

# Perspective



## Our Impending Golden Age

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**I**T SEEMS QUITE EVIDENT that for the next several decades at least, which is not very long, our planet can produce and will yield to man all of the raw materials man can possibly need, regardless of his numbers, to provide the most satisfying or satiating levels of living for all mankind. The problem of equitable distribution of this bounty, and the problem of what men will choose to make of their materialism, are problems of politics, economics, and sociology charged with inestimable challenge. These are even now receiving the most intensive study by national and international groups of scientists within and without the intellectually powerful United Nations. May their planning be blessed with wisdom!

Their task is surely difficult; for the underdeveloped countries do not now have the means to exploit their own resources; they do not have the harnessed power or the know-how to construct and use the machines of modern industrialism, nor the means to buy from or barter with richer nations for the essential power and machinery and know-how. Moreover, the simpler resources needed for survival—the agricultural resources which supply food, fiber, shelter, fuel, and water—keep on being depleted in less developed nations by the pressure of increasing populations, as they do in the United States by the pressure of industrial expansion. Communication makes known everywhere the better standards of living in more developed countries; local demands upon local government for better levels (and fast) lead to political unrest and instability. Nevertheless, international efforts to spread the bounty have begun.

Regardless of their success, we in the United States are facing an age of unprecedented bounty and unprecedented leisure. If in the enjoyment of material prosperity man can also use his time and his resources to enhance his natural, as distinguished from his material spirit, he will contribute most to prolongation of the race.

This is not to suggest that the Malthusian problem is unimportant. To know how to use our resources and our leisure wisely requires a comprehension of what in fact is happening to man and to the earth and quite desperately to the resources of the earth on which mankind depends.

It is reassuring to know that the “prophets of plenty” believe that this planet, as it is manned by ever more knowing engineers, scientists, and industrial promoters, can be made to produce enough new raw materials and new synthetic essences to care for all the new children all the women in the world can ever conceive. It is important to note, however, that so far the application of such promises has not yet brought our annual resource budget into balance.

We can see implicit in these facts and beliefs the uncertainty of the element of time—the time in which, if ever, science can catch up and turn the red ink into black; the time, if ever, when expanding consumption will have reached the limit of growth. But there is nothing uncertain about the fact that man now has available enough raw materials and enough knowledge and productive capacity to make these next several decades the most extraordinary Golden Age in all history.

Whether or not during that time we can succeed in repairing our lost resource capital and balancing our budget for the future will pose the significant challenge of the coming Age of Leisure. This will have far-reaching impact on our mores, customs, and modes of thought and life. It will present new economic problems and new problems in education. With 140 to 150 hours of leisure time each week, in these decades ahead, it is high time to ponder how we shall use them toward the salvation of our spirits, the contentment of our egos, and the ultimate restoration and protection, we may hope, of the natural resources on which the future security and welfare of mankind depends.