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Antidote and Paradox

A Comment

By DUDLEY WYNN

MR. FLETCHER says: "In short, where Russia faces the possibility of a vast expansion in the direction of machine mass-production, we in the United States must now face just as inevitable a contraction in exactly this field." Proceeding on this assumption, Mr. Fletcher finds that there is a definite place for handicrafts in our life, because with all the leisure the machine has given us, the unemployed must have something to do. These unemployed, I presume, are to leave the bread lines and begin making pottery, and are to go out and sell their pottery in competition with machine-made things. In this manner, the great unemployed "leisure" class is to retain its integrity, express itself, and maintain its hold upon its art as *property*.

Mr. Stevenson's way of thinking undermines this argument at its very foundation. Why do we face an inevitable contraction of machine mass-production? Why is it inevitable? It is inevitable only under the conditions of the competitive profit system. If the Machine were released from private control and were used for production, not for profits, there would be an inevitable *expansion* of mass-production. That is why Russia is expanding while we are contracting production. Are we so well-housed and well-fed that we could not consume more than is now being produced? Surely Mr. Fletcher would not say so, however little concern he may have for all the gadgets that machine mass-production could put forth. *Contraction* is inevitable only if one assumes that the present capitalistic system is endowed with eternal life. That is an assumption which Mr. Stevenson will not tolerate; and Mr. Fletcher, in assuming such, is playing right into the hands of the very thing he and the Agrarians of the South detest—the non-human mass-production of the North since

1860. Contraction may be inevitable, for contraction is Fascism, and Fascism may be inevitable; but Mr. Fletcher need not pretend to like this horrid inevitability. At least, he ought not to predicate our future upon such a system of contraction. The people have had a taste of abundant commodities, and they will not submit forever to a contraction in the supply of them. This much is pretty clear, to even a "bourgeois idealist": the Machine has come to stay; collectivization is one way of mastering and humanizing it; there is every possibility that a free Machine can attain to a high level of beauty, design, and quality in the products which it turns out in abundance.

That is why I wish that Mr. Fletcher had never admitted that the Machine has come to stay. As long as the Agrarians (Mr. Fletcher is, or was, one of them) denied, denounced, and vilified the Machine and its progeny—vulgarity, utilitarianism, the cheap concept of Progress, the still shabbier ideal of humanitarianism, the destruction of almost all civilized values—they were on solid ground and had a logically defensible position. But now that it is admitted that the Machine has come to stay, every one of the Agrarian ideals crumbles—which is only another way I have of saying that the Agrarian position was a very difficult one to begin with, because it was so strenuous an ideal. The Agrarian, the bourgeois idealist, the Humanist, all of us every day succumb to, and acquiesce in, the new cultural pattern of this new world-view (humanitarianism, progress, etc.) which is so unalterably opposed to the older world-view (humanism, religion, "the tragic view of life," etc.). How easy it is to succumb to the new, how difficult to adhere to the older tradition or discipline is beautifully illustrated by an address of the Humanist Norman Foerster at Rockford College, Illinois, recently. Mr. Foerster, in holding up for emulation the early Renaissance conception of liberal education as a stern discipline, inveighed against our shabby humanitarianism. How can anything great, he said in ef-

fect, come out of a society whose ideal is *comfort*? But then he had to say in a kind of undertone (I give merely the gist of his remarks) that, of course, we cannot deny the comfort of comfort, or the value of comfort. The intellectual climate, the fundamental *belief* of our age, vitiated Mr. Foerster's noble address. Mr. Foerster went out to slay a dragon, and ended by lying down to let the dragon lick his wounds. And there go all of us.

After all, the question of whether we shall or shall not have handicrafts and folk-arts is a very minor question. The presence of a folk-art (as that is at present conceived) is a symptom, not a cause. It is a symptom of certain kind of culture. The particular kind of culture which it is symptomatic of is a culture which reflects the fatalistic-superstitious-reverent view of life. Think of the English and Scottish popular ballads or of the American Indian. The world today holds the progressivist-amelioristic-scientific-utilitarian view. Whenever an automobile and a newspaper and a tourist come in contact with a ballad or an Indian, it is almost sure death to the ballad and the Indian. Mr. Fletcher, in holding out for a system of private property in the folk-arts as a kind of antidote to a hideous machine culture, is pleading a hopeless cause. Mr. Stevenson, in insisting that Soviet Russia nourishes and fosters folk-arts, is pleading a paradox. Everything that modern Russia stands for means the rapid extinction of folk-arts, as we use that term at present. The question today, I believe, is whether or not anything humanly satisfactory can be made out of a Machine culture. Mr. Fletcher does not solve the problem by proposing to take ten million men out of circulation and set them to weaving rugs and baskets. What about the other one hundred and ten million or more who are going to have to live with the Machine? Is there anything for them except machine-tending, spending, machine-tending, spending . . . ? This last question, by the way, is for Mr. Stevenson as well as Mr. Fletcher.

Rockefeller Center on the Camino

By T. M. PEARCE

THE discussion to which Mr. Crichton and Mr. Fletcher contribute in this QUARTERLY was begun by Mr. Wynn, Dr. Clark, and Mr. Stevenson in February. The five articles may now be reviewed by readers with the addition of Mr. Wynn's commentary and what editorial comment will here follow.

Late in the fall the editor of the QUARTERLY began to speculate upon what estimate could be made of the economic side of the regional movement in the Southwest. That Mary Austin and Frank Applegate had begun to think quite definitely in this direction is proved by the founding of the Spanish Colonial Arts Society which operated a shop in Sena Plaza for the merchandising of native goods. Before the death of Mrs. Austin, plans had been formed with her encouragement for the Spanish Market, in some ways successor to the Spanish Colonial Art Society's original shop. Years earlier, and relying primarily upon Indian goods, began the vast organization of Fred Harvey Curio Shops whose regional goods have been wholesaled and retailed in sums many a major industrialist concerned with machine made textiles, jewelry, and jardinières would respect. Our discussion has enjoyed no report from the director of the New Mexico Vocational Rehabilitation Bureau whose exhibits in Santa Fe and elsewhere have stressed the economic return brought to unemployables by the spinning of native wool, the weaving, carving, ornamental tin, and other crafts. San Jose Training School of the University of New Mexico, through community projects has I know figured impressively toward self support of small communities through crafts.

Though this is regional economy and of considerable monetary return, it does not settle the major problem of regionalism as an economic program, because all of the contributors recognize, as does this writer, that minorities are

engaged in it. Yet for fear we can make no more of our case for regional economics, let us repeat that here, in our very diversity of industry, whether of pinon, tortilla and tamale selling, or of curios and health, the economic aspects of Southwestern regionalism both in merchandising novelty and stressing special industries is not to be dismissed.

But to tackle the major issue: "Has Southwestern Regionalism or any Regionalism an economic program for a majority of its people?" Scientific planning, as Dr. Clark points out, will conserve water, forests, game, the range, and will make inevitable compromise between the land as nature and man as industrial scientific society. Yet it will not settle the contest between labor and capital, as outbreaks in the most improved machine-mining units of Gallup or Madrid testify. Mr. Stevenson believes that machines in socialized industries can be made to free the worker for folk arts, by time saving and energy saving instead of wasting both time and energy in competitive warfare for private profit. Mr. Fletcher points out that capitalism of one sort or another will remain, whether the state capitalism of the Soviet Republic or the private capitalism of the United States. This article is written just after listening to President Roosevelt's fireside radio talk of April 28th. It is pertinent to remark that unemployment has justified state capitalism in the United States through government projects on a vast scale, and if the currency and credit of banking are further integrated with the federal treasury system even a greater degree of state capital will be in reserve to supplement or dominate private capital.

What I've just written seems a far step from Southwestern regional economics, and yet from the start of the parley the issues were broader than regional, because regional met national and international industrial organization. It is from such a point of view Mr. Crichton writes—the national or world outlook as it faces the provincial. Mr. Crichton speaks of the coming to New Mexico of refugees

who "felt the need of justifying their flight" by the "mystical nonsense of God, the Indian, and the good dark earth." Yet one can scarcely fail to retort that aside from the question-begging term "nonsense," all the terms listed are good topics for reflection and if one needs to leave the city limits of metropolitan New York to think about God, to meet an Indian, and to see the good dark earth, we, among others, would take the step. One can be a refugee in one direction or the other.

We confess to wishing Mr. Crichton had footnoted the list of our leaders who were individuals "defeated by life and eager to escape it." None of the leaders here as I have known them answer to his description except D. H. Lawrence and perhaps his Southwestern hostess. C. F. Lummis, Frank Applegate, Eugene Rhodes, Mary Austin—to name only four of those who have led—can with little justice be said to have been "defeated by life and eager to escape it." That in more directions than one, each of them embraced life to its fullest, and founded almost schools of followers, present day Southwestern archaeology, crafts, literature, ideology and phraseology will testify.

How significant this is to be, the moment, here or in New York City, cannot decide. A little clear thinking both places will help. We represent rural America everywhere (with apologies to the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce). What our or any other community's native industries are to do in competition with the great syndicate stores, power, light, oil, cinema, automotive, steel, radio, etc., etc., is a matter for general reflection. The current is steadily toward standardization with the rest of America. When this standardization is complete, we shall be exactly where Mr. Crichton is now, wondering where to turn next.

Mr. Crichton says to us, "Cease to live in the past," but he cannot by words say to the past, "Cease to live in us." The past lives on in us both east and west. The air of economic and political discussion recently has been befogged

with such terms as "proletariat," "bourgeois idealist," "dialectical materialism," "middle class," "workers," "third international," "class struggle." The West and Southwest have always been acclaimed for an atmosphere where "the sky is not cloudy all day." Maybe a "North American man" can be grown on this soil and a "North American mind," borrowing something from the stature of New England's Emerson and the Southwest's Cowboy and Pueblan. From the former would derive a good deal of "mystical nonsense about God" and from the last a community ideal of how to get along with everybody else and sacrifice if need be to do it. The Cowboy, like the American man in general, regional or otherwise, would just see the thing through.