

Letters from Scandinavia

I. Norway

THE LARGEST LITTLE COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

WHY don't these sturdy Nordics work at all? And since they don't, how have they succeeded in acquiring the reputation of being strenuous and indefatigable workers? These were the first questions which puzzled me after spending a few hours in Oslo. In the summer, all offices close at 3 p.m. and shops not much later. In Italy they keep the shops open till the late hours of the night and should you urgently need a tomato or a guitar in Naples or Rome at twenty minutes before midnight, you will have no difficulty in buying either. Yet the Italians have the reputation of being lazy and the Norwegians of being industrious. These vague generalisations, however, are true and just—as vague generalisations almost always are. The Italians often enough are just too lazy to close their shops, thus giving a false impression of keeping them open. But the Norwegians, as long as they are supposed to be working, do in fact work. The Norwegian has his breakfast—a lot of fish, soda water, milk and coffee—and goes to his office. He takes no time off for lunch. If you drop into an office around 12 noon, you may find a clerk or a minister of state sitting at his desk, munching a sandwich with one hand, writing something with the other and talking on the telephone at the same time. Till 3 p.m. they do work, but they never rush; they try to do their best, but whatever cannot be done today will have to wait till tomorrow. They carry on their hard and conscientious work in such a vague and leisurely fashion that a Norwegian office always gives you the impression of a holiday camp. An American friend—driven to despair by this Norwegian version of hard labour—exclaimed bitterly: “These Norwegians either fish or make love; and in the summer they don't fish.”

The war has made a deeper impact on some other nations, but its effects are nowhere more alive than in the four Scandinavian states. (Four

because, in addition to Norway and Sweden, Denmark is always counted as a real, and Finland as an honorary Scandinavian country.) The Germans do not remember the war at all and Nazism is less than a fading memory. According to them, all the trouble started with the Allies bringing the Russians to the Elbe. Prior to that there was the bombing of Germany and prior to *that* nothing happened worth mentioning. The English seem to remember Cromwell and the Wars of the Roses much more distinctly than Hitler. The Americans look ahead while the French are looking back to World War I. But, in Scandinavia, World War II is remembered. It is a decisive and character-forming influence—and the new traits formed or brought to the surface by the war are superimposed on the basic characteristics of the various Scandinavian peoples.

Sweden succeeded in remaining neutral and Sweden has a guilt complex. She tried to buy her peace with Germany for concessions and is now trying to buy her peace with herself for cash, and explanations. No explanation is needed; but it is forthcoming with alarming and alarmed eagerness. It was Norway—a country which had seen no hostilities since Napoleon—which became the hero of Scandinavia. The King of Norway, with his government, escaped to London; the Norwegians fought bravely in the underground and on the various battlefields. The whole world admires them for this; but no one more ardently than they admire themselves. Norwegian heroism meant immense sacrifice, loss of blood, and tremendous sufferings. Yet, they wouldn't give a second thought to all this. What should be more natural than that they have done their duty? But Norway's heroism also pierced—almost fatally—the superiority complex of the Swedes. The Swedes were well fed on thick steaks while the Norwegians suffered in

concentration camps. When you sense the atmosphere of Scandinavia, you cannot help realising that today this is regarded as the good luck of Norway and the misfortune of Sweden.

I HAVE never seen people who are so fond of disparaging themselves as the Norwegians. This healthy dislike of each other is symptomatic of a deep inner harmony. Every human being and every nation is in need of discharging a certain amount of hatred—just as a motor has to discharge a certain amount of fumes—and those who discharge these psychological fumes on the home market, can adjust themselves more easily to communal life at large. Besides, it is much simpler and more natural to dislike your neighbour than any distant enemy or adversary. So the Norwegians dislike one another as individuals and the Swedes as a nation—and they are happy. They are not too talkative, as a rule, but as soon as they have a chance of speaking ill of themselves, their eyes light up and you just cannot stop them. As soon as people heard the nature of my errand, they implored me to write something bad about them. “We are sick and tired,” they said, “of hearing what fine fellows we are”—adding almost beseechingly: “And we are not, you know. . . .”

They hate, first of all, one another’s physical proximity. It is not uninteresting to observe how different people react to—let us say—an overcrowded bus. The French enjoy the warmth of the human body; the English are quite prepared to sit unconcernedly on each other’s shoulders as if unaware of anything irregular; the Americans struggle for space and *Lebensraum* in a bus, but once their space is secured, they are ready to view their battling fellows with benevolent and amused interest. But the Norwegians are downright hostile. They like individualism but dislike individuals. They draw away from each other and remember, subconsciously, the wide and limitless open spaces to which for centuries they were accustomed. They were—and still are—a nation of fishermen and farmers; and independent fishermen and farmers at that. They were used to cultivating not only their own land but their own hills and mountains. In a country where there was too much space and too few people, everything belonged to them as far as the eye could see. They are no real city-

dwellers. It is estimated that 75 per cent of Oslo’s population consists of second or third generation farmers. The Norwegians build cities because cities are painful and unavoidable necessities in modern life; but their hearts belong to the sea and the forests. Thousands of people possess little islands in Oslo Fjord or on the West Coast, or retreat to little huts in the depths of wild and practically unapproachable forests or valleys where they try to escape back to a primitive but healthy life. It is when they are far away from a modern lavatory that they are really happy. I met scores of people who dream of getting ruined: then they can get away to their island or their forest hut, feed on fish they catch themselves or on birds they shoot, cut wood, and cook on their own wood fire and be miles and miles away from chain stores, trams, and telephones. Others, in good jobs, save up all the year to be able to get away in the summer and spend a few weeks in utter discomfort.

They are provincial. But their provinciality is not the dreary provinciality of small towns; it is the proud and sovereign provinciality of the peasants. They do not pretend that their small towns are large cities or that Oslo is a rival of London. They do not dream of big cities; they dream of no cities. They feel happiest on top of a snow-covered mountain peak where they can see only a hut, an occasional reindeer, a few terrifying cliffs and one or two odd Coca-Cola advertisements.

THIS instinctively reluctant attitude to urban civilisation often prompts them to over-compensate. Every now and then a mania for monumentality breaks out in the Norwegians. They have built a City Hall in Oslo which cost a fortune and is the largest in Scandinavia. It is also the ugliest. The inside is impressive and is decorated by some good, modern paintings which recall the horrors of Nazi occupation and the joy of liberation; but, from the outside, the building looks like a monumental piece of cheese, rather awkwardly cut. Obviously, it was the size that mattered. Or take, for example, the Vigeland collection in Oslo’s Frogner Park. Vigeland was Norway’s greatest sculptor but not better than a third-rate Rodin. His career was rather the opposite of the usual. He was hailed, accepted and revered in the early stages of his career and became a controversial figure after his death. Oslo decided to honour

him and Vigeland was honoured in a way no artist had ever been before or has been since. He himself was asked to plan a huge park, a worthy home for several hundred of his statues and sculptures. Vigeland has one theme only: the beauty and joy of healthy and uninhibited sexual love. Even motherhood seems to be only an accidental result of sexual life—a conception which may not be utterly untrue but, having examined the first three hundred of his works, you feel that the subject grows slightly monotonous. Gustav Vigeland led a lonely and secluded life and died during the German occupation in 1943, at the age of seventy-four. He left behind him the vastest public monument ever created for any living artist inside or outside Norway, some sky-scraping phallic symbols, and a raging controversy about his own artistic rank and value.

It follows from the Norwegians' provincial, peasant outlook that they mistrust success. Few Norwegians have ever been really popular in their own country. Nansen, Amundsen, Michelsen, the King, a few other members of the royal family—and that's about all. They do not like Trygve Lie, for instance. The former secretary of the United Nations returned from the great world and—they feel—speaks to them from a certain height. He lives in Flaskebekk, near Oslo, in the Fjord, and has a flat in town as well as a mountain cabin in the Røros district. He has no say at the moment in Norwegian politics or in the Norwegian Socialist Party and no one knows his future plans: does he want to play a part in national or only in international politics? He works on his memoirs, plays tennis at a friend's house in Flaskebekk, goes to Oslo practically every day, turns up frequently in the restaurant of the Storting—the Parliament—and talks to people with great gusto and listens to them with interest. But he comes from the great world, he refers to Eden as Tony and to Acheson as Dean—and that is unforgivable.

A charming and nonchalant informality sets the tone of social and even business life. In this they are in the sharpest contrast with the Swedes, who are more formal and pedantic than the Germans. In Norway they do not try to keep up with the Joneses. They do not mind whether they have a good address or a bad one or whether they live in a style corresponding to their social status. They used to be poor and do not mind at all being poor. They are

fully aware of the immense and unshakeable security poverty gives you. The poor man—one who is content to remain poor—is safe. He has no worries. If a rich man loses his riches, it's a tragedy; if a poor man loses his poverty he is not inconsolable.

A letter may or may not be answered, and one does not feel embarrassed for not having replied. If you make an appointment, your friend may be anything up to two hours late and will probably mutter a few words of vague apology, but it is as likely as not that he will not even be aware of being late. You do not write formal letters for appointments, you just ring up and the person you wish to meet, be he the Commander-in-Chief or the Foreign Minister, will probably tell you to come along straight away or at any time between 9.30 and 3. In the worst case he will merely have forgotten all about you and will not be in his office. After breakfast I often walked over to the Storting, next door to my hotel, and sat in the restaurant or listened to the debates. No one ever stopped me to ask for a ticket and no one ever enquired who I was or where I came from.

NORWAY is the largest small country in the world. She is considerably larger in territory than the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I have five reference books in front of me giving five different figures concerning the size of Norway, which is, however, about 125,000 square miles. The area of the United Kingdom is 94,279 square miles. The United Kingdom has about fifty and a half million inhabitants while Norway, according to the latest (1950) census, has a population of 3,277,211. That means an average density of 10.2 persons per square mile, the lowest in Europe, with the single exception of Iceland. More than a quarter of Norway's territory is north of the polar circle. Only 4 per cent of her land is cultivated, 24 per cent is covered with forests, and 72 per cent consists of rocks, waste land, and glaciers. Her innumerable lakes cover 14,000 square miles—i.e. more than the entire cultivated land of the country. As regards hydro energy, both tapped and untapped, Norway is one of the richest countries in the world. This means, according to many scientists, that in due course she will be one of the most important countries in the world. Once coal, oil, and uranium have been used up,

countries with vast supplies of hydro energy will gain preponderance. It may be only a matter of a few hundred years. Just wait and see.

It is remarkable to see that the Norwegians really look Nordic, with the exception of the picturesque and arctic Laplanders (there are about 20,000 of them). On the whole the Norwegians are not very tall, but according to army statistics 64 per cent of the new recruits have blue eyes and only 7 per cent brown. The army is silent about the colour of the eyes of the remaining 29 per cent, but I should guess they are green. Norway's population is also one of the most homogeneous in the world. Almost 97 per cent follow the Lutheran State religion. Among the few foreigners in the country, are a few thousand other Scandinavians and 1,280 Poles. Before the war, Norway received a comparatively large number of German-Jewish refugees, too, but most of them were exterminated by the Nazis during the occupation. There are 1,218 German citizens left. Not counting the Scandinavians, Poles, and Germans there are altogether 4,796 foreigners in Norway, among them 15 Hungarians, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Egyptian, 1 Israeli, and 4 Chinese.

In Norway it is either never dark or it is always dark. In the summer, the night lasts less than two hours and even at its darkest, is not darker than our twilight. At the North Cape the sun never sets from the second week of May till the last week of July and never rises between November 18th and January 23rd. North of the Arctic Circle you can see the Midnight Sun, which means that you can see the sun rise at about 1 a.m. It is a lovely sight and tourists flock to admire it. But—impressive as it is—the spectacle does not differ greatly from the sunrise at 5 o'clock, visible in a large number of other lands. In fact, I gather, it is the same sun.

In the winter, on the other hand, it is dark at 3 in the afternoon and is not light again till 10 or 10.30 a.m. These endless winter evenings have turned the Norwegians into inveterate readers. It is an old boast of Scandinavia that there are no illiterates and a new boast that there is no television there. But there is a vast difference between people who can read and people who do read. Norway has the largest book circulation per capita in the world. The average circulation of a novel is 4–5,000 copies,

but a circulation of 50,000 is not too infrequent. Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* book sold 100,000 copies and Churchill's *War Memoirs* 226,000 sets—£8 per set. *Aftenposten*, Norway's largest newspaper, has a daily circulation of 135,000. Proportionately, Churchill's *Memoirs* should have sold almost 4,000,000 copies in this country and an average novel should sell 70,000 copies.

A very large number of the Norwegians are secret dramatists or poets. During the endless hours of darkness they write; and that's why they read, too. And this is, in turn, the basic explanation for the fact that a country with a population slightly larger than that of Tibet and smaller than that of Guatemala, has produced such giants as Ibsen, Bjørnson, Sigrid Undset, Knut Hamsun, Jonas Lie, Alexander Kielland, and Edvard Grieg.

WHAT is the structure of Norwegian society? Norway is a democratic and constitutional monarchy. War almost broke out between Sweden and Norway in 1905 when the Norwegians decided to end their country's union with Sweden. It was by one of the few victories of common sense in history that war was avoided and a peaceful separation negotiated. A referendum decided that independent Norway should remain a kingdom. Then a second referendum was held on the question whether the Norwegians wished to invite Prince Carl of Denmark to be their king. Had the answer been "no," many people were ready to suggest Bjørnson for the throne—partly because he looked like a king. I wonder whether this choice would have been advantageous for Norway or for Bjørnson; a poet made king, however, would have created a pleasant impression in literary circles. Anyway, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour of the Danish prince who, under the name of King Haakon VII, entered Oslo (then Christiania) in November, 1905—525 years after the death of the last Norwegian king, Haakon VI. Haakon VII, at the age of eighty-two, is still Norway's reigning monarch. He was always popular, but his courage and determination during the war raised his popularity to legendary heights.

Crown Prince Olav is fifty. He is a superb yachtsman. Apart from the most formal state occasions, he does not allow anyone to call him "Your Royal Highness" and usually

addresses men in the Norwegian equivalent of *du* or *tu*. This rather embarrasses people because they feel that, after all, they cannot call him "Olav" and talk to him in the second person singular. As a result, a most awkward kind of conversation follows in which every kind of address is carefully and painfully avoided by one party. The Crown Prince and Princess go to the cinema and buy their own tickets; their children go to ordinary schools with other children. One American journalist had two appointments with the Crown Prince and let him down on both occasions, without even excusing himself on the telephone. Finally, he turned up at the Prince's yachting cottage at Hanko without an appointment. He was received, but during the interview the Crown Prince was doing the washing-up.

Olav's son, Harald, Prince of Norway (now 17) is reliably reported to have borrowed 50 øre (about sixpence) from certain of his grandfather's loyal subjects, well known to him. When asked what he needed the money for, he said: "Ice cream." When further interrogated whether he could not obtain the sum required from his father, he replied: "No." Once, at school, Prince Harald annoyed a little boy who shouted at Harald: "I'm going to give you a hiding, even if you are the Crown Prince." Harald explained that he was not a Crown Prince, only Prince of Norway, but this important constitutional distinction did not save him.

THE royal family, as I have already said, is immensely and justly popular but their influence is moderate. Which is then the ruling class of Norway? The Socialists are in majority and it is safe to say that the working class is the strongest layer in Norwegian society—the working class which does not exist. The Norwegians have succeeded in raising the working class to a middle-class level, thus achieving the most sensible aim of the proletariat: its own liquidation *as* proletariat. The workers make as much money as clerks and small merchants; and what is more important they spend their money in the usual middle-class manner. They often acquire property: houses and motor boats. Servility is unknown. You order something in a restaurant and the waiter may reply: "That's no good. I'll bring you a pork chop instead." Don't argue with him. It would be quite useless.

The workers assert their rights and their party rules the country. Regulations are manifold, taxation is heavy, and poor millionaires keep complaining. There is no aristocracy and no influential gentry class, but a few great fortunes have been amassed: ship-owners are rich (Norway has the third largest merchant fleet in the world) and there are forestry-millions, fishing- and whaling-millions, but few large industrialists. Now that the Crown Prince's daughter, Princess Ragnhild, has married a commoner—who is also a millionaire ship-owner—some people have the suspicion that a new ruling class may emerge from the combination of wealth and royal prestige. On the other side of the scales there is another kind of new aristocracy: the aristocracy of sufferers. People like to point out, not without a certain pride, the prisons in which they spent some time during the German occupation. These new aristocrats are not arrogant, they do not assert any real or imaginary rights and they are not organised. But their prestige is high, although it is bound to decline with the passage of time, while the influence of millionaires will last as long as their millions last.

Who are then the underdogs in Norway—in a country where neither the workers nor the rich are oppressed? Every society needs its underdogs and as Norway had none she had to create some—at least on a temporary basis. The former Nazis—*quislings*—were eminently suitable and consequently chosen for this role. Of course, they deserved it and, in a way, Norway was generous with them. It is estimated that 75 per cent of the former Nazis are back at work. Those who are not, can live somehow and need not starve. But there is some discrimination against former Nazis and even their children are ostracised in a cool, Norwegian manner "unless"—as someone put it—"they are really first-class skiers."

In the political field Norway finds herself sadly deprived of all acute and burning problems. The *Storting* is one of the few parliaments of the world which became calmer and more sedate after the war. Indeed, their sessions are strangely quiet because no interruptions are allowed; there is no booing and no applause. In the Danish parliament members give a 5 øre piece to the orator whose performance has pleased them—but even this expression of approval is unknown in Norway.

In foreign politics they have no problems,

either. The country has joined NATO but refuses to give the Americans bases in peace time. There is an undercurrent of what they call Taftism and Bevanism in the Socialist Party—in other words, some wish to return to a splendid Nordic isolation, leaving Europe as well as America to their fate. Others, mostly military people, want to grant bases to the Americans. But these problems are not acute and no change in foreign policy is likely.

Norway has no American problem in the Western European sense of the word because there are few Americans in the country. She has no German problem either. The Norwegians dislike Germans and wish that the Germans would buy more fish in general and more dried fish in particular, though dried fish can generally be sold to Catholic countries. They have no Russian or Communist problem either. The Communists are not very strong and although Norway has a common frontier 122 miles long with the Soviet Union, Russia seems to be much further away from Oslo than it is from New York. The Russian frontier is in the extreme north and not important either economically or strategically. Every now and then, a Norwegian cow strays over to Soviet territory and is arrested. Then the Russian frontier guards put up a flag intimating their desire to hold a meeting. Negotiations are then started, minutes typed out in triplicate, and eventually the cow—unless she confesses to being an imperialist spy—is returned to her owner.

HAVING no real problems, the Norwegians are desperately trying to create some. They are not very good at this task and seem unable to generate any strong feelings in the matter. The first great problem they have succeeded in improvising is the language question. Norway has two languages, the urban Riksmaal and the rustic—or at least lower class—neo-Norwegian. Everybody understands both languages—so there is no real problem. But they refuse to accept this fact and, one feels, it would be cruel to deprive a poor nation of fishermen and sailors of their last little problem. As they maintain that Norway has, in fact, two languages, the solution seemed to be self-evident: they have decided to create a third one, to be called Samnorsk. Writers have taken up arms over the language problem and the Authors' Society has split into a Riksmaal and

a neo-Norwegian group. But most people are able to regard the struggle with their emotions well under control. A Norwegian publisher explained to me that the struggle was futile. He himself simply speaks Riksmaal in Oslo and neo-Norwegian in the country. Did it matter—he asked—whether he said “boken” or “boka” for *book*? Then he grew serious. But, he added, he would never say “boka” for the Bible. For any other book, yes; for the Bible, no. He would rather die. Last year, a learned committee was appointed by the Storting to unify the language and produce an official and compulsory version of Samnorsk, the third language. The full committee meets once a year; sub-committees of six members, once a month. Members of the committee told me that their work might be finished roughly in a hundred years, if they pull themselves together and hurry up. So this problem is being solved, too, in true Norwegian spirit and at true Norwegian speed.

The other acute problem Norway will have to decide and decide pretty soon, is whether hell exists or not. The Bishop of Hamar, Bishop Schjelderup, has declared that hell does not exist in the physical sense, that there is no eternal punishment and that people are not actually roasting for eternity. This statement created a furor in some religious circles, particularly in the Menighets Fakultetet, an important theological college, under the spiritual leadership of the retired Dr. Hallesby. This group insists on the existence of a real, hot hell. As the Lutheran religion is the state religion in Norway, the dispute was referred to the government. The government was to decide: (1) whether there is a hell or not, and (2) if there is, what kind of hell it is. The government tried to wash their hands of hell, declared that they were not concerned with theological questions and referred the problem to the Council of Bishops.

Discussions, arguments, and committee meetings went on for almost a year. At last, the bishops of Norway and the two Theological Faculties produced a statement and this was published by the Ministry of Church Affairs in February, 1954. The Ministry observes that “the pronouncements by the Bishops do not express any united viewpoint and tend to lead to divergent conclusions.” The statement goes on: “Nor can it be said that theological-dogmatical research in this field gives any unequivocal or

binding guidance. It is difficult to deny that theological science does not seem to have reached conformity of opinion with regard to the Scripture's testimony about the nature of perdition." Now, at last, we know.

BEFORE leaving Oslo, I visited one of Norway's celebrities: Thor Heyerdahl, the organiser of the Kon-Tiki expedition. In Oslo he lives in a villa on the outskirts of the city but his permanent home is a log-cabin in the Sylene area, in the wild forests near the Swedish border. He loves it, as it is far away from civilisation, although he likes big cities too. Heyerdahl is forty—but a very young forty—thin, of medium height, with light hair and complexion.

The Kon-Tiki expedition had almost to be called off because of lack of funds. No American publisher wanted to risk \$600, the sum Heyerdahl needed. It was his Norwegian publisher, Mr. Harald Grieg—a great-nephew of Edvard Grieg—who advanced him the money in the end. He knew Heyerdahl well—because he had published a little known but quite successful book by him before the war. "Heyerdahl is the kind of man," Mr. Grieg said to me, "who, whenever a historical, anthropological or archæological fact is in doubt, goes to the spot and finds out for himself." In 1937 he wanted to find out whether civilised people could live the lives of savages. He travelled to a small island east of Tahiti and spent there a year with his first wife. His book, *One Year in Paradise*, was published in 1938. Heyerdahl left behind all products of civilisation, including even matches; he did not shave; he lived on fish caught in the sea and went out to hunt with an axe. He was disappointed in the end, because he found the savages much more civilised than himself. Ultimately he was driven to the conclusion that "it is no use to buy a ticket to Paradise."

Mr. Grieg's 4,000 Norwegian crowns were—as he said—the best investment of his life. The book sold 100,000 copies in Norway, 225,000 copies in Sweden and over a million

(not counting the cheap editions) in the United States. It was translated into twenty-eight languages.

Since the Kon-Tiki expedition, Heyerdahl has made another journey. Accompanied by an American and a Norwegian archæologist—Dr. Eric K. Reed and Arne Skjølsvold—he travelled to the Galapagos Islands, 600 miles off the nearest mainland, South America, to look for traces of early man. Since Darwin's expedition, science had claimed that no human beings had inhabited these islands before the 16th century. Heyerdahl doubted this claim, so he went to find out for himself. He succeeded in discovering traces of prehistoric settlements on three islands. He found quantities of prehistoric pottery—some of them not only pre-Spanish but pre-Inca. He thinks the evidence discovered is conclusive. His theory is that the Indians knew of the existence of the Galapagos Islands but were disinclined to settle there because of the scarcity of the water supply.

Heyerdahl lived to see the Kon-Tiki raft—which had travelled 5,000 miles from Peru to Polynesia—transformed into a museum. He no longer cares for it. "It's a glorious wreck now," he says. "It was quite a different sight to see it bounce on the waves of the ocean." What are Heyerdahl's final conclusions? They are not only typical of the man but of his nation, too. "I lost much of my confidence in civilisation," he said, "but there is no way back. Civilised man cannot return to nature. We must resign ourselves to this fact. But let us be alert and remember that not all change is progress. And even real advance does not necessarily mean more happiness. We—I mean humanity—haven't improved a great deal." "Since when?" I asked. "Since prehistoric times," he answered. "We haven't really improved at all."

Before I said goodbye to him, I asked him to ring for a taxi. He could not get through so he asked his wife to drive me down to the nearest taxi-rank.

"I should like to take you down myself," he said, "but I cannot drive."

George Mikes

THE BROKEN DIALOGUE

RECENTLY, I was present at an interesting, and in some ways archetypal, Anglo-American conversation. It was between an American visitor to London, an educationist, and his host, an English critic. Both men were cultured, intelligent, and vaguely liberal in political outlook; the discussion went along amiably—until the Critic remarked casually how disgusting was the latest example of American witch-hunting: the labelling of the former Assistant-Secretary to the U.S.A. Treasury, Harry Dexter White, as a Communist agent, the way even ex-President Truman had been dragged in, and all the rest of it. Having said this, however, the Critic was taken aback to find that his American visitor believed fully in the charges against White, though he disliked the manner of the Republican attack against Mr. Truman. Of a sudden, the transatlantic dialogue broke down.

In the course of further conversation, the following came out:

(1) Though the Critic had followed in his daily newspaper the controversy over Harry Dexter White, he was quite unaware that President Truman had *not* defended White's loyalty but had instead claimed that he had moved to "get rid of the fellow" as soon as he learned that White was passing information to Soviet agents.

(2) Somewhat startled by his misreading, the Critic accepted the correction, but replied that since Senator McCarthy and his associates threw out so many obviously wild charges of Communism in all directions, one was disinclined to accept any of them. To which the American replied that the accusation had been put forward in this case not by McCarthy but by Mr. Brownell, President Eisenhower's Attorney-General.

(3) He seemed to have his facts mixed up, said the Critic; but, to be frank, it made little

difference to his general attitude. What *was* an ugly fact was that people were being hounded in the United States: there was a witch-hunt, which he detested so much that he was most reluctant to believe any accusation of Communism made by any American politician. To this the American was sympathetic, but he was also perturbed by his host's evident lack of interest in whether or not Harry Dexter White had been a Soviet espionage agent—a disinterest that the latter freely admitted, though he could not, under questioning, explain it.

In confessing to this lack of interest, the Critic was doubtless only giving expression to the general British feeling on this subject. Yet, objectively looked at, isn't such a disinterest very odd? For, after all, Harry Dexter White was by all accounts a Very Important Person. An able man, aggressive and energetic, he was the key figure at the US Treasury for five years, from 1941 to 1946. As Assistant-Secretary to that dignified gentleman-farmer, Mr. Henry Morgenthau, he had more than an ordinary share in important policy decisions. He drafted the so-called Morgenthau Plan, and was in fact the man in charge of US foreign economic policies. (It is interesting—though perhaps not relevant—that he was regarded as anti-British; and though he favoured the idea of large-scale American aid to Russia, he was distinctly cool to the prospect of providing dollars to Britain.) During the war and post-war international monetary negotiations, he was the American counterpart to Lord Keynes, though with longer tenure and therefore even greater influence, and if one should suddenly learn in London that Lord Keynes had. . . . The very idea is unthinkable. But no one could say it was uninteresting.

It is, therefore, surely no cause for surprise if the revelations about White's pro-Soviet activities evoked a political furore in the United States. Even if one takes the extreme