Oliver La Farge . . . Santa Fe Birdwatcher

Smokeless Industry Smokes Up SF

That was a really rough ride that Rick DuBrow gave to the Teevee show "Empire" in last Wednesday's paper, and after all the pains Santa Fe went to to take this thing to its bosom, too. The presence of the Empire Series Manufacturing Company in our vicinity makes me think of the plastic doll manufacturing enterprise on the Cheyenne Reservation in Montana.

The plastic doll factory turns out pukey little dolls and dresses them in vaguely Indian costume. Those Cheyennes up there are poor people; they welcome almost anything that gives employment. Almost anything, please note. The factory gives employment to 50 or 60 Indians at a rate of about $40 a week. It's not much, but it's a lot better than starving, more self-respecting than relief. The Indians welcome the work, but they don't consider making crumby little dolls an ideal occupation, and they are under no illusions about the quality of the product.

Recently the tribe was urged to make a heavy contribution to induce an Eastern manufacturer greatly to enlarge the factory. To the surprise of many, the tribe refused to do so unless the factory was moved to a site more convenient for the employes, and further, made it very plain that it considered its cattle enterprise and lumber business much, much more important.

Well, now, we here in Santa Fe talk a lot about smokeless industries, and grinding out "Empire" sequences — thirty-nine for the season if the show gets decent ratings—is a smokeless industry. It spends money in Santa Fe and hereabouts in various ways, as even Teevee stars must eat and have shelter, although sometimes I wonder why, and so on and so forth.

More fun, and also important, it hires local extras at $12 a day and gives them a really elegant midday meal to boot. Unlike some shows, it's not chinche about the number of extras it uses, either, at least to judge by the opening number. That's a minor but pleasant addition to our local economy. We don't have to be proud of "Empire," we certainly would not want to advertise Santa Fe as the place where "Empire" is made, but we can wish the industry well.

With all the background in cultural activities Santa Fe, usually a cosmopolitan town, has, we can also keep our sense of proportion about it. If the opening number is any criterion, we're helping produce a product that compares unfavorably with those pukey plastic dolls. For myself, if they want to use our locale, O.K., but I wish all reference to our fair city would be removed from the show.

We don't expect ordinary Teevee stars to act, and Mr. Egan is no exception. He has about as much range as the senior Cartwright in "Bonanza," which approaches zero as a limit. In the opening number, Miss Moore's part was small. Perhaps she has something; last Tuesday it did not appear.

The story was melodramatic and absurd. It had an offstage murder and rape. Onstage it had three sequences of as nasty Sadism as television can get away with. The happy ending was about as incredible as it could be made, short of having a benevolent King Kong come sliding down a mesa to set things straight.

This lollipop is offered us at 6:30 p.m., prime viewing time when all the kiddies cluster round the screen for their bedtime story. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we have a new smokeless industry, and we don't want to throw it out, but, like those Montana Cheyennes, we have other activities and resources that are more remunerative and in which we take greater pride.