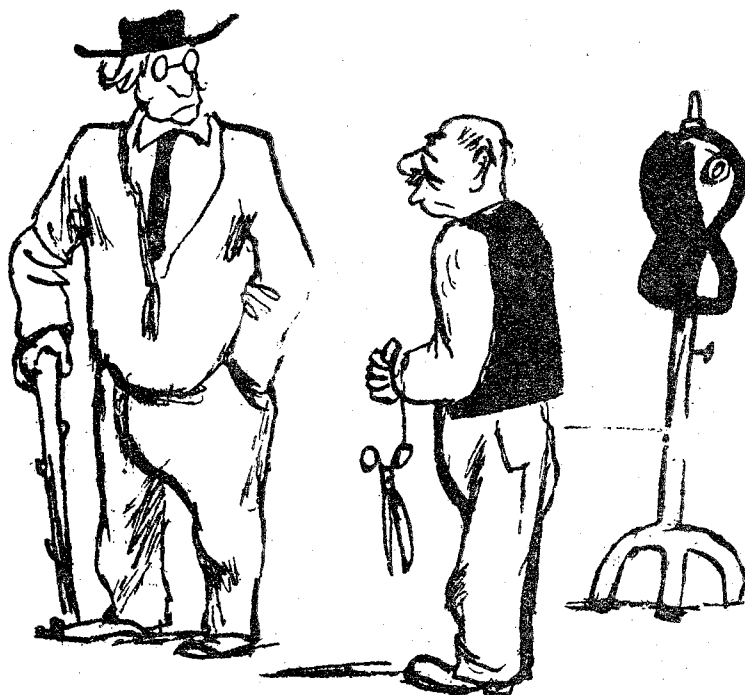


Incredibly petty the themes of some of our poets. Every insignificant fact in the personal life of the poet—the removal of the telephone, the changing of apartments, and even the fact that the poet's room is infested with bedbugs—immediately inspires the poet to a "problem" poem.

—From a Soviet critical journal



(From Literaturnia Gazeta)

TERRIBLE VENGEANCE!

"I warn you, if the suit isn't ready on time, I'll write a poem about you!"

much esthetic theory from Plato to Croce has been written as though the medium were an accidental form. At this point Dewey does much to bridge the gap between philosophied esthetics and immediate art criticism, and Dewey demolishes many ingenious philosophies of art which squeeze art into an *a priori* system of ideas.

So far, apparently, so good. These and many of Dewey's other ideas are valid and acceptable. But one begins to question them when one looks for a resolution of important philosophical and social problems today. What are the social implications of current philosophies? Which philosophy of history is consistent with a revolutionary outlook toward a classless society? The questions Dewey fails even to consider form the body of Marxian thought. Dewey has two, closely related shortcomings. On the one hand, the concepts of action, purpose, instrumentality remain vague categories because they are never applied to specific ends. As such they explain human activity in general, but they cannot justify any particular social outlook. I don't see how Dewey can get away from Pope's "Whatever is, is right," except by introducing extraneous ethical considerations. On the other hand, Dewey's philosophy of history does not consistently recognize class divisions in society. Consequently his analyses blur the irreconcilable differences between the purposes and actions of each class. At best, Dewey's philosophy is to be regarded as a critical method partly effective in answering more reactionary philosophies. His entire concept of experience is methodological, without concrete outlook.

In the discussions of art this eclecticism adds considerably to the first impression of the book as having approached art from outside. Much of the book is a recoil from esthetic theories which have little favor in literary circles. Most of the important critical problems facing artists today are barely touched on. Yet the only intelligible application of Dewey's ideas of action and purpose would be in the practice of artists and in the theoretical justification of that practice. Dewey grants that "purpose controls selection," but the locus of purpose remains largely in the psychology of the individual. Take this passage (quoted with approval by Kenneth Burke in his review of the book in *The New Republic*, April 25, 1934):

I think the idea that there is a moral obligation on an artist to deal with "proletarian" material, or with any material on the basis of its bearing on proletarian fortune and destiny is an effort to return to a position that art has historically outgrown. But as far as proletarian interest marks a new direction of attention and involves observation of materials previously passed over, it will certainly call into activity persons who were not moved to expression by former materials, and will disclose and thus help break down boundaries of which they were not previously aware.

If you grant purpose and selection in art, you must recognize value judgments and fundamental criteria. But Dewey's uprooted philosophy of art blinds him to the systematic values and social forces which steer art currents. Marxists base their work for a proletarian art on the conviction that proletarian art represents the most significant form of so-

cial and esthetic perception today. Dewey's dragging in of the idea of "moral obligations" stems from his inability to see that esthetic theory involves esthetic direction (socially conditioned, of course).

It is a tribute, I suppose, to Dewey's consistency, that his political liberalism, his educational theories, his metaphysics, his esthetics, are all tantalizingly suggestive of a revolutionary outlook, while they finally manage to repose snugly in the arms of the *status quo*.

WALLACE PHELPS.

The Southern Middle Class Replies

CULTURE IN THE SOUTH, edited by W. T. Couch. University of North Carolina Press. \$4.

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF THE SOUTH, by Rupert B. Vance. University of North Carolina Press. \$4.

In 1930, in the volume *I'll Take My Stand*, the so-called agrarians of the South set down their social philosophy of return to the economic, social, and moral precepts of Bourbonism. The thirty-one essays on all phases of southern society, contained in *Culture in the South*, were written in direct, in some cases defiant, reply to the earlier volume. The chief interest of the book lies in the fact that it is one of the clearest expressions yet articulated by the Southern bourgeoisie, in all the contradictory aspects dictated by the peculiar class relationships in the South. The Southern middle-class is not only exposed to its natural enemy, but must also face those antagonistic groups created by the survivals of slavery. It therefore exhibits many conflicting tendencies.

A. E. Parkins, for example, advocates that the sorely-stricken planters return to "the self-sufficing basis so widely practised before the maelstrom of modern transportation sucked them into the currents of world commerce." He cannot mean the slave regime, for it was neither self-sufficing nor isolated from the world markets. He must have in mind the solution of Clarence Poe, who paints a future for the Southern farmer of a self-sustaining natural economy which existed in this country only during the earlier pioneer farming days and has long since been discarded by the developments of capitalism, only to be reincarnated by the Roosevelt "New Deal" in the form of "subsistence farming," and the fantastic natural-economy-manufacturing unit.

One can well agree with Clarence E. Cason that there is much in common between the bourgeois philistine of the South and the genteel planter of the Black Belt country, although he quite misses the point in his chapter on "Middle Class and Bourbon." To him Bourbonism is merely a cultural hangover of the slave system, which he finds much to his taste; in reality, bourbonism has an economic foundation in the South today, in the plantation system with its share-cropping and its whole top-structure of the oppression, degradation, and ostracism of the Negro. Behind Mr. Cason's boring verbiage there is projected an unholy fear and hatred for the "poor whites,"

an expression of the class cleavage which is again beginning to split asunder southern white superiority.

On the other hand, George Sinclair Mitchell, in his chapter on "Labor Disputes and Organization," displays appreciation of the basic issues which face the labor movement in the South and a recognition of the service done by the Communists. "The loyalty of the Gastonia people, certainly for a few months, must balance any argument that the Communist propaganda is unpalatable to southern workers unforwarned," he declares, and he gives a rather friendly, if not at all times clear, presentation of the Communist solution—the right of self-determination for the Negro people in the Black Belt. Although Mr. Mitchell seems to have fallen, at least partly, under the spell of the "New Deal," he declares that for agriculture "the ultimate issue is between peasant proprietorship and collective farming." And Bruce Crawford does not mince words in his description of the conditions in the southern coal fields, nor in driving the lesson home that the coal miner has nothing to hope for from capitalism, although he

presents no clear alternative to a picture of endless exploitation and exhaustion.

In any discussion on the South the Negro is always the key question. Not until recently has liberalism of the Nation or New Republic variety existed in the South. The impact of the Communists at Gastonia, in Harlan, and especially in the Scottsboro case and in the organization of the Negro share-croppers in Alabama, shaping into sharp relief the fundamental issues of southern society, has, among other things, effected a certain crystallization of liberal opinion among the southern middle-class. Thus, W. T. Couch, the editor of the volume, in his chapter on the Negro, declares that chattel slavery has been replaced by "another species of bondage." Mr. Couch gives no clear delineation of the origin and rôle of race prejudice, but he does present a sharp picture of both the legal and extra-legal persecution of the Negro. Lack of clear class analysis leaves the author with the empty formula that nothing can be done for either race until "cheapness and servility of labor has been utterly repudiated." At most, he has achieved a liberalism untainted by Bourbonism.

Other contributions concern themselves with culture in the South in its narrower conception: journalism, folklore, education, etc. It is significant that such a volume should emerge from the South, for it indicates the acute social crisis provoked by the undermining of southern economy, of the profound motion among the masses, and of the succinctness with which Communists have raised the issues that strike fire in the South.

The second volume under review is of special interest to the student of the South who wishes a well-documented and reliable description of its natural resources and economy. In this specialized regional study, the author seems to have forgotten that man no longer lives in direct contact with nature, that between man, the individual, and his "adequacy," there intervenes a social system which has its own laws of development, and which, in turn, sets the mold for "human adequacy." Mr. Vance favors a "folk renaissance for the South," led by a southern party—"not in politics," with a program as "all-embracing as the Victorian liberals."

JAMES S. ALLEN.

The Church and the Can-Can

ROBERT FORSYTHE

PERSONALLY I am in favor of sex. I want to get that on record and if the man comes to the door when I'm not home, I want you to tell him I'm heartily with him in the matter and will sign the petition. This is not a time for liberals. I don't want to hide behind any ontheonehand and ontheotherhand. The dispute has reached a point where men must stand up and be counted. On any other occasion I might say that sex is good in its place or that I am sick of Constance Bennett, but this is no time for half measures. The Great Opium War is being fought out between the Catholic Church and the little black brothers of Hollywood Boulevard and nothing but united front action on the part of all lusty ladies and gentlemen will keep Lupe Velez with us.

If you think I'm overestimating the situation, it is a sign that you have been paying more attention to Carnera and Baer than you have been to Variety and even to the great untrammelled American press which prints all the news that's fit to print and will the actresses arriving on the Europa please lift their skirts a little higher for the photographers. The battle has reached a point where the Archbishops of various Catholic dioceses are instructing their paying clients not only to boycott special obnoxious movies, but to boycott all movies until Hollywood cleans them up. In short, the ladies must get on their clothes and they must cease being so casual

about their histrionic and personal morals.

Robert E. Sherwood once discussed the ladies who become our movie stars: "Imagine the plight of a Hollywood heroine, a not too complex cutie who has been boosted suddenly to a dizzy eminence and is rather puzzled by it all. She awakens in the night with the realization, 'At this moment I am being subjected to vicarious rape by countless hordes of Jugo-Slavs, Peruvians, Burmese, Abyssinians, Kurds, Latvians and Ku Klux Klansmen!' Is it any wonder that a girl in that predicament finds it difficult to lead a normal life, that her sense of balance is apt to be a bit erratic?"

I read these words when I was a younger man and I can still remember the shock they gave me. I had been going to motion pictures with my Uncle Herbert and it seemed to me that they were very artistic indeed. The pictures of the movie ladies in the movie magazines were a little nekkid, but my Uncle Herbert pointed out that this was a healthy thing because cleanliness was next to Godliness and the ladies were evidently just preparing to throw off their last garment and depart for the bath.

I am not surprised to find that the ladies are subjected to vicarious rape because vicarious rape is what the Zukors and Sheehans and Laskys and Laemmles are selling, and as a good American I will fight to the last breath to give the American business man the right to run his affairs as he sees fit. I will also

fight to the last ditch to give the Catholic Church the right to control the motion picture policies of this country because the Catholic Church is a great and benevolent institution and I am sure that it will be an impartial force in determining what we may see during these air-cooled afternoons and nights.

And what are the good fathers complaining about? They protest against the inculcation of ideas which are subversive to family, state, God and morality, and I am with the holy fathers 100%, although I hope they will let us have just a pinch of sex on an odd Thursday evening. If we might have it in a great religious spectacle by Cecil de Mille, it will be a beautiful thing and I will be mollified. After all, I am for sex and I do not want to go back on my principles.

But I can see the Church's idea and I am for it. I am for the old virtues and I have just seen a picture which I know will make the holy fathers very happy. It is a moral picture with no sex allure and no derogation of the family, although the father is a drunken fellow and comes to a bad end early. It is a beautiful film of mother love and sacrifice and it is called *Mother*. It was written by a man named Gorky and directed by a man named Pudovkin and I am sure that Cardinal Hayes will be glad to endorse it when he hears about it.

This is a Russian film and ordinarily I have no use for Russian films because they are not