

April 12, 1945

Dear Summer:

This noon the Eating Library paid a dividend. In scanning the magazine rack my eye caught the April 16th edition of the New Republic which, in the front page list of the important articles, called attention to "PM Mind Granville Hicks," so I picked up the magazine and took it to the high stool where I read the particular article as I munched the crackers and sipped the milk. No sooner had I read the first fourteen lines than I decided that this particular issue I must purchase not only that I might read that article slowly and leisurely but that I might then clip it and mail it to you. Thus the purchase was made and the article is herewith enclosed (but I am not mailing this letter to you until Mother has had a chance to read it, too).

I like the article for more reasons than one. First, Hicks makes the statement which so thoroughly echoes my own idea, oft stated to you, that PM is "not a real newspaper at all but a daily journal of opinion, usually worth reading but only as a supplement to papers that carry the news." I buy PM about three or four times a week and each time I also purchase the Times. The Times has the news and PM has its peculiar slant. There is absolutely no objectivity in PM; and, as Hicks points out, a newspaper should have the lofty ideals and objectivity. Of course, that objectivity cannot be poor and unadulterated for human beings report the news and human beings have feelings and emotions and do not live in a vacuum; but the objectivity should be as free from the personal approach as it is possible for human beings to be.

I like the phrase wherein Hicks expresses the view that it were better that this book of Max Lerner's, Public Journal, which contains about 100 of his signed articles in PM, had never been written. For, "the world might have been no worse off if they had all perished as the days perished."

Third and principally, I like the review because Hicks implicitly projects the idea that "liberals" and "liberalism" as these words are so glibly used today, are cliches, devoid of any real meaning and significance. That definite implication, also, has been one of my pet complaints. My friends smilingly refer to me as a reactionary because I do not worship at the altar of words and phrases. "In his eagerness to act", says Hicks, "he has committed himself not only to propositions, but also to men and women and institutions." And that is the point. One can agree, for instance, with the aims of labor and applaud much of the social legislation directed to that end and at the same time applaud Pegler for those articles wherein he proves the rottenness of labor's leadership in certain regards. Yet to the "liberal" anybody who sees anything constructive in any word that Pegler writes is a reactionary. In other words, the "liberal" clings to a cliché not only of words and phrases but of men and institutions. The answer is, of course, that the true liberal makes no sweeping statements and adopts no rigid attitude but, on the contrary, thinks and probes and struggles with ideas and keeps his mind in a state of fluidity and recognizes that progress is not made by panaceas but by trial and error and that the important thing in life is to make men use their minds, search for better attitudes and ideals, and act generously towards friend and foe with the ultimate aim in view to make the foe channel his thinking along broad and comprehensive lines for a better way by which people and nations can live happily with each other. Hicks is right when he says that the voice of the liberal should be a still, small voice and not blatant, obstreperous, and vinegary.

Thus, we can admire much of the present day accomplishments in Russia without becoming a devotee of Leninism or Stalinism or Communism. With an open mind we can ask, "what has been gained worth the price that has been paid?" Thus we can admire many of the accomplishments of the New Deal without becoming an addict to its philosophy. To point out the weaknesses as well as the merits of any present day trend and to prod people to think and not to worship a cult is the prime responsibility of the true liberal.

Of course you will read and reread this article and then you will spare no comment.

The world is looking brighter with each passing hour and the time cannot be as far distant as it may seem at the moment when the war in the Pacific will be over. In the meantime, please reflect on your present assignment relatively. You may be hot, you may be itchy, you may be bored, and daily monotony may weigh heavily on you physically as well as mentally. I do not for a moment scoff at these inconveniences. They are real and often hard to endure but there is comfort in your position of relative safety and in the fact that you did not make the selection but that you went where duty called you. Your contribution to the winning of the war is as real and as genuine as that of any soldier. Gripe if you must; that is the privilege of every man in the service. But in the end maintain a sane and healthy attitude and remember that when you return full play will be permitted to you for the energies and fine capabilities which you so abundantly possess.

Affectionately,