How is government to achieve this role? That, dear sir or madam, the author quite properly leaves to you. He has written "Community Lost." The voters will have to write "Community Regained."

DON KNOWLTON

Shall We Choose Starvation?

The Road to Abundance, by Jacob Rosin and Max Eastman. 166 pp. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company. $3.50

Although the dour ghost of Pastor Malthus continues to mock the efforts of Point Four missionaries and other apostles of plenty, there is actually very little doubt that hunger, as a limiting factor of life on this planet, is at least *potentially* obsolete. The rope that hobbles the modern technological elephant is made out of nothing more substantial than ancient habit and contemporary political ineptitude. Given full release, in what Dr. Rosin calls "a chemistic society," the existing potentials of abundance provided by multitudinous applications of physico-chemistry could probably be realized sufficiently within a century so that mankind would have to find something else to worry about than physical survival.

In *The Road to Abundance* Dr. Rosin, helped by Max Eastman's expert editing, argues persuasively that we have in our hands the weapons needed to slay all the dragons of scarcity with respect to food, metals, and energy. All we need to do is to mobilize on a sufficient scale, as we did when we developed the atomic bomb and the synthetic rubber industry, our available resources of knowledge, skills, and technological equipment.

What's stopping us, then? A vicious circle, says Dr. Rosin. "A chemistic society is impossible," he writes, "until scientists think along chemistic lines, and such scientists are not produced by a nonchemistic society. However, we have faith in humanity to believe that this vicious circle can be broken. We refuse to admit that scientific conservatism, mental procrastination, and plain ignorance will prevail forever over the vital interests of the entire human race. . ."

The writer shares this faith, but regrets that Dr. Rosin did not include in his excellent but too-short book an adequate analysis of the social and political forces that not only delay the parturition of a chemistic society but threaten to abort it. The result may well be that we shall actually *choose* the road to starvation and destruction rather than the road to abundance.

The roadblock is essentially political and it is not adequately described by the phrases "scientific conservatism, mental procrastination, and plain ignorance." Again and again, in this book, one feels these obstructive forces casting their chilling shadow over the sunny and far from utopian landscapes Dr. Rosin is able to sketch out of the admirable breadth of his knowledge.

What would a chemistic society be like? It would be a society freed from the tyranny of the plant and of the mine; a society that would turn its wheels and power its television sets—if we *must* have television sets even in a chemistic society—by energy drawn directly from the sun and possibly concentrated by means of vast fields of parabolic mirrors.

Such a society could feed itself by growing chlorella, an alga which multiplies itself seven times a day and yields harvests of 55,000 pounds an acre—either proteins or fats, as desired. We might also sieve from the ocean its inexhaustible harvests of plankton.

For a little while we would continue to grow potatoes and the cheap grains for carbohydrates, but only until vast supplies of solar energy became available. Then we would proceed to tap the inexhaustible store of carbon dioxide in the air and synthesize starch from formaldehyde. At that point, writes Dr. Rosin, " 'Give us our daily bread' will begin to sound as incongruous as would 'give us our daily oxygen' today. The abundance of our most essential food will be absolute."

To achieve these prodigies machines will be necessary, of course, and machines are made of metals, the supply of which is nearing exhaustion. Dr. Rosin leaps this hurdle with the greatest of ease. Sea water, he points out, is not only incomparably richer in minerals than the mines but is constantly enriching itself with the minerals leached from the eroding land, including about two billion tons of uranium and still greater amounts of the common metals such as iron, copper, lead, and tin. We already get magnesium by electrolyzing sea water; we'll get all the other metals from the same source, or by processing the "dilute abundance" in which many of them are found in the earth—this assuming they are not displaced by new plastics. As for gasoline, supposing that we continue to use this fuel, the answer might be to grow about 35,000 square miles of chlorella, carbonize it into coke, and convert the coke into gasoline.

But when we grow chlorella we are still depending upon the plant for the photosynthesis that utilizes solar energy. Why not bypass the plant entirely, employ photochemical reactions to decompose water, and burn the hydrogen to generate electricity? Or better, generate electric current directly in photogalvanic cells? Promising starts in both directions have been made at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Illinois. And Dr. Rosin is probably right in his opinion that "if a fraction of the organized effort invested in the atomic bomb project had been invested in photochemistry, an absolute abundance of energy would already be at man's disposal."

No such investment is in prospect, because ours is not a chemistic society, which Dr. Rosin defines as "the kind of society that would arise if the natural sciences, with chemistry in the lead, were given a chance to create a genuine abundance of all the necessities of life."

Instead we have the kind of society in which probably half the time of our food chemists—to choose an example in a field where Dr. Rosin does not always write as critically as one might like—is spent not in releasing abundance but in loading the diet of an already malnourished population with scores of dubious chemical additives and ersatzes, the only justification for which is that they make money for somebody—sometimes. Or to put it more broadly, we have the kind of society in which our chemical and other mental and physical resources are largely wasted on silliness, on countless evasions, distortions, and perversions of valid human objectives, and on actual destruction as in war.

What's more, if we are to have any other kind of society, it is not likely to be the chemists who will give it to us. All roads lead to politics, and the release of abundance is finally a political problem, vastly more difficult to solve even than the mystery of photosynthesis.

JAMES RORTY

Wit and Versatility

The First Morning: New Poems, by Peter Viereck. 120 pp. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. $3.00

Peter Viereck is a wit, raconteur, ironist, and lyricist who can sing both high and low. He can use invective; he is intelligent and resourceful; and his imagination plays over the scenes around him in such fashion as to transform them even before the poem begins. For example, "Arethusa: The First Morning," a Phi Beta Kappa poem read at William and Mary College in 1951, is based on the theme that the nymph changed into the spring brings life and consciousness with her into these hitherto inanimate waters:

> Is being alive just something to get used to,
> Or always startling, like hoofprints on my mirror?

In these poems trees rise against men to cut them down; a plank addresses the people who have used it over the centuries for a coffin, the sides, and then the end of a ship; returning sons and heroes welcomed with all the appurtenances of love and civilization go berserk, and their father ends in the isolation of a magic and far island. All this could be mere virtuosity and playfulness, and sometimes indeed it is; but for the most part it is poetry of substance and many facets. Wit is not often lyrical; intelligence often strains off the emotion until anagrams of feeling are all that is left. But here the liveliness, the vigor of the perceptions, the willingness to take on any subject, are pretty well matched with a technical skill that turns his themes to poetic account.

Viereck's lyric poetry is deceptively simple. Words are repeated, girls compared to flowers, but they are also girls that can be whistled at:

> If blossoms could blossom
> One petal of petals
> To whom all other blooms are
> As leaves are to flowers,
> It would be to the others
> As you are, my daughter,
> To all other daughters
> Whom songs are adoring.
> For what am I here for
> If not to make love-songs
> Of all the world's beauty
> Whose birthday we share?

Viereck enjoys attacking his subjects by removing them from their ordinary contexts, by changing their names and habits. In two poems, "The Slacker Apologizes" and "The Slacker Need Not Apologize," he writes:

> We trees were chopping down the monsters in the
> Street to count their rings.

The willow here is the poet and he triumphs both over a weed who merely writes verse, and an oak who stands for an arboreal chamber of commerce and all bounden duty. In "Gladness Ode" the poet is a net fishing the moon from the midnight lake; bad news is brought from Ratisbon to Browning; a gnarled old apple tree answers that permanent target, Joyce Kilmer:

> I'll bow my trunk to true simplicity
> But not to folksy simperings that drool.
> Poems are made by trees like me,
> But only God can make a fool.

Mr. Viereck has three poems in German that expertly parody Rilke and Stefan George. He cheerfully goes to battle against the faddists of poetry:

> Today the women come and go
> Talking of T. S. Eliot.

and the new critics:

> Because a *texte* without a Muse in
> Is but a snore and an allusion.
> Well, then, let's turn the tables hard:
> The snobs all snubbed, the baiters baited,
> The explicators explicated,
> The avant-garde the new rearguard.

As for Mr. Viereck, he is his own man. There are, of course, perils in such versatility, in the quick hand and eye, and there are lines that betray them. Viereck is sometimes mannered and clever in a way more likely to convulse the undergraduates at Mount Holyoke than their elders. But there is a talent that breaks up the surfaces, that makes poetry a sharp weapon for onslaught and defense, the cherishing of virtue, and the undoing of philosophical hassles that have led to much confused prose.

EUGENE DAVIDSON