of the disasters we see all about, and those on the way. People who make sense out of the human condition neither point with pride nor view with alarm. They just go on making sense.

There probably never was a human being, anytime, anywhere, who did not require some instruction from outraged nature—which we call disaster—in order to start making sense. If this is true of us all, then we can at least have patience with others, if not with ourselves. Nature hasn't been able to get through to them yet. But shouldn't it be possible to anticipate Nature and to save people a lot of trouble? It should be and occasionally is. A handful of intelligent humans have been anticipating nature for thousands of years. A recent one of this company wrote about a century ago—

> There are two laws discrete,
> Not reconciled,—
> Law for man and law for thing
> The last builds town and fleet,
> But it runs wild,
> And doth the man unking.

Emerson said this, but his hearers, while admiring him, refused to take it seriously. For a great many, it seems, only additional pressures from nature will persuade them to take it seriously. If we knew more about the rhythms of natural persuasion we might be more effective anticipators and collaborators.

One kind of web of life grows out of the Emersonian conviction, while a very different network of intentions and associations results from the assumptions we have now. It is this network—fabric and texture of ideas—which must change before the voice of the Emersons and other anticipators can be heard by more than a handful of wonderers. But the little networks made by the few become amplifiers, so that others begin to hear. As the networks themselves are extended, they become a group of signs and symptoms that occur together and define a distinctive normality.

REVIEW
SURVIVORS OR TRANSCENDERS?

IMPLICIT in the determination to return to "natural" ways of life is the contradiction between the ruthless moral indifference of natural processes and the longings of human beings. There is a wonderful chapter in Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*—which needs reading over about once a year—in which the dilemma of being human, of being able to idealize and envision, yet having to live in an animal world, is graphically dramatized:

> Look: Cock Robin may die the most gruesome of slow deaths, and nature is no less pleased, the sun comes up, the creek rolls on, the survivors still sing. I cannot feel that way about your death, nor you about mine, nor either of us about the robin's—or even the barnacles'. We value the individual supremely, and nature values him not a whit. It looks for the moment as though I might have to reject this creek life unless I want to be utterly brutalized. Is human culture with its values my only real home after all? Can it possibly be that I should have my anchorhold to the side of a library? This direction of thought brings me abruptly to a fork in the road where I stand paralyzed, unwilling to go on, for both ways lead to madness.
>
> Either this world, my mother, is a monster, or I myself am a freak.

From whom, then, or what, should we take instruction, since, quite evidently, we are moral creatures in an amoral world!

> All right then. It is our emotions that are amiss. We are freaks, the world is fine, and let us all go have lobotomies to restore us to a natural state. We can leave the library then go back to the creek lobotomized and live on its banks as untroubled as any muskrat or reed. You first.

This dilemma makes the subject-matter of a new book by Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival* (Guild of Tutors Press, $7.95), subtitled the "Search for an Environmental Ethic." The author is on the side of nature as our instructor:

> It has become possible in this century to consider the development of a true environmental ethic based upon the human experience of events in the world, upon the evolutionary history of the human and other species and upon the new knowledge of ecological principles which govern the relationships of organisms to their natural environments. Such an ethic must emphasize the survival of the species rather than spiritual salvation or transcendence, and its methods must provide for adaptation to the natural environment rather than conquest of it.

Not the inner feelings of human beings, not their metaphysical constructions and their hunger for transcendence, but the laws of our natural (animal) life should guide our ethical decisions. In Prof. Meeker's view, the Greek dramatists, who were the first expositors of Western Humanism, glorified man at the expense of the surrounding environment, which they largely ignored. The time has come, he suggests, for a conscious change in our "authorities." Our humanism has been anthropocentric, and it must now submit to the more reliable judgment of "evolutionary naturalism."

> The majority report of Western civilization has consistently judged mankind to be superior to and separate from nature, and mankind has gladly accepted the flattering implications of that judgment. The minority report, however, has always been present to remind us of our kinship with other animals and our dependence upon nature. . . . The revolution in biological thought which has been begun in this century with such studies as ecology and ethology is in part an affirmation of the minority vision, a vision articulated by a few literary artists and unpopular philosophers but rarely heard by statesmen, religious leaders, or educators. If the new messages of biology can be brought together with the old messages of philosophy and literature, perhaps they may become a unified statement in the minds and hearts of the people who will assume leadership tomorrow.

How, one wonders, will it be possible to subordinate the fundamental human longing for transcendence—for emergence into a super-physical life—to biological rules which know nothing of this aspiration and have neither concepts nor language to give it a place in the scheme of things? This question is by no means answered by Prof. Meeker, who seems mainly concerned with hope for some kind of pragmatic compromise. He wants us to give up our hope of

perfectibility and complete knowledge—in his estimation mere humanist fantasies—and settle for the sly solutions of a Good Soldier Schweik, or to adopt the zany sanity of Joseph Heller's Yossarian in *Catch-22*. This explains the title of his book; he wants men to be comic instead of tragic heroes. That way, he argues, they'll have a better chance to survive.

> Human comedy does not offer a proud view of mankind but an accurate one, mindful of human limitations and modest in its assessment of human potentials. With little guilt over the past and little expectation from the future, the comic mode seeks its fulfillment from the present. Its greatest pleasures arise from the satisfaction of basic bodily needs and from the flexibility of the human mind as it responds to the ironies and bewilderments of daily experience. Yet the comic perspective is not frivolous. Its themes are birth, life, conflict, reproduction, necessity, death, and the fulfillment of human needs. Its message is that these are essential features of existence which must be accommodated and, if possible, understood. Even if they cannot be understood, they must be accepted and borne with good grace. Although comedy fails to curse the world or to make gigantic demands of it, it is not shallow. The humor of comedy is most often an attempt to deflate the overinflated, not to trivialize what is genuinely important. Comedy is serious about life even in its lightest moments.
>
> Scientific ecology and literary comedy are consistent with a rich and diverse human culture. Mankind cannot afford the consequences of human self-aggrandizement, but fulfillment may lie in a knowing and spirited immersion in the processes of nature, illuminated by the adaptive and imaginative human mind. In literature or in ecology, comedy enlightens and enriches human experience without trying to transform either mankind or the world.

The terrible mistake of the humanists, according to this writer, is that they have tried to improve both themselves and the world. He finds no evidence in ecology that this is possible. This seems reasonable, for how could he? The evidence is not where he looks. The idea of *human* improvement, which is distinctively ethical or moral, is to be found only in humans. Prof. Meeker seems to think that self-improvement is a foolish *hubris* which ignores our animal origins and nature. The humanists, of course, insist that man is more than an animal—that the mind of man is something transcendent—*added* to the animal, having a destiny of its own.

But in his view, biology reproaches us for virtually all the achievements which differentiate us from animals:

> An important step toward reconciling human phylogeny with human culture was taken by the contemporary American ecologist Paul Shepard in *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game.* Humane life did not begin with the invention of agriculture and the domestication of animals, Shepard points out, but may have ended then. When men and women gave up hunting and gathering and began to manipulate natural processes for strictly human ends some eight thousand years ago they took the first steps toward destruction of the earth's ecology and cut themselves off from their evolutionary past. Mankind thus sacrificed an ecologically oriented way of life that had taken a million years to develop and gained in exchange the power to disrupt the world and to manufacture widespread human unhappiness.

While Prof. Meeker does not directly charge the classical humanists with intending exploitation of nature and non-human creatures, they have, he argues, assumptions in common with those who do. They believe, he argues, that "ethical law comes from outside the world of matter, nature, and experience," citing Plato's analogy of the Cave in the *Republic*, "where ideas of good and evil are shown to be beyond sense perception and far above the environment of life in a realm that the Greeks called *metaphysical*, beyond existence." The implication is that the destructive habits of the acquisitive and technological society are allowed, if not encouraged, by transcendental idealism.

Yet Eastern transcendentalism—which Prof. Meeker thinks we need not inspect—is saturated with reverence for the world of nature and its creatures. *Ahimsa*, or harmlessness, a central teaching of Buddhism, declares compassion for all that lives, finding the promise of the highest evolutionary development in every particle of matter. Meanwhile, a modern Platonist, Dr. Catherine Roberts, who is also a biologist, has

given a precise reply to writers who, with Prof. Meeker, would serve the welfare of nature by urging that the laws of biology should set limits to our moral and spiritual intuitions. She says in *Science, Animals, and Evolution* (Greenwood, 1980):

> In stressing man's relation to animals and playing down the diversity among living creatures, they are using concepts of democracy and equality. Such profoundly well-meaning efforts to better the relations between man and the rest of creation do, however, seem to have gone somewhat too far, for to proclaim that man is in no way unique is a distortion of spiritual truth. Man's conscious awareness of his conscience, the divine ethic, and his self-transcendence as a realizable human potential *does* set *Homo sapiens* apart from other creatures. And precisely because of his spiritual uniqueness, he has a responsibility to help lower beings to ascend that exceeds any responsibility to them based on a sense of physical relation through common descent. . . . In assuming the existence of a spiritual hierarchy of being, there at once emerges an idea wholly undemocratic and, at the same time, wholly necessary for the evolutionary ascent: *noblesse oblige.* This is no illusory concept to bolster the human ego. . . . In the religious scheme of things, the higher are ever helping the lower to realize potentiality for the sake of the cosmic Good.

COMMENTARY
WHAT IS "NATURAL" FOR HUMANS?

IT is characteristic of most writers with a background in biology to assume that human beings are a special breed of animals and nothing more. This is certainly the case with Joseph Meeker, whose book insists (See Review) that our ethical ideas must be shaped by the rules of Darwinian evolution, in behalf of "survival," rather than by conceptions of "spiritual salvation or transcendence."

But why should the feelings and aspirations which spontaneously arise in the mind be discounted as if they were not a part of the "natural" human environment? The idea of "transcendence" as the fulfillment of an ideal human life is the central theme of all the high religions, and the shutting out of this conception by scientific anthropologists dates from the angry rejection of religious corruption and tyranny by the free spirits of the Enlightenment, not from any actual antipathy for genuinely aspiring philosophies of the past. The anti-spiritual stance of the present-day biologist is an outlook framed by angry polemics, not balanced inquiry. As Bertrand Russell said in 1925: "As a rule, the materialistic dogma has not been set up by men who loved dogma, but by men who felt that nothing less definite would enable them to fight the dogmas they disliked."

It follows that an ecology which denies the natural reality of transcendental thinking is a partisan inheritance—an ecology mutilated by the lobotomy of aggressive materialism. Now we have books which take this outlook seriously, as though only the animal aspect of human life can be accepted as "scientifically" real. This is an idea belonging to only a fragment—a few hundred years—of our human history. As the cultural anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, said recently, "So far as I know, we are the only people who think themselves risen from savages; everyone else believes they descend from gods."

Darwin, it has been suggested by at least one of his biographers, was reading Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* while gathering evidence for his theory of evolution, and Smith's endorsement of "self-interest" may have seemed support for the struggle for survival. An entirely different conception of both economics and evolution is explicit in the thinking made current by writers such as E. F. Schumacher and Theodore Roszak. Darwinism may have become only a brief episode in the history of thought for the scholars of the twenty-first century.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WALT WHITMAN S WARNING

[In a recently published book, Konrad Lorenz is quoted as saying that certain findings of depth psychology make it "possible and legitimate to interpret the revelations granted to great poets as sources of scientific information." A paper by Harold Goddard, written in 1919, gives reason to think that some such possibility ought to be introduced to the young as preliminary to study of poetic works. We are able to publish this paper through the kindness of one of Professor Goddard's family.]

"It is absolutely uncanny," said a woman to me the other day, referring to two of the literary masterpieces of the decade prior to 1914, "it is absolutely uncanny: these men seem to have known beforehand what was coming."

"When would you have had them know what was coming?" I asked. "After it had happened? These men are not historians. They are poets. It is the business of a poet to know what is coming."

This idea seemed to strike my friend as odd; wherein she was typical of an age which has permitted a superficial and largely antiquated connection between verse and creative literature to blur its notion of what poetry is and of the relation of poetry to the future. A sailor, if he is worth his salt, knows the winds and tides and currents of the ocean. A poet, if he is worth *his* salt, knows the winds and tides and currents of the human ocean. To know what convictions and visions are dominating the most dynamic minds of an age—of which the poet is by definition one—is, by that fact, to know the future. (To know it, that is, within limits set by natural and social forces over which the human will has as yet no control.) If there was ever a period when the poetical meteorologists deserved to be consulted, it is our own. If the world had listened to them prior to 1914, the disaster could have been averted. If it would listen to them now in 1919, new disasters might be averted. When will the world learn to listen?

In this country we have had no greater authority on the future than Walt Whitman. We need not go so far as did Samuel Butler, who declared that Whitman was the one genius America has had. The test, luckily, is independent of anyone's opinion. The test of a pudding is in the eating. The test of a prophecy is in the fulfillment. And poets as well as the weather-wise must submit to that test. They must only be given enough time. These, however, are crowded hours—and already Whitman stands the test. Listen to a few lines, for instance, from his *Years of the Modern*, the passages not yet fulfilled taking on a startling vividness from those which the last four years have brought to pass:

> Years of the modern! years of the unperform'd!
>
> Your horizon rises—I see it parting away for more august dramas;
>
> I see not America only—I see not only Liberty's nation, but other nations preparing;
>
> I see tremendous entrances and exits—I see new combinations—I see the solidarity of races;
>
> I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world's stage; . . .
>
> —What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?
>
> I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions;
>
> I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old aristocracies broken;
>
> I see the landmarks of European kings removed;
>
> I see this day the People beginning their landmarks, (all others give way;) . . .
>
> —What whispers are these, O lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas?
>
> Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?
>
> Is humanity forming, en-masse?—for lo! tyrants tremble, crowns grow dim;
>
> The earth, restive, confronts a new era, perhaps a general divine war.

You and I could not do as well as that after the fact. Whitman did it fifty years before.

Whitman has been called an optimist, though predicting a general war is hardly painting the future rose-colored.

> I have urged you onward with me, and still urge you, without the least idea what is our destination,
>
> Or whether we shall be victorious, or utterly quell'd and defeated.

It is lines such as these which set in their right light others wherein the poet's faith is so great that it sounds to undiscriminating ears like fatalism. In other passages Whitman himself distinguishes his prediction of the dark from that of the light. And always his prophecy is more than of the generally tenebrous. He can give a bill of the black particulars.

A remarkable example of this is his poem, *Respondez!* Written before the Civil War, but revised and expanded after it, it was a warning of the corruption into which America was about to sink, if she did not rise and throw off her lethargy. Whitman's warning was not heeded, and the sordid decades that followed the war saw the fulfillment, to the letter, of the poet's nightmare of depravity.

Once more we stand with a war behind us. 1919 is 1867 over again with the scale enormously enlarged; and Whitman's lines, shot through with new meaning, ring with timeliness as if written yesterday. Will history repeat itself? Are we on the brink of a new era of materialism? Are we about to rewrite in world terms that cynical epoch which began with the death of Abraham Lincoln and did not end with the reign of Mark Hanna? We are. We are, that is, unless, this time, we heed the warnings of our men of vision. Of Whitman's prophecy, which time swiftly turned into history and now turns into prophecy again, I can give but a few fragments. Look it up! Read it from end to end. It will give you the most salutary castigation you have had in two decades. Lawyer or politician, teacher or preacher, business magnate or member of the common herd, whoever you are, the poet has a lash for your particular back, a demand for an answer from *you*. "Respondez! Respondez!" he cries:

> The war is completed—the price is paid—the title is settled beyond recall:
>
> Let everyone answer! let those who sleep be waked! let none evade!
>
> Must we still go on with our affectations and sneaking?
>
> Let me bring this to a close—I pronounce openly for a new distribution of roles;
>
> Let that which stood in front go behind! and let that which was behind advance to the front and speak; . . .
>
> Let faces and theories be turn'd inside out! let meanings be freely criminal, as well as results!
>
> Let there be suggestion above the suggestion of drudgery! . . .
>
> (Stifled, O days! O lands! in every public and private corruption!
>
> Smother'd in thievery, impotence, shamelessness, mountain-high;
>
> Brazen effrontery, scheming, rolling like ocean's waves around and upon you, O my days! my lands!
>
> For not even those thunderstorms, nor fiercest lightnings of the war, have purified the atmosphere;)
>
> —Let the theory of America still be management, caste, comparison! (Say! what other theory would you?) . . .
>
> Let freedom prove no man's inalienable right! everyone who can tyrannize, let him tyrannize to his satisfaction! . . .
>
> Let nothing remain but the ashes of teachers, artists, moralists, lawyers, and learn'd and polite persons! . . .
>
> Let there be no God!
>
> Let there be money, business, imports, exports, custom, authority, precedents, pallor, dyspepsia, smut, ignorance, unbelief!
>
> Let judges and criminals be transposed! let the prison-keepers be put in prison! let those that were prisoners take the keys! (Say! why might they not just as well be transposed?) . . .
>
> Let the men of These States stand aside for a few smouchers! let the few seize on what they choose! let the rest gawk, giggle, starve, obey! . . .

> Let there be wealthy and immense cities—but still through any of them, not a single poet, savior, knower, lover! . . .
>
> Let the preachers recite creeds! let them still teach only what they have been taught!
>
> Let insanity still have charge of sanity!
>
> Let books take the place of trees, animals, rivers, clouds!
>
> Let the daub'd portraits of heroes supersede heroes! . . .
>
> Let the reflections of the things of the world be studied in mirrors! let the things themselves still continue unstudied!
>
> Let the limited years of life do nothing for the limitless years of death! (What do you suppose death will do, then?)

A day or two after I had spoken with the friend who thought it, uncanny that the poets foresaw the calamity of 1914, I was walking through the corridor of a public building, when my eye caught the sign:

DON'T SLUMP YET

There you have it! Don't slump *yet.* Wait a few weeks—or even months. Wait until the war work campaign is over. Wait until after the Victory loan. Wait until the boys are all back home. And then—slump to your heart's content. Go back, man, to your stocks and bonds. Go back, woman, to your teas and shopping. Go back, America, to your drudgery and your luxury, your movies and your motor cars, your baseball and your golf. Go back to the world Whitman foresaw.

"But what about that other world that he also foresaw," I hear you ask, "the roseate world of the social millennium?" To which I hear Whitman himself replying:

> Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself.

A reply which will prove puzzling only to those who are still misty in their minds over the relation of the poet to the future, a somewhat subtler one, it happens, than that of the weather prophet to tomorrow's weather. For human wishes have no effect on the weather; but the human will is what makes the future.

HAROLD C. GODDARD

FRONTIERS

Winona, Minn., Pop. 27,000

ONE year ago, a citizen of Winona, Minnesota, Ellery Foster, started a Free Trade Exchange in Winona (at 122 East 2nd St.), combining person-to-person barter and purchase with notes of credit which may be exchanged for goods or services. The *Winona Sunday News* for last September 21 tells how the exchange system works:

> Roger Lacher, rural Winonan, is one of about 60 area residents who have filled out a "yellow page" at the Free Trade Exchange. Lacher offers to go through a timber stand and mark trees for homestead use, pointing out which are good for fence posts, hand-carving, berry and nut crops, meat-smoking, wood-strip basketry or leather bark tanning.
>
> He is willing to give short courses on edible plants, do chain saw maintenance and repair Coleman lanterns.
>
> Lacher recently fixed a camp stove, earning work credits toward what he wants—fiddle lessons, legal advice, a wooden silo, a 12-foot wind generator blade and a large tower.
>
> What he has to offer and what he wants are listed under his name in the "yellow pages."

It soon occurs to the reader of this report that one is likely to meet some interesting and enjoyable people by taking part in such activity. Direct cooperation is involved, with no intervention of government or bureaucracy, and virtually no organization. Socio-economic relationships of this sort have a clean, uncomplicated quality, restorative of an atmosphere that once pervaded most of America. The exchange is regarded by Ellery Foster as an application of Kropotkin's "mutual aid."

More on how the Exchange works:

> Jan Pomeroy, resident of Wiscoy Valley Land Co-op, has been asked by Foster to paint posters and do other lettering to advertise the Free Trade Exchange. She collects work credits, hoping to exchange them for some finished carpentry work. But Jan had an unexpected expense—she needed a car starter. So she turned in the credits to Foster, for cash to pay for the starter.
>
> Foster occasionally buys work credits when people in the Exchange need emergency money. He, in turn, keeps credits until he needs a service that can be provided by someone in the Exchange.
>
> A multitude of services are offered by persons signed up in the "yellow pages": child care, handmade baskets, massages, typing, tutoring, chimney sweeping, piano tuning and repair, music lessons, bicycle repair, and "original singing with guitar accompaniment."
>
> The "wants" are varied also: occasional hauling, house maintenance, rides to Minneapolis, stereo repair, firewood brush-making lessons, automotive work, juggling lessons, darkroom equipment and cameras, and the most basic needs, food and shelter.
>
> Exchanges may be arranged directly between two persons.
>
> Or the person receiving the service would get a "debit" which, in time, would have to be paid back to someone, not necessarily the person who provided the service.

Exchanges, Ellery Foster says, were common in this country during the 1930s. Then, after what we thought was economic recovery, they died away, but now they're being revived. "There are hundreds in this country," he says.

In addition to the yellow pages where participants list their offerings and needs, there is a bulletin board at the Exchange where people can post interests and capacities. Foster maintains a free lending library, mostly books on ecology, environment, history, and contemporary literature.

In a letter to the *Winona Daily News* he reports the appearance of an *Exchange Networks Newsletter* issued by the National Center for Citizen Involvement (1214 16th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036), sponsor of various nongovernmental agencies. He also describes an idea for "a free trade department store."

> It would give "duebills" (country stores used to give them to farmers for eggs and cream) to people bringing in useful merchandise. The duebills could be traded for any merchandise in the store, or for goods or services available through the Exchange Yellow Pages. A way to help beat both inflation and

unemployment. And an alternative to the bother of holding garage sales.

Summarizing the merits of exchange, Ellery Foster says (in a newsletter issued twice monthly):

> Free trade is based on the idea that, if left to themselves, people are cooperative beings who can and will work together for their mutual benefit. However, the present economic system has shifted that truth just enough to allow the means of exchange, the dollar, to be predominant in the dealings among individuals. Since the dollar is more or less rigid in its use and value, all the give and take of barter and the accompanying interaction of individuals is effectively removed from the scene. By setting the dollar aside, for the most part, within the Free Trade Exchange, we are all able to use the skills we have (a combination uniquely our own) to obtain the services we need in a way that's socially satisfying and non-threatening to everyone involved.

This seems a good place to recall a book published in 1975 by the University of Minnesota—*Winona: Toward an Energy Conserving Community*, edited by Huldah Curl, of the faculty of Continuing Education in the Arts, University of Minnesota. This book is a comprehensive study of the city by design students of the University, showing what is and what might be, with street and neighborhood plans and models illustrating recommended transformations. It is sure to be of value for anyone thinking about radical improvement of urban areas. The book takes its conclusion from an Illinois farmer, who says:

> Both the far left and the far right are emphasizing individual and local community effort. And puny as the individual and his wind generator, or the neighborhood and its anaerobic digestor may seem at the present, where else can we begin?