

# The Backwoods Progression

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THE American backwoods is unique in history. It is the one feature, along with pioneering, that is common to the different sections of this no longer commonly-minded country. It is, in fact, the only common ancestor, for pioneering and settling are the successive stages of one movement. This is especially true of the early period in the great Southwest when the pioneer would settle, pull up his stakes, and settle again. And for Americans today, on those rare moments when they consider the past, the backwoods citizen, partly nomadic, partly agricultural, alone has any real meaning. His qualities of sheer physical strength, self-possession, and courage have been abstracted into a state of mind which gives directly to the big business man his ruthless drive, to the gangster a cruel realism, and to the walkers of asphalt a vicarious feeling of power which readily makes them tools of those who possess power. And his reported self-confidence and will to liberty have injected into the nation's foreign policy a strange combination of arrogance, naïveté, and greed—a combination which has regularly made our foreign office the dupe of astute European politicians. Because of this backwoods-pioneering figure's singular importance to us, he will probably epitomize North American civilization for world history as the crusader epitomizes Christian Feudalism. Such habits of mind and body were noble

qualities for the backwoodsman; without them he would have perished; but as our only inheritance from the past, this backwoods spirit in its modern manifestation denotes a diseased body politic, a case of arrested growth in the public mind which forbids the establishment of any economic, political, or social stability.

It seems proper, at this time, when those mediums by which our common life was held together have broken down almost entirely, to examine into the historical implications of this legacy. When everybody lived in the woods, the term backwoods defined a peculiar sort of isolation, almost a half-savage autonomy. It was a fringe of near-anarchy to the agrarian society of Colonial times. Its contemporaneous meaning for the ruling gentry was a sort of lubberland. While running the line between Virginia and North Carolina, that English gentleman, William Byrd, commented that those backwoodsmen made

their wives to rise out of their beds early in the Morning, at the same time that they lye and Snore, till the sun has run one third of his course, and disperst all the unwholesome Damps. Then, after Stretching and Yawning for half an Hour, they light their Pipes, and, under the Protection of a cloud of Smoak, venture out into the open air; tho' if it happens to be never so little cold, they quickly return Shivering into the Chimney corner. When the weather is mild, they stand leaning with both their arms upon cornfield fences, and gravely consider whether they had best go and take a Small Heat at the hough; but generally find reasons to put off til another time. Thus they loiter away their Lives, like Solomon's Sluggard, with their arms across, and at the Winding up of the Year Scarcely have Bread to Eat. To speak the

Truth, tis a thorough Aversion to Labor that makes People file off to N. Carolina, where Plenty and a Warm Sun confirm them in their Disposition to Laziness for their whole Lives.

Undoubtedly a great part of this first American backwoods was made up of such men: escaped indentured servants, men who were tired of living on poor lands, criminals, hunters, the nondescript. But this universal fear of falling under Virginian rule cannot be set down to congenital lassitude. "A thorough Aversion to Labor" is too glib a definition to fit the case. The backwoodsman's fears of aristocratic Virginia has a more profound significance. When so many appear lazy, the matter is not with the individual but with society; and the matter with Colonial society was the Tory gentleman's rule. Byrd voices the contempt held always by the oppressor for the oppressed. Change the antique spelling and it will at once become evident how closely his remarks resemble the current criticisms made by the city man about the farmer. The ploughman's bankruptcy, economic and spiritual, is laid to shiftlessness and ignorance, cardinal sins in the aggressive man's eye, to be punished by a most thorough exploitation.

The Colonial backwoods was the extension of an advanced stage of a European revolution; and the Colonial gentleman, like his English counterpart, was the agent of these disrupting forces which had been at work since the sixteenth century. The gradual disintegration of Feudalism, hastened by Henry VIII's lust, broke down by degrees the forms of the estates, reducing the Kingdom's subjects to the unrestrained mercy of the ruling will or wills, since power quickly

slipped from mitre and sceptre. In feudal England the sovereignty had rested in Heaven; the King was God's overseer. But as the influence of the Church declined, he ceased to be the suzerain; dropped upon the defensive; and attempted to retain his position by absorbing in his private character the powers of sovereignty. This change progressed very rapidly through the Tudors, until rule by Divine Right took on with the Stuarts a very personal meaning. This house acted as if God had made it a present of the three kingdoms. Such a psychological change in the nature of the kingship would not have been understood before the Wars of the Roses. But certain sixteenth-century noble houses and most of the seventeenth-century commoners were quick to learn. The successful demands by these houses for a share in the church property confiscated by Henry VIII made their position in the State so strong that they were able to challenge the King's power. In the past the Church had seen to it that ambitious barons did not upset the social equilibrium; but there was no check now from distant Rome, and since the Church in England was responsible no longer to God but to the Government, those who might dictate its policies owned the British Isles as a cotton-planter owned his bale of cotton. This struggle with the Tudors and Stuarts, culminating in the Stuarts' overthrow, was the struggle with the king as a powerful individual over the new meaning of money. By the time of the Whig revolution of 1688 the idea of the State had completely changed in the English world.

The vanity of the Squirearchy and the upper yeomanry proved as great as that of the nobles and

princes, until every beef-eating Englishman was saying, in imitation of Louis XIV, "I, too, am the State!"; and the Presbyterian and Puritan ethical societies made the logical transference of God's beneficence to their lay concerns. To say that the State exists for private property is to say that it exists for the private will. It then follows that any individual who is cunning enough, or powerful enough, or lucky enough, may make of the State, of a group of States, or even of the world, a possession answerable to the commands of his desire. This is the old war against the gods. Out of it came the moral revolution that changed the mediaeval concept of the economic commodity from the thing-to-be-used to the thing-to-be-sold: the revolution at the bottom of the anarchy of the modern world.

The enclosure of the lands common to landlord and peasant took away the basis for the peasant's economic freedom; and when the North American continent was discovered (the world was now a thing-to-be-sold), it served as a refuge for the disaffected and a new field to conquer for men already masters of the technique of conquest. It was against this exploitation that the backwoods in the new world, where the land to the West was plentiful, grew darkly on the fringe of Colonial society, for the Colonial backwoodsman was not one of the conquerors. He was fleeing from them—from the same sort of domestic conqueror he had encountered in the old world. For a land to be invaded as the Normans invaded Britain may result in a cultural metamorphosis. But the backwoods is evidence of decay.

At the same time, the Colonies themselves were

large blocks of the English backwoods; and out of this condition of private exploitation came the American Revolution. The English Parliament, serving certain interests, did not have the imagination to visualize the temper of a people whose spirit of self-dependence had not been broken and could not be broken so long as there was plenty of unoccupied land. Because of this tremendous economic fact the exploiting gentry in the old world and their Tory allies in the new lost a continent. Liquors carry in their dregs the concentrated flavor of the drink; and the dregs of revolutionary society meant to share in the distribution of the continent. Their dissatisfaction with the Tory rule, shown explicitly in their fear of the Order of the Cincinnati, now took form in new theories of government springing from the natural-rights school. These theories crystallized around a new party, the early Republicans. Those who sought to continue the system of exploitation quickly formed a party, the Federalists, in opposition to the so-called Mob demands.

It was apparent that wise leaders could put this discontent with the old rule to noble uses. Jefferson came forward, and for one precious moment he and his supporters had it in their power to correct the mistakes of the Whig revolt of 1688. But Jefferson's political philosophy turned out to be inadequate to the changed set of circumstances; his strategy worse, although tactically he often displayed brilliance. His line of attack was an abstraction, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Federalists opposed to this a concrete, well-organized array of property rights. The weak point in Jefferson's defense was his own belief in a distorted conception of

property, albeit a specific kind, landed property and the kind of life it supported. This meant that his political activity concerned itself fundamentally with the same thing the Federalists espoused: the principle that the chief duty of the State is the protection of the property of individuals and aggregates of individuals. This is certainly one duty of government, but only as a means of guaranteeing the security and self-perpetuation of the family. Prohibiting kings, then allowing private citizens to own the State is certainly hopping from a very slow pan to a very hot fire. Instead of laying the broad foundations a State needs to rest upon—and these foundations are best laid upon the dogma of one religion—he raised the question as to which will, the middle-class or the agrarian, would own the continent.

He did not intend this. He hoped to produce a stable farming society, predominantly yeoman, in which the head of every family might be assured of an independent living for his dependents and the promise of security for his posterity. Much of Jefferson's special legislation—especially the abandonment of primogeniture and the separation of Church and State—contradicted his general idea and obstructed the establishment of the agrarian State. He placed his faith in a central government which would be the trustee for a league of free commonwealths, a trustee which would interfere as little as possible with the private wills, the yeoman Olympuses, scattered throughout the sovereign States. He managed to destroy the Federalist Party but incorporated, because of this faulty strategy, its most dangerous elements into the Republican ranks. And so the balance be-

tween the State governments and the central government, within the central government itself, was never definitely secured. By placing this security in the hands of delegates who had only their political acumen to protect them from the more concerted middle-class designs, he postponed settlement to the future. Before his death he was to see the enemy dressing in the garment of free government to overcome more easily its principles. Like all eighteenth-century liberals he and his chief lieutenants were confused. The temporal policies of a Church which had been thrown down had perplexed their minds on religion and its corruption. It is difficult to know how far an individual is responsible for the times and the times are responsible for the individual. The scriptural admonition makes a partial answer: "For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh."

But with revolutionary grants in their pockets, confident in their new power, great bodies of Jefferson's followers marched upon the Western wilderness. The words "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" rang through the legislative halls at Philadelphia; but life, property, and the pursuit of wealth gleamed in the eyes of these adventurers. This was the beginning of the great period of pioneering. The movement grew to tremendous proportions, re-enforced by Scotch-Irish and German immigrants and by Eastern-shore planters whose lands had become exhausted by an extravagant cultivation. There were numerous hazards: the Indians, the French and Spanish intrigues, drought, hunger, and the crouching panther. But most formidable of all, was the hazard which they did



not visualize—that postponed issue: where would the power ultimately lie, in the Eastern cities or on the Western and Southern farms?

The lower Mississippi basin and the region north of the Ohio now became the West. In a remarkably short time farms and plantations appeared in the wilderness, and the new ground stumps remained to tell of the conquest. Two backwoods grew up: the local backwoods, and the West as the backwoods of the nation. The first was made up of those men who had lost out in the scramble for the best land. These men, in the main, were thrust into the mountains and upon barren soils—although the “Barrens” were later shown to have adequate fertility for a good living. Because of frontier conditions, there was at this early time little difference in the way of life between these and the more fortunate land-grabbers. Everybody was on the make, and no man questioned his destiny. This first group would become conscious of a backwoods status as the pioneering ways were polished away and the planter stood out to define the form of polity growing from frontier chaos. But it is the West as backwoods, as an agrarian state of mind, opposed to the middle-class state of mind, that is the concern of this essay. On account of Republican failure, from now until the War between the North and South, the West would struggle to hold its conquests against the rising power of the new capitalism.

As this struggle over the nature of American society increased with a population pushing back the Colonial boundaries, the two opposing schools began to head up in sections. The South and West became predominantly agricultural. The East, because of its

seaport cities, and later its industrial towns, became the base for capitalist operations. At an early stage it became evident that the South, with its intelligent planting class, would furnish the leadership for an agrarian school. The West, still in a transitional stage, divided, according to the interest of the moment, its allegiance. But since it was primarily a farming section, ultimately its proper course would be to ally itself with the South, unless by shortsightedness it should make an Eastern alliance, an alliance which would begin with the appearance of a partnership but would inevitably end by making of the West a creature of the bankers and capitalists. At the turn of the century the field was set. The first six decades marked the periods of this, the most critical phase of the struggle.

The settlers, as they passed by large bodies of fertile Western land owned by speculators in the older states, were faced at the outset with the tactics of the enemy. The Yazoo fraud, an attempt to steal the states of Alabama and Mississippi from Georgia, showed how little the delegated authority of the people might be trusted. But it also showed the backwoods what kind of leadership it might rely upon. John Randolph of Roanoke, the aristocratic planter, not Jefferson the political theorist, rose up as the defender of the faith. He understood that the success of this fraud would imperil those institutions which offered security to the farming life, for the fraud meant traffic in the public domain at the expense of the people for the aggrandizement of the few. This was no Federalist ghost he was raising from the grave. Without his strenuous and sustained attack upon these

speculators in millions of acres they would undoubtedly have succeeded in their designs, for they brought to bear upon the Government the strongest pressure. Jefferson had hamstrung himself with the all-Federalist-all-Republican doctrine. He undoubtedly meant that all were to be Republicans; but the fraud, spreading even to his cabinet, told another meaning. At the time, Randolph was spokesman for Jefferson in the House. This meant that he had to buck his own Party, a Party as completely at the call of the executive as it is now under Roosevelt. His rigid defense of principle was at the expense of his career; and later, when he tried to uphold the dignity of the legislative branch and curtail the growing power of the executive—to preserve the fine state of balances in the Constitution—he practically prepared for his political suicide. He could not be read out of the Party, because his principles were ostensibly those of the Republicans; but from this time on he was gradually thrown upon his own. He remained powerful for the next ten years, and he was feared. Never did those measures which tended to sacrifice principle to expediency go unchallenged by him: the embargoes, standing armies, war, speculation, and the tariffs. He had seen, from the beginning, “the poison under the wing” of the American eagle. His long, withering finger struck terror to the hearts of many men; but it fell limp and helpless before that dangerous Federalist, John Marshall, seated on the Chief Justice’s bench. Randolph overthrew the Yazoo men; but in overthrowing them, he divided a strength needed later to preserve the idea of the Union as a partnership between sovereign states.

In trying to keep the Ship of State afloat during squalls from foreign parts, Jefferson and Madison neglected domestic principles, until dissension spread into mutiny. The embargoes and later the War of 1812 ruined New England's shipping and turned her capital towards manufacturing. At the conclusion of hostilities the factories demanded protection. The depleted currency and the debt contracted to prosecute the war made the richest ground for patronage, a National Bank, and the sectional taxation of the Southern planter and farmer. Randolph had foretold these conditions with Cassandra-like prophecies. The metamorphosis of prophecy into reality took place before the eyes of the backwoods wing with magical speed. The task which would absorb the energies of the Constitutional defenders for the next forty years lost its opacity, and the added difficulties became apparent by degrees. The crib door had been left open and its lock broken. It would require heroic exertions to fasten it again, after the stock had found where the corn was stored and rats had slipped in to nest and breed. Randolph found an ally in the person of John Taylor of Caroline County, Virginia. They became the two most powerful figures in the backwoods camp for the first twenty years of the new century. Calhoun, a young man just entering political life, should have stood beside the conservatives. Instead he and Clay became the lights of the Administration and the foremost instigators for war. Randolph said one day to a friend, "They have entered this House with their eye on the Presidency, and mark my words, sir, we shall have war before the end of the session!"

Taylor redefined the conflict and put the issues where they belonged, between the agronomy of the Union and the incipient industrialism of the East. In answer to John Adams, who had proposed a balance between aristocracy, monarchy, and the Third Estate as the means of giving security to the State, he replied that such a balance no longer applied. The only real danger now was from what Taylor termed the aristocracy of the third age: a rule of paper and patronage. In his *Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* he posited the "confession" of this aristocracy:

Our purpose is to settle wealth and power upon a minority. It will be accomplished by a national debt, paper corporations, and offices, civil and military. These will condense king, lords, and commons, a monied faction, and an armed faction, in one interest. This interest must subsist upon another, or perish. The other interest is national, to govern and pilfer, which is our object; and its accomplishment consists in getting the utmost a nation can pay. Such a state of success can only be maintained by armies, to be paid by the nation and commanded by this minority, by corrupting talents and courage; by terrifying timidity, by inflicting penalties on the weak and friendless, and by distracting the majority with deceitful professions. That with which our project commences, is invariably a promise to get a nation out of debt; but the invariable effect of it is, to plunge it irretrievably into debt.

This precise summation of the exploiting-capitalistic policy was to need no new terms for a hundred years. It will serve today as the basic premises which inform this interest's action.

This "confession" was published in 1814. Another treatise, *Tyranny Exposed*, points out in detail the fallacy of the manufacturers' report calling for more manufacturing and higher protection. In these volumes and others Taylor states the exact grounds of conflict between the two theories of society, dismissing irrelevant and confusing arguments. He makes the philosophical defense of agrarianism; but it is because it is a philosophical defense that it fails. His truth, that good government cannot come from bad moral principles and that the American centralizing principle is bad (as it certainly was at that time) cannot be denied; but like Jefferson, he fails to offer a medium by which the bad may be destroyed and the good set up and maintained. He can only appeal to the intelligence of the voter for the remedy. Liberalism inevitably used the terms good and bad. It needed, as a fighting cry, virtue triumphing over evil. Cromwell's leadership was shrewder. He did not concentrate on discussions of the morality of the Stuarts. He threw his Ironsides against the devil's agents.

Although philosophy proved a handicap to Jefferson, Taylor, and men of their class, the form of the plantocracy, given a tremendous impetus by the rise of cotton and the spread of negro slavery into the West, shaped Southern and Southwestern society into a feudalism, greatly different from European feudalism, but preserving the inertia and fixing the form so that the European tradition could be preserved. The planter ceased to be the small farmer's oppressor as in Colonial days. The conditions had changed. He had now an alien race to serve him. His interest was identical with that of the small farmer and the plain

man generally, since they all were the objects of capitalistic exploitation. And the plain men, or dog-run class—a name taken from the form of dwelling universally used by this class—furnished vigorous recruits to the plantocracy. The vocabulary of the gentleman gradually changed from that of liberalism to a speech more proper to his social rôle, the rôle of the First Estate. The planter stood in place of the feudal lord; the general movement in the place of the suzerain; and the Jeffersonian farmer in the place of the yeoman. These lines had become so generally fixed by 1830 as to be officially announced through the Pro-Slavery arguments of Dew, Harper, Hammond, and others. So, in spite of the fact that liberalism made the effort to found a State on capitalistic private property, a Southern nation began slowly to grow up in the changing Union.

But this growth into a social and spiritual unity continued, until the South's destruction, to be retarded by the handicaps which have been discussed. Its blind devotion to the Union would lead Northern politicians to say that it could not be kicked out. It was thrown on the defensive from the beginning, and its only hope of survival was an intelligently directed offence. Its churches were brought together on the matter of slavery, but its politicians never could agree upon any common action. While tariffs and the criticisms of its institutions tended to emphasize for the West its bond with the South, under Clay's advice the West was so eager to develop that it gave heavy support to the centralizing interests in return for subsidies and internal improvements. When the South-West eventually found out that these gifts

from a consolidated government were intended, like the corn thrown out to the hogs, to make the killing more profitable, it was too late to do more than reflect upon its own stupidity. The two most persistent and effective attacks against the backwoods were made by means of the tariffs and abolition, the one economic, the other moral. Protection was first in time, although the abolition agitation was soon coupled with it when it became apparent that the tariffs alone would not destroy the South. South Carolina, under the prompting of such men as Rhett and Hammond, made such active opposition that the great leader of the state, Calhoun, abandoned his nationalistic stand and proposed his Nullification theory of redress. Andrew Jackson's romantic idea of the Union and his dislike of Calhoun joined together in his stubborn mind to play him into the hands of the enemy. Although he had destroyed the National Bank, he threatened to send troops into Carolina to make tariff collections. For a moment war seemed inevitable; but Henry Clay came forward with a compromise. Calhoun accepted it. The Congress voted favourably on Jackson's force bill, and voted to reduce the tariff. Two great blows to State rights were struck at once. The South got temporary relief, and for this relief agreed to a sacrifice of principle. There can be no compromise between two antithetical ways of life. What appears a compromise is a postponement of the issue. The South, by accepting this postponement, doomed itself to ruin. The high prejudices of his heart and a limited political vision led Jackson to squander the great strategic moment by which his backwoods could have established its rule. Like a good backwoodsman, he



took "the responsibility" and Calhoun refused it; but the South, not Calhoun or Jackson, suffered the consequences.

There was after this only one avenue left open to the South—secession. Calhoun still hoped to concentrate Southern leadership and make the fight within the Union. But his plans of effecting his ends by controlling the Democratic Party failed. With desperation he took up a last position, secession through the common action of all the Southern States. But Clay's American plan—an extension of capitalism—and his compromises, the god of all opportunists, had done their work. In this crisis Calhoun's chief lieutenant, Robert Barnwell Rhett, proposed a policy of coercion. He contended that if one State acted separately, the other States, all believing in their own sovereignty, would follow the lead. He supported his contention by reminding his political peers that the revolt against England did not take place until the tea had been thrown into Boston Harbour. When common action did take place, it came about by South Carolina's single-handed withdrawal; but it came ten years too late and brought Appomattox, not independence.

The fall of the Confederacy removed the last great check to the imperialism of Big Business. The Northwest, having been induced to aid in the overthrow of its natural ally, was to pay for this action by its servility to Eastern capital. The Northern Democrats, who had been naïve enough to think they had been fighting for the Union, began to renew their connections with the Southern branch of the Party. This reunion would have turned the government over to the Democratic will. The Radical Republicans saw at

once the "fruits of victory" about to vanish into air; so they set to work again the reliable abolition propaganda and spread the news that the planter was re-enslaving the Negro. This brought popular support to the radical reconstruction programme and allowed Stevens to disfranchise the white South and enfranchise the Negro. The Negro was told his freedom would last as long as he voted the Republican ticket. In this way the South became a pocket borough for the capitalist party; and the Northern Democrats discovered for whom they had been fighting the War. But the white South was not to be reduced so easily. Out of economic, political, and social chaos, under the sting of defeat, in the face of a victorious enemy, and with troops quartered in the land, it recaptured the machinery of government through the Ku Klux Klan and re-established its control. It was the last and the most remarkable display of political genius its planting feudalism would show.

But victory was only temporary. The capitalist interest, with its railroads through the Far West and its growing industrial enterprises, was able to consolidate its gains and begin that conquest of the North American continent which had been so long delayed. Its tactics were simple and effective. They were re-learned from Clay who had absorbed them from the Biddles of his day: hold out a lure of wealth; allow a few to gain it; and the rest, with this will-o'-the-wisp before their eyes, will be satisfied with the system and lend it support with their labours and talents. Not for one moment did the real power slip from the hands of those who intended to keep it.

Such was the policy the capitalists carried into the

war-exhausted South and, having failed in supplanting the whites, they began to corrupt them. A New South, repudiating the beliefs and economy of the Old, was expounded from the platforms which had once heard the call of States Rights and Secession. Southern men like Henry Grady, Lanier, Watterson, and the young men who listened to them, counselled the South to get on the bandwagon. The Democratic Party abandoned its original principles and played the under dog at the rich man's table, grabbing what crumbs it could. It was reduced to making gestures against the exploitation which it was unable to curb: power is the twin brother of wealth, and wealth no longer belonged to agrarian descendants. Cities grew, industrial not cultural cities; farming population diminished. Henry George, in an effort to check the business, aroused a momentary flare of rebellion with his concept of land as common property; but he was too late to do more than cry the ruin of the experiment in liberty. The Populist Party, grounding itself on too scant a foundation, quickly subsided into defeat. Both efforts were the laboured, violent gasps of death. The mortal injury had been done in 1865.

The full significance of what had happened and what was happening was not understood at the time. There was still plenty of empty land into which the dispossessed might go. But in the meantime the shores of the Pacific have been reached. It is no longer possible for a general migration to get under way in an effort to escape the dominant factor in American civilization. Nevertheless, the backwoods still rises up, although the trees are little in evidence. It is not trees which define the backwoods. They were the physi-

cal properties, along with the Indians, the wild animals, and the treacherous rivers, which once formed the setting. Today it is different. There is, indeed, no setting. The backwoods of a full-fledged industrial society is without location. The long hunter's shadow has ceased to glide upon the bending prairie grass but his spiritual heir, the tramp, on wheels, on foot, is always in motion, driven without direction because there is no longer any place to go.

But the tramp is only the symbol for the outcasts created by the paper system. All those who have been discarded, who have been supplanted by the increase of machines, who consciously rebel against the slavery of technology; the unemployed of factory, mill, and farm; and, in a small degree, the hangers-on in the mountainous districts—all Ishmaels thrown upon the constantly changing scene, driven by a vague nostalgia to wander upon the face of a continent—it is these who make up the mass of this century's backwoodsmen. As their numbers increase, their rulers become more baffled. Their frame of mind is dangerously close to that of the Tory gentleman's.

And a situation similar to that which destroyed the Tory gentleman is generating itself again. The middle-class concept of property has triumphed in a far grander way than Hamilton ever dreamed it would. But the increasing confusion which follows its swelling up indicates inevitable failure. The State, through which a people expresses its destiny, cannot stand on such a basis. Property no more makes a State than a bed makes a marriage. Man begins to think he is a god, but he has only unshackled his will. A curious, modern Prometheus, he has stolen no living but an

abstract fire; and all the energy of his filched knowledge must go to replenish a liver, food for the insatiable appetite of Time the Vulture, drawn to the jailrock by the odour of the crime. Like the successful pickpocket the modern industrialist lives by his wits. He dreams and boasts of riding the four million horses of power. If he were not blinded by this delusion, he would see that he had seated himself upon the back of the communal flying jennet, whose wooden tail and mane are given to an abstract breeze. Others of like mind he sees to his front, seated safely in a chariot or gleefully on a pig that does not squeal. Around and around they go, until the machine stops.

The common admiration for the ambitious man and the contempt for the unambitious come to us as direct results. The ideal of progress promises so much that he who refuses to enter the race is only a craven, puny being who must be thrust quickly into the ranks, where he can be used. One must use, or be used. The myth of the backwoodsman rises from the past and hovers near, an inspiration to encourage the modern American when the fight grows hard. This ancestral giant reduced the strongholds of nature, the endless woods of gloomy oak and impenetrable cane; he rode upon the surface of wilderness rivers; he crushed the Indians; he cleared away forests and planted seedbeds around the slow rotting stumps. If he did these things, might not his descendants crush obstacles just as great, riding the backs of the proletariat and the farmer?

The ancient capitalist policy of "corrupting talents and courage . . . terrifying timidity . . . inflicting penalties on the weak and friendless . . . distracting

the majority with deceitful professions" has finally reduced the Southern scene to a unit of the general scene—but with a difference. Historically it is still the seat of opposition. It has become the fashion to forget this; but fashions change; tradition lodges in the blood. That is to say, tradition holds to the great body of people who live according to custom and not in chameleon style. It is no more possible for Southern people to remove this element of their tradition than it would be for certain of their old and distinguished families to open their arteries and let out the tainted African blood which for generations has commingled democratically and darkly with the purer strains. The words of its local industrial leaders which deny this tradition are empty words. They can never extract it from Southern consciousness. Leader is not the term to apply to these modern strong men and their literary and scholarly sycophants. They are the modern scalawags who have cut themselves off from the country-side and withdrawn into the cities, where they openly acknowledge their servile dependence upon New York. For a small share of the booty, comparable to the share of the cotton crop formerly allowed to the overseer by the planter, they have either consciously or unconsciously become the sucking mouths of those industrial octopuses whose long arms wrap about the "provinces".

Whatever they have done to this section economically, they have not succeeded in emasculating it spiritually. As long as the great body of people, still living chiefly in the country, feel that there is something about the South which no other section can claim; as long as its people go, though stumblingly, in

the ways of their fathers; in different language, as long as tradition, sullen and inarticulate, continues to flow through their cultural expression, it remains possible that at some future date circumstance may produce genuine leadership which will express this feeling of separate destiny. And then such leaders may not fail as Jefferson, as Randolph, as Taylor, as Calhoun, as Jefferson Davis, failed. The recent fall of its hereditary enemy, the Republican party, may mean much or nothing. Mr. Roosevelt's attempt to give security to the economic life of this country has not, as yet, had time to show its effect. But unless he succeeds in destroying the great moneyed interests and re-establishing the farming classes in their former dignity and independence, his concentration of power in the executive branch will only facilitate the establishment of a servile state.

But if the ascendancy of the middle class has not destroyed the agrarian South, it has done it great damage. The share-cropping relation between landlord and tenant was an effort, after the war, to bind together what seemed a disintegrating world. Industrialism has made it the worst sort of tyranny, for unfortunately emancipation did not free the Negro. It merely rendered the landlord impotent, enslaving both classes by substituting the money economy for the planting agronomy—economic foundations of great difference in meaning for society, in spite of the fact that the planter grew to power from the factory demand for cotton. What set him apart from the industrial mechanism was his feudal organism which could produce for consumption even while producing for exchange. If it had not been disrupted by war, it

would have stood without strikes, or unemployment, even if the demand for cotton had failed.

But the share-cropping system is not feudal. In spite of its barter element it is fundamentally industrial. It is built almost entirely around the money crop. The only thing in common between the different participants is money, which means that there are several elaborate medias of mutual exploitation. The planter is able through the furnishing system to make it impossible for the tenant to do more than make a bare living. On the other hand the tenant, to protect himself, has learned a most intricate method of theft. And no family will attempt to take care of land some other family may farm next season. But it goes further than this. The landlord soon finds himself in the hands of the local banker, who is dependent upon a larger banker, who, in turn, is dependent upon the New York clearing house. This is the final commentary upon the early effort to establish a State upon private wills. But even so, the relation between the man who owns the land and the man who rents it has much of the old-time goodwill. And when an injustice is protested or a trade is made the two parties have the great advantage of being able to see each other and discuss such subjects in person.

Another important economic and social loss has occurred. Before the war the sturdy Jeffersonian yeomanry furnished its best men to enlarge the planting class. Now the best are drawn away from the country, going either to the Northern or to the Southern city, the one being about as bad as the other. Those of this class who are left on the land have largely lost their independent position by moving in



as tenants on the modern plantations. The small farmer has by no means disappeared, however. There are many of them scattered over the South who still work for themselves. Although they have become implicated in the system, they manage to live with a reasonable amount of security. They have their money crops, but in times of depression they naturally tend to spend more hours on making a living and less on the more hazardous production of these crops. So long as they can feed, warm, house, and clothe their families, they practice a partial freedom. At least they may expect more security than any other branch of the industrial army. However, their position in the State is always hazardous, for they exercise so little control over the machinery of government that the defeat of the internationally-minded bankers would carry them along in the common ruin.

The prevailing concept of private property prohibits the middle-class moneyed princes from becoming rulers in any sense except in the possession of an irresponsible power. Their economics are bad; their morals worse; and their common sense has long been dead. The recent depression has shown how puny are their hands when the four million wild horses get out of control. The nearest that they come to social usefulness is an eccentric philanthropy, and this philanthropy must inevitably remain unsocial because of its private and whimsical nature. It is not a power which resides in the body of the people, delegated to the rulers for the common good; nor a power handed down from a society resting in the Godhead of some religion. It is a power transferred from the people to individuals, until the state has become not a protector

of private property everywhere but a protector of a few men who have monopolized an impersonalized wealth. Having once become "mastered", this wealth becomes a monster apart from its owners, though driving them. There is never any rest, for the greater it becomes the greater grows the number of those who would change places with those who nominally control it. The man is nothing. The thing is everything. In this lies its inevitable destruction, and in this lies the germ of the universal condition of servitude that logically follows the breakdown of the capitalist state. For this reason the Socialist or Communist state is not at all "radical" but a rationalization of the drift of the present system, though in this country there are indications that we may skip a communistic or socialistic polity and be metamorphosed into the Caesarian condition of servility.

The New England elders, the patroons, and the Tory gentlemen of the South had an outward fringe of people for their backwoods. This aristocracy of paper has a section, the South, for its backwoods. It is as confused, as inchoate, as apparently degraded as those inhabitants of William Byrd's lubberland; but though it may "lye and Snore", it is still potentially powerful. It represents the only group of states in this country with enough form left to shake off their lethargy when the walls of steel and concrete tumble down upon our heads; when the electric webs break loose from their poles to dart and sting like scorpions.

# The Pseudo-Science of Economics

SILVESTER HUMPHRIES

THE philosophers of the eighteenth century created a study of the social order in its economic aspect. The fruit of their researches was developed in the nineteenth century under the name of Political Economy, which was included among the sciences. Precisely to what extent, if any, there is an "economic science" is a topic worthy of examination; and by the publication of M. Vialatoux's *Philosophie économique*\* many suggestive lines of thought are presented.

The mental background of the founders of economics—Stewart, Petty, Locke, Adam Smith in England, and the Physiocrats in France—was the work principally of Bacon and Descartes. The former asserted the value of inductive logic in the formation of sciences, thereby following Aristotle (whose work it was his ambition to consummate); he formulated a new abstraction of the sciences, based on the method of knowing, not on the object known (thereby deserting Aristotle and founding the peculiar heresy of English philosophy).

Descartes and Galileo habituated men to identify science with exactitude, and exactitude with mathematics, so that "scientific", when the word was coined, meant "statistically measurable", and not "pertaining to essences". What could not be stated numerically came to be underrated in the order of knowledge itself.

\* Paris: Éditions Spès.