

# The Long- Legged House



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COUNTERPOINT  
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# Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

## [I](#)

[The Tyranny of Charity](#)

[The Landscaping of Hell: Strip-Mine Morality in East Kentucky](#)

[The Nature Consumers](#)

## [II](#)

[The Loss of the Future](#)

[A Statement Against the War in Vietnam](#)

[Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience in Honor of Don Pratt](#)

[I](#)

[II](#)

[III](#)

[IV](#)

[V](#)

[VI](#)

[VII](#)

# III

The Rise

The Long-Legged House

I

II

A Native Hill

I

II

III

*Copyright Page*

# The Loss of the Future



WE ARE A REMNANT people in a remnant country. We have used up the possibilities inherent in the youth of our nation: the new start in a new place with new vision and new hope. We have gone far toward using up our topsoils and our forests and many of our other natural resources. We have come, or we are coming fast, to the end of what we were given. The good possibilities that may lie ahead are only those that we will make ourselves, by a wiser and more generous and more exacting use of what we have left.

But we are still an exceedingly destructive people, and our destructions are still carried out, as they have been from the beginning, on the assumption that the earth is inexhaustible, and that we, the predestined children of abundance, are infallible. We live in a fallen world by the dangerous presumption that *we* are unfallen. Only a nation that is conscious of its own guilt can change and renew itself. We are guilty of grave offenses against our fellow men and against the earth, but we have not admitted that we are.

We must be tried now by the knowledge that what is at stake in our behavior is the world. The world is now our dependent. It is at our mercy. We have reached a point at which we must either consciously desire and choose and

determine the future of the earth or submit to such an involvement in our destructiveness that the earth, and ourselves with it, must certainly be destroyed. And we have come to this at a time when it is hard, if not impossible, to foresee a future that is not terrifying.

It is deeply disturbing, and yet I think it is true, that as a nation we no longer have a future that we can imagine and desire. The best we are able to hope for now seems to be to avoid chaos and obliteration by a sequence of last-ditch compromises. We have lost the hopeful and disciplining sense that we are preparing a place to live in, and for our children to live in. Instead of an articulate vision of a decent world, we have the bureaucracy and the rhetoric of the Great Society, an attempt through organization and wealth to delay or avoid the obligation of new insight, a change of ways, a change of heart. We do not believe in problems that do not have "practical" solutions. We have become the worshipers and evangelists of a technology and wealth and power which surpass the comprehension of most of us, and for which the wisest of us have failed to conceive an aim. And we have become, as a consequence, more dangerous to ourselves and to the world than we are yet able to know.



THE GREAT INCREASE of our powers is itself maybe the most immediate cause of our loss of vision. It must be a sort of natural law that any increase in man's strength must involve a lengthening of his shadow; as we grow in

power we are pursued by an ever-growing darkness. Our science has given us poisons that we cannot be trusted not to use against our land, or against our kind. Our mechanical skill has given us machines that have, as a necessary concomitant of the power to build, the power to destroy—and we have used them to destroy. Our power over the atom has made *us* the prospective authors of Doomsday, though it has not made us capable of guessing the full implications and requirements of such power. Even medical science, in addition to its benefits, must produce the horrors of overpopulation, and the hardly less troubling increase in the number of people who live beyond the pleasure of living. The anxiety is compounded by the doubt that man has ever possessed anything that he has not at some time made the motive or the means of his evil—or that he hasn't sooner or later put to the worst possible use.

Power has darkened us. The greater it grows, the harder it is for us to see beyond it, or to see the alternatives to it. It exercises as compelling an influence on us, who possess and use it, as it does on those we use it upon and against. In spite of all our official talk, now, about our high motives in Vietnam, most of us suspect that the only dependable explanation of our presence there is that we are strong enough to be there; for some, that seems also to be a justification. The rule, acknowledged or not, seems to be that if we have great power we must use it. We would use a steam shovel to pick up a dime. We have experts who can prove there is no other way to do it. A question that must trouble the rest of the world a good deal more than it troubles us is: Can we learn to use our power to avoid the doom of it? Has anybody—ever?

Along with the growth of our power, our history has acted to dull our sense of the future. Our history is not only the fund of inspiring events that in our obsessive self-congratulation we have made it out to be—it is also the record of a tragic and shameful wasting of the land and of human possibility. We have a past that has fed greedily and indiscriminately on our future. And the evidence is all around that the habits of the past are still present.

We come to the problem of the future, then, not with the endowments of a new nation and with all time before us, but handicapped by a history and a habit of waste, our power only doubtfully in control, and time turning against us.



CONSIDERATION OF THE future—which has become for us, now, so largely a question of self-control—leads necessarily to the consideration of ideals. Futurity and idealism are so closely involved with each other that, in my own mind, they function nearly as synonyms. The future is the time and the space and the ground of the ideal. The ideal, unless one believes in literal prophecy, is the only guide to the future. Men and nations who have no idealism—no order of hopefulness—have no future, or none they can bear to think about.

Our loss of any appealing vision of the future seems to me inseparable, in terms of both cause and effect, from our loss of idealism. Our public attitude has become political and cynical. Our political life is no longer

effectively disciplined by any articulate political ideal. Though we talk compulsively—or our politicians do—of our high destiny and aims, the truth is that we no longer expect much in that line, or hope for much. We don't hope for much because our estimate of human worth and human possibility has dwindled. We don't expect much because we expect our leaders to be corrupt as a matter of course. We expect them, as we say, to be "realistic."

But one of the most damaging results of the loss of idealism is the loss of reality. Neither the ideal nor the real is perceivable alone. The ideal is apparent and meaningful only in relation to the real, the real only in relation to the ideal. Each is the measure and corrective of the other. Where there is no accurate sense of the real world, idealism evaporates in the rhetoric of self-righteousness and self-justification. Where there is no disciplined idealism, the sense of the real is invaded by sentimentality or morbidity or cynicism and by fraudulent discriminations. And that is a fairly just description of the present state of our national life. The voice of it, of course, is that of the television: a middle ground, a no-place, between the ideal and the real, where mental and moral discriminations are not only ignored but are less and less possible. War is funny. Sex is surreptitious, omnipresent, consummated only in advertisements. Stupidity is only amusing, as are such personal afflictions as speech impediments. Violence is entertaining, and manly. Patriotism is either maudlin or belligerent.





I CANNOT AVOID the speculation that one of the reasons for our loss of idealism is that we have been for a long time in such constant migration from country to city and from city to city and from neighborhood to neighborhood. It seems to me that much of idealism has its source in the relation between a man and the place he thinks of as his home. The patriotism, say, that grows out of the concern for a particular place in which one expects to live one's life is a more exacting emotion than that which grows out of concern for a nation. The charity that grows out of regard for neighbors with whom one expects to live one's life is both a discipline and a reward; the charity that, knowing no neighbors, contributes to funds and foundations is, from the personal standpoint, only an excuse. It is patriotism in the abstract—nationalism—that is most apt to be fanatic or brutal or arrogant. It is when charity is possible only through institutions that it becomes indifferent, neither ennobling to the giver nor meaningful to the receiver. Institutional neighborliness can function as the very opposite of neighborliness, without impairing the moral credit or the self-satisfaction of the supporters of the institution. There is good reason, for instance, to suspect that the foreign mission programs of certain Christian denominations have served as substitutes for decent behavior at home; in return for saving the souls of Negroes in Africa, one may with a free conscience exploit and demean the lives of Negroes in one's own community.

The breakup of our small communities and neighborhoods has produced a society of ghettos. I don't mean just the much-noticed ghettos of minority races and the urban poor. There are also ghettos of the rich, the intellectuals, the scientists, the professors, the politicians,

and so on and on. These ghettos are not necessarily made up of groups living in the same place, but the people in them have the same assumptions, the same sort of knowledge, the same mentality, often much the same experience. They communicate mostly, or exclusively, with each other. Their exclusiveness and insularity foster the same homogeneity of attitude and the same self-protective psychology as any other ghetto. It is possible in the larger cities to live in a liberal intellectual ghetto, in which basic assumptions are rarely challenged or argued. It is possible to live in a university ghetto in which scholars and theoreticians converse only with other scholars and theoreticians in the same "field." Washington, one gathers, has a ghetto of politicians and a ghetto of bureaucrats—or several of each.

Those who by natural endowment and by training might have become the spokesmen and representatives of the ideal in our life have instead become specialists—experts in aspects. Those equipped by wealth or by power to bear great responsibilities have gathered into communities of themselves, insulated specifically against the claims of responsibility. What we have, as a result, are not communities but fragment-communities, the fragments communicating by means that can only be institutional.

But ideals grow out of and are corrected by the sense of the whole community and the individual's relation to it. There is no partial idealism. Specialists, answerable only to the requirements of their speciality, are remote from the possibility of idealism—hence, so far as the life and health of the community are concerned, they are without controls, particles in an expanding disorder. They are obviously and even notoriously prone to self-interest and

to the perversion or misuse of their abilities. And they are indefatigable self-justifiers.



ANYONE TOTALLY COMMITTED to a single pursuit almost inevitably becomes the propagandist of his own effort. As a nation of specialists, we have become a nation obsessed with self-justification. When we don't have it, we make it. And we are by now familiar enough with the make-work of manufacturers who need products, scholars who need projects, politicians who need issues, generals who need armies. We speak the language of a people bent on justifying everything we do or want to do, whether it is justifiable or not.

This preoccupation, with its consequent language of self-praise, is epidemic. It is chronic at the highest levels of the government. Much of the blame for the erosion of our idealism must be laid to the government, because the language of ideals has been so grossly misused by the propagandists. The liars of policy and public relations are addicted to a rhetoric of high principle. Our political ideals fill their mouths as unctuously, and with as little involvement of conscience or intelligence, as so many pieces of fat meat.

In the discussions over our war in Vietnam Senator Fulbright has asked whether we might be guilty of "arrogance of power." Even if one is disposed to believe in our innocence, it must be acknowledged that the question is of the sort that a moral people ought to be willing to

bear against itself and to make the occasion of a strenuous self-appraisal. Instead, the President and others in the government have replied with repetitions of what they have always said, hardly varying the rhythm, and with insinuations against the character of Senator Fulbright—providing perhaps the clearest evidence so far that we have indeed become arrogantly powerful. We deal with what is surely the most relevant question that can be raised in a powerful country by ignoring it. We ignore it by using against it the language of our idealism, made so dogmatic and sanctimonious and automatic as to be proof against criticism, doubt, argument, even evidence—all that a live idealism must not only accept but invite. Our ears have been so dulled by such talk that we no longer notice how readily its voices slide from principle to self-righteousness and self-congratulation, and from that to personal slur. If one *subscribes* to high principles with enough fanfare, one need not act on them. So long as government speaks with a fervent idealism it is free to prolong its inertia and to indulge in expedient corruptions.

This eagerness to assure institutional survival at any cost is apparent also in the churches, and most of the clergy speak an inflated high-tone language that is analogous in character and in function to the government's rhetoric. It is the language of a group mentality so perfectly certain of its rightness in everything that the answers are all implicit in the questions, and the questions in the answers—a language seeking the comfort of belief without alternative.

As a consequence of this fragmentation and vaporization of the ideal, reality becomes a sort of secular inferno in which nothing good is imaginable. This is the realism of

many of our writers, but there is no reason to believe that it is only literary; it is a prevalent state of mind. When we look to the future we see no such visions as Jefferson saw; we see the cloud of Hiroshima standing over the world. We know, though we make it a desperate secret from ourselves, that in refusing the restraints of principle that might have withheld that power, we created not only an epochal catastrophe, but also the probability that it will happen again.



IN A SOCIETY of ghettos many of the vital labors of our duty to each other cease to be personal. They are necessarily taken over by institutions; the distances between the giver and the receiver, the asker and the answerer, are so great that they are simply no longer negotiable by individuals. A man living in the country or a small town might aid one or two needy neighbors himself; the most obvious thing for him to do would *not* be to phone some bureau or agency of the government. But what could he do if he were to try to exercise the same charitable impulse in an urban slum, or in Appalachia? The moral dilemma is suggested by a walk on the Bowery, equipped with common decency and a pocketful of change. What is the Samaritan expected to do when he meets, instead of one in need, hundreds? Even if he had the money, he would not have the time. Now, in America, I think he is likely to feel that he is expected to do nothing. He is able to reflect that there are organizations to take

care of that sort of thing.

My point is not that these agencies do their work badly, but that having contributed to one of them, or even having heard of one, the citizen is freed of a *concern* that is one of the necessary disciplines of citizenship. And the institutionalization of charity has its counterparts in all aspects of our life, from the government down.

The usurpation of private duties by the institutions has fostered in the public mind the damaging belief that morality can be divided neatly into two halves: public and private. It appears easy now to assume that institutions will uphold and enliven the principles of democracy and Christianity, say, while individuals may without serious consequence pursue the aims of self-interest by the methods and the standards of self-interest. It is hardly necessary to say that men are commonly found who give passionate oratorical support—and, through the institutions, financial support—to the ideals of liberty and brotherhood, at the same time that in their private lives they behave and speak in ways antithetical to those ideas. It thus becomes possible to imagine the development among us of a society that would be perfectly hypocritical: a democratic government without democratic citizens, a Christian church among whose members there would be no Christians. In such a society it would be natural rather than disturbing for the exercise of patriotism to be taken over by investigating committees and the F.B.I. and the Pentagon, private conscience replaced by the Internal Revenue Service, governmental charity programs used to enrich the rich, churches used as social clubs and conscience sops for the dominant classes, ideals made the gimmicks of salesmanship, decent behavior adopted as the

sham of campaigns.

The notion of a difference between private and public morality is, of course, utterly fraudulent—a way of begging every difficult question. Only men—separate, specific, one by one—can be moral. What is called the morality of a society is no more than a consequence of the morality of individuals. There is, by the same token, no such thing as a purely private morality, for the morals of private citizens are public *in effect*, and are increasingly so.

For some time now the government has been carrying on what it calls a War on Poverty. The government people speak of this program in tones which imply that it is the effort of a highly moral people. I do not believe it. Like some other current federal projects, it is a matter that the government talks about a great deal more than the people do. It does not contemplate any revision of our assumptions or our aims. It does not involve any change of heart or mind among the people of the country or the government. Uncritical of the powers and attitudes among us that have caused poverty, it can only cynically claim to hope to cure it.

There are a number of characteristics of the poverty war that seem to me typical of governmental high purpose. The government people have been congratulating themselves on it *from the beginning*; it may be that they reveal some doubt about it by being so unwilling to wait for results. The program has vastly elaborated and empowered the institutional presence of the government all over the country, and has vastly increased the number of people dependent on the government. It is an inspiration to freeloaders and grafters and chiselers. The program goes about its business with such fanfare, drawing so much

attention to its own workings, that its specific effects are hardly noticed.

The worst is that the War on Poverty is a big generalization, giving suck to, and pregnant with, a great company of little generalizations. It has been made the occasion, for instance, of much squabbling among the social planners as to whose generalization about “the poor” is the most humane. What one hopes for is a beginning in the minds of those people of some suspicion that their generalizing may itself be inhumane. It is not just or merciful or decent to treat people as abstractions. It is not tolerable to be treated as one. *Who*, and by what divine authority, determined that *all* who make under three thousand dollars a year are “poor”? Who except a robot would have the impudence to confront another man—a small farmer, say, with a garden, a milk cow, meat hogs, and an income of twenty-six hundred dollars a year, who farms because he *likes* to—with the news that, by a decree of his government, he is to be considered a pauper? Is there no sociologist or bureaucrat who can imagine how this sort of thing would sound to a man who is looking another man in the eye?



AND SO THERE are a number of developments in our society that have radically narrowed and darkened the moral space surrounding the individual life. That being true, and growth and change being now so nearly overpowering in themselves, it is perhaps not surprising



that we have so little resistance to the temptation to think in terms of the expedient rather than the desirable, the temporary rather than the permanent, cures rather than preventions, painkillers rather than cures. Each problem or act tends to be isolated from all others, seen in terms of its own immediate conditions, related neither to principle nor to history, preyed upon by anxiety and by haste. To some extent this may be a necessary weakness of the institutional mentality, but this kind of thinking is apt to receive the acquiescence of most citizens, who accept "practicality" as the highest standard of public conduct. When the people have neither the incentive nor the moral means to resist and correct their institutions, they are poorly served by them. They become their servants' servants.

As more and more of the moral prerogatives of the individual are taken over by institutions and by agencies of the government, the individual does *not* become more secure and more happy. He becomes more confused, because moral standards in the hands of organizations will no longer answer the questions or illuminate the conditions of private persons. They become too generalized, too pumped up by righteous rhetoric, demanding too automatic and subservient an allegiance.

If the institutionalization of morals, as in the organized charities, involves a contradiction in terms, the same must surely be said of the legalization of morals, as in the civil rights laws and the Medicare program and the issuance of government standards for business. The more explicit and detailed and comprehensive the law becomes, the more limited is the moral initiative of the citizen. It might be debated whether the citizen loses his moral prerogatives

because they are “grabbed” by the government, or whether they are only *assumed* by the government after they have been abdicated by the citizen. In my opinion the latter is more likely: If the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments had been responsibly received by the people and the states, the recent civil-rights legislation would not have been necessary; if doctors had been more interested in service than in earnings, there might have been no need for Medicare; if the automobile makers had had either pride in their work or respect for their customers, perhaps they would not have needed to come to Washington, pleading their right to discipline themselves.

A more important concern, once it is recognized that citizens do abdicate their responsibilities, is *why* they do it. And how is it that some of those most guilty of irresponsibility turn up among the loudest advocates of freedom, and among the loudest objectors to “big government”? Freedom to do what? Instead of big government, what? It is certain, I think, that the best government is the one that governs least. But there is a much-neglected corollary: the best citizen is the one who least needs governing. The answer to big government is not private freedom, but private responsibility. If it is too late, as some think, for that answer to be given now, that is the fault of those who might have given it from the beginning, but refused to.



THE MOST OBVIOUS reason for the abdication of personal responsibility in this country, I think, is the great difficulty of the ideals of Christianity and democracy that are most native to us. These ideals place an extraordinary moral burden on the individual as the result—and the reward—of their extraordinary high estimate of the individual's worth. The follower of these beliefs finds himself in anxiety and trouble. If he loves his neighbor as himself, he has no reason to expect that he will not be hated in return. If he holds out for the political liberty of his neighbor, he has no assurance that his neighbor will not vote against him, or his principles, or even against political liberty. His convictions threaten him with the likelihood that he will have to act purely on principle—without certainty that the result of his act will be of practical benefit to him, without even the assurance that it will not be painful or costly to him—and that he will have to measure his life by standards so demanding that he must accept failure as a condition of effort. There is a sense, in other words, in which Christianity and democracy are moral predicaments. They propose an intellectual and emotional hardship, for which they do not provide either an easy solution or a handy comfort.

The typical reaction to this hardship is to take refuge in institutional formulas and regulations, to substitute reverential lip service and dues paying for the labor implied by the demands of the ideal upon the real. One imagines that there exists no greater potential of torment than in the minds of racist democrats or Christian militarists. That such as these are not noticeably prone to moral anguish is in my opinion owing almost wholly to the sanctified double talk characteristic of institutions. The

same mentality that produced the notion of “Christian soldiers, marching as to war” now produces the notion of a “peace offensive.” And in most of our talk about liberty and dignity our political institutions have permitted us to imply, with perfect consistency and propriety, the adjective *white*.

Another reason why we hold ourselves less and less accountable to our ideals is the habitual misrepresentation of these ideals to the young. Christianity and democracy are by definition problematic. Since it may reasonably be doubted that either has been fully and fairly tried by any society, they may even be considered experimental. They have so far produced more questions than answers. But they are commonly presented to the young *as solutions*—the packages in which all the problems of the human condition are neatly and finally tied up. Most Americans no doubt remember from their childhood the voices telling them: *All you have to do is vote. All you have to do is believe.* The problems of behavior and character and intelligence are all right, in their place. But what will lead the whole gang finally to the Promised Land, heaven on earth, or earth in heaven, is that pair of acts of brute faith. All that is needed is a consensus. The result is that the necessary stamina is not developed. The result is precocious disillusionment, weariness, cynicism, self-interest.

A third reason is that, in the minds of increasing numbers in the businesses and professions, the ideals of service and excellence have been replaced by the ethic of success, which holds that the highest aims are wealth and victory. To an alarming extent our schools and colleges are geared for the production of that kind of success, and are

turning out graduates who not only do not desire any other kind but cannot recognize any other kind. Here is an ethic that can be clarified in a column of figures. It can be dealt with adequately by computers. It is made to order for everybody, except poor people and losers.

It is a bogus ethic because it is so specialized and exclusive. It is of use only to dominant groups. To the majority of the world's people it can seem neither an aspiration nor a justification. The wealth of some is always accompanied by the poverty of others. And it ought to be clear that where there are victors there must be losers. That we find these things so easy to ignore suggests how far our conscience has strayed into that middle ground where intelligence is impossible.



WE HAVE—AS we were once eager to boast, but now reasonably fear—made a significant change in the human condition. Such power has grown into our hands that we must now look on ourselves not just as the progenitors but also as the *grantors* of such life as may continue on this planet. And in that a great deal is changed.

One might make a sort of formula: The growth of power increases the capability (and, apparently, the likelihood) of destruction, which must involve a proportionate increase of responsibility, which defines a need for a *developing* morality. That does not necessarily mean the continuous development of new moral principles. It does mean the continuous renewal of principles in the light of new

circumstances, the continuous renewal and enlivening of the language of morality—to clarify, among other things, the identity of private and public responsibility.

Since 1945 it has been generally acknowledged that the world is our dependent. It has been acknowledged, that is, that it is the dependent of those governments capable of atomic holocaust. But it is becoming more and more apparent, as we continue to contaminate the soil and water and air and to waste and misuse the natural wealth, that the world is also the dependent of private organizations and individuals: corporations, contractors, developers, mining companies, farmers with modern chemicals and machines. Because of the enormous increase in the economic and technological power of individuals, what once were private acts become public: the consequences are inevitably public. A man on a bulldozer can scarcely make a move that does not affect either his neighbors or his heirs. All his acts, so empowered, involve a tampering with the birthright of his race.

The recognition of that amazing and terrifying dependence, and of the great difficulty of the obligation it implies, ought to make the beginning of a new moral vision, a renewal of the sense of community.

For too long the ideal role of the individual in our society—the role the talented young have aspired to almost by convention—has been that of the specialist. It has surely become as plain as it needs to be that what we need most now are not the specialists with their narrowed vision and short-range justifications, but men of sympathy and imagination and free intelligence who can recognize and hold themselves answerable to the complex

responsibilities of a man's life in the world.

The failure of the modern cities, I think, is that they have become, not communities, but merely crowds of specialists and specializations. The businessman, the physician, the technician are specialists not only in the sense that they have become expert in narrow disciplines, but also in the sense that they accept the confinement of their discipline as the exact equivalent of the old idea of community responsibility or neighborliness. Thus the specialist who produces a drug or a formula or a technique or a machine may feel that he has done his "duty," no matter what use may be made of his work by others. The moral limits of his specialty are apt to coincide with his personal and selfish aims; what he has produced advances his career whether it advances the common good or not; his expertise and his self-interest slide smoothly together around him like the two halves of a capsule. Specialization, in this sense, is little more than a euphemism for moral loneliness; morally, the specialist is a man out of control, an erratic particle. The rioter in the black ghetto is a specialist of much the same kind, differing only in that he has not refused the obligation of neighborliness, but has been denied it.

The modern city, then, is in the fullest sense of the word a crowd, a disorderly gathering of people. Loneliness is on the rampage in it—so many separate lives pursuing their own ends among and through and in spite of the lives of all the others. And the disease that is destroying the community is destroying the families and the marriages within the community.

A community is not merely a condition of physical proximity, no matter how admirable the layout of the

shopping center and the streets, no matter if we demolish the horizontal slums and replace them with vertical ones. A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.

Now it has become urgent that the sense of community should include the world, that it should come to be a realization that all men ultimately share the same place, the same nature, and the same destiny. But this most necessary feeling that the world is a neighborhood cannot, I think, be expected to grow among the crowds of strangers that fill the cities. If it is to be hoped for at all, it is to be hoped for among the people who have had the experience of being involved responsibly and knowingly, and at some expense of their feelings and means, in the lives of their neighbors.

Against a long-standing fashion of antipathy, I will venture to suggest that the best model we have of a community is still the small country town of our agricultural past. I do not mean that this was ever a perfect community, or that it did not have serious faults, or that it can be realistically thought of as a possibility that is still before us. But with its balance of variety and coherence, it is still more suggestive of the possibility of community, of neighborhood, than anything else we have experienced. Whatever may be said against it, it did bring into the condition and the possibility of neighborliness a number of people who varied a good deal in occupation,



income, education, and often in opinion. Different sorts of people, different kinds of experience and levels of education were in constant touch with each other, and were taught and disciplined by each other. Knowledge of neighbors was encouraged and cultivated, by the natural curiosity that produced either gossip or understanding, and also by the caution and interest of business dealings. A merchant or banker in one of those towns, dealing constantly with the problem of whom to credit, would in a lifetime gather up an authoritative knowledge of literally thousands of people. He gained from his business, in addition to his living, a profound and various experience of other men.

Though it was not inevitable, it was certainly possible in such a community for the life of a merchant or lawyer or teacher or doctor to be inspired and disciplined and even ennobled by a precise sense of its relation to other lives, its *place* among them, its usefulness and duty to them. Those places did not have the dead look of modern suburban towns in which the people live but do not work. The population was reasonably stable. People expected to remain in the same place all their lives, and often they did.

In those communities it was always at least possible that charity could be personal, and that possibility enforced the likelihood that it would be. A man whose neighbor was hungry would give him something to eat because it was the natural thing to do. He knew who his neighbor was. And he felt, without needing to be told by a sociologist, that the condition of his neighbor was a reflection on him. Because he knew his neighbor it was possible for him to care about him, or be his friend, or love him.

But the ideal community would include not just the

living; it would include the unborn. It would be aware, with a clarity and concern which the best of us have hardly imagined, that the living cannot think or speak or act without changing the lives of those who will live after them. There would be a language, not yet spoken in any of our public places, to manifest and convey that awareness—a language that would live upon the realization that no man can act purely on his own behalf, not only because it is not desirable that he should do so, but because it is in reality not possible.