

JUST OVER FIFTY YEARS AGO, the poet W. H. Auden achieved what all writers envy: a prophecy that came true. It's embedded in a long work called *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, where Herod enlarges on the distasteful task of massacring the Innocents. He doesn't want to, because he is at heart a liberal. But still, he says, if that child is allowed to get away,

“One doesn't have to be a prophet to predict the consequences . . .

“Reason will be replaced by Revelation . . . Knowledge will degenerate into a riot of subjective visions—feelings in the solar plexus induced by undernourishment, angelic images generated by fever or drugs, dream warnings inspired by the sound of falling water. Whole cosmogonies will be created out of some