

A Leaf in Time



NON - FICTION * * * * *



David Walker, ill Mic Rolph, Portand Press, 32pp 1 85578 0976

This is an absolute gem of a book. The author's thesis is that without plants which live on air and water and use sunlight to make food we humans would have no air to breathe, no food to eat and no fuel. He explains this in brilliantly (*cf* **The House that Jack Built** or **The Very Hungry Caterpillar**) simple terms starting with the basic unit of photosynthesis -the chloroplast. Now there are as many chloroplasts in a sycamore leaf as there are people on this earth so the total global chloroplast-count makes a huge green army to grow our food, provide our oxygen and keep us warm, mobile and productive. However human 'need' for increased productivity, mobility and warmth sets up a fossil-fuel consuming process that is in effect photosynthesis backwards and this frantic reversal is upsetting the global balance in well publicised ways. Professor Walker gently urges us to learn from the leaves - if we could make solar panels that were as good as chloroplasts at turning light into electricity we could slow down fossil fuel use. And if, he says, we stop polluting the air and give plants time, green leaves could save us, by doing what they have always done. Seldom have I encountered a text so simple yet so thoroughly informative and in its best sense, instructive. It puts the whole global-warming scenario before the reader in a series of courses as easy to absorb as those of a carefully-planned meal. And, as with such a meal, a feeling of intellectual well-being remains after it, and energy for action is gently imparted. A leaf, in time, will look after the whole world; this small but lively book helps us understand how. At the price of two gallons of petrol, it is worth every penny and deserves a place on every shelf. **TP***

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