

The Meadow, the Sky, and the Vision

by Mark F. Sharlow

The year is 1965. A child stands at the top of a hill, looking out over a vast golden meadow. In the field below is a dirt trail. Bicycles sail by on the trail, carrying other children to their playful destinations. Beyond the far edge of the field is the sea. On the sea are boats and ships – distant descendants of the caravels and barkentines that once explored the unknown waters of Earth.

The bicycles may seem like simple devices, but they stand for one of humanity's oldest urges – the urge to travel farther and faster. When the bicycle was a new invention, it provided one of the better ways to achieve this goal. The boats and ships represent this same search for better transport, but they embody something more – the desire to travel in whole new environments, beyond the places available to the unaided human body. Bicycles, boats and ships may seem familiar, but all of them embody humanity's basic urge to overcome distance and separation – in other words, to *overcome space*. Viewed this way, these familiar means of transport are not simply machines, but are monuments to humanity's refusal to accept its limitations.

Return now to the child on the hill. Above the meadow is the sky. On one side of the sky is a propeller-driven airplane. On the other side is a helium-filled airship of the kind called a “blimp.”

The sky is the most important part of this meadow scene. The machines that lift humans to the sky are vivid reminders of the impulse that creates all transport: the desire to overcome the limits of distance and space. The fountainhead of this desire is an even deeper urge: the yearning to overcome *all* our limits, the urge to stop being playthings of chance and to become masters of our destinies.

The child sees bicycles, and dreams of the treehouses around the next hill.

The child sees ships, and dreams of ancient islands, remarkable journeys, and new lands awaiting an explorer.

The child sees airplanes, and dreams of rockets to the Moon, to the planets...and someday, to the stars themselves.

What created the bicycles, ships, and airplanes? The power of imagination! The child carries this power within, and uses it this day from the top of the hill.

The only limits on the human race’s next achievements are the limits of imagination...or rather, the limits on our willingness to use imagination, for imagination itself knows no limits.

When the power of imagination creates a better world, the result is called *progress*.

What is the essence of progress? This question has no single answer. The mental and spiritual engines that drive progress forward are many. The desire for a better life, free of problems such as poverty and disease, is one driving force. Another is simple curiosity – the natural, wholesome impulse to find out what is around the next corner, under the next rock, or beyond the next planet. But perhaps the most important motive for progress is the human capacity known as *vision*. Not the vision of the eye, but the vision of the visionary – the vision shared by poets, artists, inventors, and all who love the future.

The human mind is not satisfied with the actual – with what physically exists today. Instead, it “sees,” with a mental eye, the realm of the *possible* – of things the way they could be, instead of things the way they happen to be today.

Besides the world as it is, there is a better world – the world as it could be. The eye of imagination can see this other world behind the actual world. Imagination can dream of the day when the better world will become real.

The bodily eye may see a meadow. The mind’s eye sees what that meadow could be – free of human-made scraps and smog, vibrantly alive again. The bodily eye sees children playing in the meadow. The mind’s eye sees those children freed from disease, and perhaps even from aging and death. The mind’s eye sees the children happy, freed from poverty by new technologies that make abundance possible without damaging the earth. It sees the children freed from the fear of bullying and

abuse – freed by the rise of new societies that embrace freedom instead of status and coercion.

The eye of the body sees a radar tower. The mind's eye sees the radar tower again – its far-probing dish rotating against the backdrop of the dreaming sky, throwing down at the Earth the pulsing reflections of the sun. The mental eye of progress sees this remarkable machine used for good and not for evil – not as a tool of conflict, but as a guide for travelers around the Earth and even for journeys to the stars.

The eyes of the body see a petroleum refinery. The mind's eye sees better machinery for the same purpose. This new equipment is free of hazards to the environment, and builds remarkable useful substances from the basic materials of nature instead of from a limited and conflict-ridden resource like oil.

For each of humanity's creations on this planet, the eye of imagination can see another creation which is yet to be. The possible future is the fruit of the present world's flowering.

We must not be afraid to look upon this remarkably beautiful future. We must not hesitate to create it.